



Greek Music Theory vs. The Bible

Kearsten Kostelnik

April 3, 2019

Influential Philosophers of Ancient Greece

- Pythagoras

- Music of the Spheres
- first music theory

- Plato

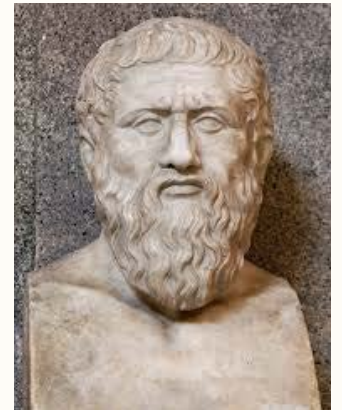
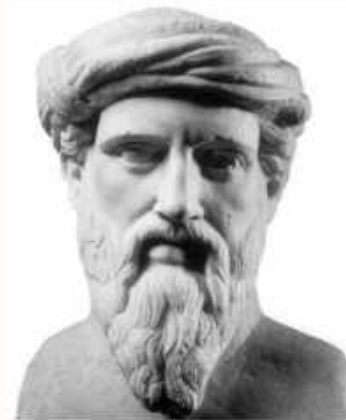
- *The Republic*

- Aristotle

- Rhetoric

- Augustine (church influence)

- *De Musica*





Julius Portnoy

“Music and religion were thought by the Greeks to be divinely intertwined.”



Thesis

- *Although Greek philosophy of music heavily influenced early European society's view and development of music, it only partially supports Biblical views and principles of music and worship.*

Two Views of Music

– Naturalistic

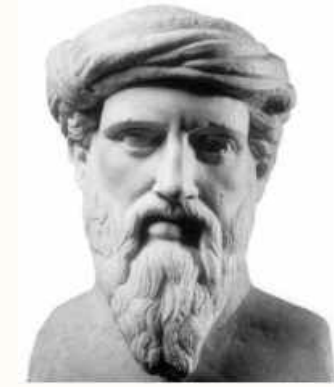
- Created by man
- Imitate nature's beauty

– Idealistic

- Divine creation
- Imitate divine beauty



Pythagoras: Music of the Spheres



- Stars and planets produce different pitches
- Inaudible harmony or *Cosmic Music*
- Similar to Babylonian
- Planets and Spheres are alive with celestial bodies
- Unites celestial beings with man through harmony
- Dissonance = chaos and negativity
- Apollo: Greek god of music, arts, body, medicine, and knowledge



Pythagoras vs The Bible

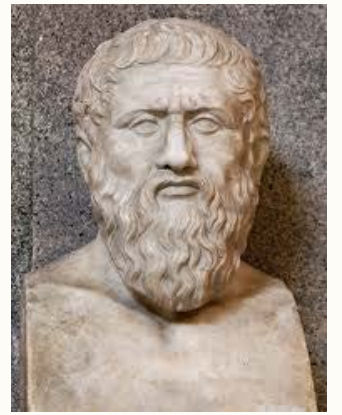
- Multiple gods vs. one God of creation
 - Nehemiah 9:6
 - Colossians 1:16
 - Exodus 20:2-3



Pythagoras vs The Bible

- Planets and Stars: Celestial beings vs. mere creation.
- Genesis 1:16 – God created Sun and moon and stars-
Ex Nihilo (out of nothing)
- Mystery and Romantic appeal to planets
- Now we know material make-up of stars and planets-
SCIENCE!

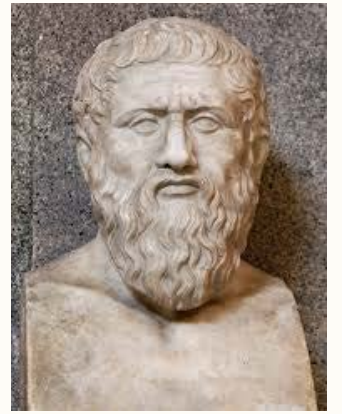
Plato: Music and the Soul



- Expands on Pythagoras' theory
- Three main parts of one's soul: rational, spirited, and bodily desires
- Balance between these creates harmony of soul
- Aesthetic powers of music- influences character and morality



Plato: Music and the Soul



- Composing/making music is divine
- Involves ecstatic influences or being *God-intoxicated*
- Died down in Renaissance- figurative interpretation rather than literal
- “good” music makes one’s soul good and “bad” music makes’ one soul “bad”



Plato's Influence in the Church

- Incorporating “holy” or “good” music in church
- Instrumental music was opposed vigorously
 - *Viewed as harsh and had no place in church*
 - *Vocal music was much more divine in means of worship*
- 12th and 13th Century Masses: only triple meter (to represent the Holy Trinity)





Plato vs. The Bible

- 1 Samuel 16:23
- David's use of harp instrument
- Supports music's power- but doesn't specify the extent of it's power
- Music in secular world evolves with dissonances (bad music) as well as in the church.



Lewis Rowell's 3 Aesthetics to Music

- Purify the mind through ecstatic experience
- Create fiction; an illusion in the mind
- Communicate through modeling nature or reality
 - Imitation (*mimesis*)
 - Aristotle: all art and music is an imitation of something else, regardless of whether the artist is aware of it.
 - Supports Divine/higher force
 - Image of God (*Imago Dei*)



Augustine

- Meter and numbers in proportions
- Ordered in a hierarchy by God; Eternal Number
- The higher the number the more perfect and closer they are to God.
- Music is temporal expression of the eternal music belonging to God
- Music is beautiful, but is needed to move beyond the temporal
- Understood 2 ways
 - 1. Music makes us more *like* God as we reach perfect numerical beauty
 - Music brings us *closer* to God.



Augustine vs. the Bible

- Bible supports that creation helps us worship God and give praise through song and appreciation.
- Doesn't specifically state that music makes us more "like God."
- Psalm 98:4
- If music makes us holy, then we can't ultimately work for our salvation.
- Ultimately: music is not means of perfection or Godly beauty, but understanding and appreciating God and his creation.



Conclusion

- Pythagoras: fails to align with Biblical view of stars/planets as creation.
- Plato: Bible supports that music has the power to influence people, but doesn't specify the degree of its power or what defines "good" music.
- Aristotle: art and creation of beauty and good things is imitation of God
- Augustine: Bible supports that music is means to worship and praise God, bringing closeness in the relationship, but not in the sense of making one more perfect and like God.



In the end...

- There was ultimately some conflict in the roles and importance of music in society between these theories and the Bible, even if they influenced early European society and helped develop early church music.

Questions?

– kearstenmkostelnik@cedarville.edu

