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Performing Damon's *harmoníai*

I must begin by confessing that my title is something of a tease: unfortunately, I am unable to perform Damon's *harmoníai*.^{*} My goal is to understand something of Damon's theoretical approach to music. An important component of music during Damon's lifetime consisted of *harmoníai*, and these have often been linked to issues of performance, as we shall see. I shall first say something generally about the *harmoníai*, and then consider how Damon may have treated them.

The nature of the Classical *harmoníai* is both obscure and controversial. Titles are telling: Jacques Chailley's 'Le mythe des modes grecques' (1956), 'L'imbroglia des modes' (1960), 'Expliquer l'harmonie?' (1967), and Dabo-Peranic's 'Les modes grecques: ces inconnus' (1959). Part of the explanation for our ignorance is that by the time of Aristoxenos, at the end of the fourth century, music had been systematized into a uniform scale called the Greater Perfect System, and musical patterns were no longer *harmoníai* but species of the octave. No extant musical writer describes the early *harmoníai*, except Aristeides Quintilianus's "old old *harmoníai*", which he presents as the *harmoníai* in Plato's Republic, although that claim is controversial.¹ Aristoxenos admits that he does not know what the Classical *harmoníai* were.²

Harmonía should mean a 'fitting together,' an adapting or adjusting. Scholars agree that musical *harmoníai* were scales or 'tunings' of a stringed instrument (such as the lyre), each constituted from different se-

* I am grateful to Martin West for reading and commenting on a version of this text.

¹ Arist. Quint. 1,9, p.18.5–19.10 W.-I., cf. 80.29; see Comotti 1989, 77–79; West 1992, 174–77; and compare Winnington-Ingram 1936, 22–30; Anderson 1966, 18–20, Barker 1984, 165–66, Landels 1999, 103–5.

² Aristox., *Harm.* 2.39–40 M.

quences of musical intervals, as arranged in a tetrachord of which the two outer notes were fixed and the two inner notes were moveable.³ In themselves the *harmoníai* were purely melodic, without specific rhythms.⁴ It is the standard view⁵ that Damon correlated *harmoníai* with *êthos*: that is, with types of behavior and character. We find such correlations in book 3 (398c–399c) of Plato’s *Republic* and many later sources, although it is fair to add that no source even near contemporary with Damon (including Plato) directly associates these correlations with Damon. How did the correlations work? It has always puzzled scholars that a shift even of one note in a scale could have produced profoundly different emotional and behavioral effects. For example, as the scales in Barker and West indicate,⁶ the Dorian *harmonía* differs from the Phrygian *harmonía* only in the last note of the scale, e' rather than d'. Yet every ancient source describes these *harmoníai* as entirely different in character. How was this difference achieved? Might pitch have been a factor? The Aristotelian *Problemata* (19.49) calls a low note soft and calm, a high note exciting; Ptolemy says the same;⁷ and those correlations make obvious sense. But were the different *harmoníai* fixed at different pitches? The evidence, while slim, does not suggest this.⁸ Lasos of Hermione (PMG 702) calls the Aeolian *harmonía* *barúbromos*, “deep-thundering,” while his later contemporary Pratinas (PMG 712) calls it “the middle course.” Pratinas also mentions the tense or relaxed Iastian *harmonía*. Are we to conclude that the Iastian could have either a high or a low pitch? Could each *harmonía* be played at different pitches, with correspondingly different effects? But how then do we explain the single ethos correlations of the Dorian or the Phrygian, as in Plato’s *Republic*? Barker notes that theoreticians like Aristoxenos do not pay much attention to pitch.⁹

³ See, e.g., West 1992, 160–61; Landels 1999, 100 ff.

⁴ Winnington-Ingram 1958, 39.

⁵ E.g., Barker 1984, 169; Comotti 1989, 31; West 1992, 246–49.

⁶ Barker 1984, 165–66; West 1992, 174.

⁷ Ptol., *Harm.* 2.7, p.58 Düring; 3.7, p.99 Düring: “The same melody has activating effect in the higher keys, and a depressing one in the lower keys, because a high pitch stretches the soul, while a low pitch slackens it. Therefore the keys in the middle near the Dorian can be compared with well-ordered and stable states of the soul, the higher keys near the Mixolydian with the stirred and stimulated states, and the lower keys near the Hypodorian with the slack and feeble moods.”

⁸ Cf. Barker 1984, 164.

⁹ As n. 8 above.

In practice, therefore, many scholars suppose that the *harmoniai* were performed in different musical styles, reflecting their different cultural origins.¹⁰ Each *harmonía* was associated with a particular people: Dorians, Phrygians, Lydians, and so forth, and these ethnic adjectives sometimes modify the word *trópos*, which can be translated 'manner' or 'style'¹¹ as in Pindar Olympian 14.17, "the Lydian *trópos*." In their earliest forms, each *harmonía* is thought to have been a distinct musical phenomenon, played in the notes that characterized the music of a certain people, and bearing no more than a coincidental resemblance to other *harmoniai*. In the late sixth or early fifth century, Lasos of Hermione might have brought more coherent order to Greek scales, possibly inventing the terms *harmonía* (which first occurs in his poems) and (Martin West has suggested) even *mousiké*.

Much of this is speculative and we shall come back to it – I want now to turn to Damon. For it may be that one key toward unlocking the puzzle of Damon's approach to *éthos* and *harmonía* has not yet been turned. In a previous publication (Wallace 1991), I argued that Damon left no written work, and therefore the best source for him must be Plato, a near contemporary and professional philosopher whose brother Glaukon was a musician and whose uncle Charmides was Damon's student. Notoriously, Plato does not mention Damon in connection with the *harmoniai* that he accepts in his ideal city.¹² Immediately afterwards in Republic 400b–c, however, Plato does mention Damon's work on rhythm and meter, and this discussion turns out to be more helpful for musicologists than at first it might seem. Although we have lost the melody and the dance of Greek poetry, we do have the meter; and as all scholars of Greek music and meter agree, at least until the later fifth century the meter of a song was closely tied to its rhythm and to the dance step 'up and down' – *ársis* and *thésis*. As West writes, "We can claim knowledge of the rhythms of ancient music because there is good reason to believe that they are reflected with reasonable fidelity in the metre ... As A.M. Dale¹³ put it, 'every Greek poet was his own composer, and no poet would write words in elaborate metrical schemes merely to annihilate and overlay these by a different musical rhythm.'"¹⁴ Furthermore, poetry's rhythmic meters are attached to texts which have

¹⁰ Anderson 1966, 11–14; 25–27; Comotti 1989, 24–26; Barker 1984, 163–64; cf. Landels 1999, 102–3.

¹¹ Anderson 1966, 25; 41.

¹² Plato, *Rep.* 398c–399c.

¹³ Dale 1969, 161.

¹⁴ West 1992, 130; see also 1982, 21.

meaning and therefore sometimes a particular ethos, whether angry, joyful, impassioned, or sad, and. This will allow us to examine the relation between musical rhythms and the content ethos of a sung text.

Plato mentions Damon in a discussion of which rhythms imitate (*mimēsthai*) which sorts of life. Sokrates says to Glaukon with his customary dry humor,¹⁵

Well, on these matters we shall take counsel with Damon also, as to which steps (*báseis*) are appropriate to disgraceful behavior (*an-eleuthería*) and *húbris* or madness (*mania*) and other evils, and what rhythms we must leave for their opposites. I think I have heard him obscurely naming an ‘in-armor’ (*enóplion*), a composite, and a finger (*dák-tulos*) and a heroic which he somehow arranged and made equal up and down, passing into a short and a long, and, as I think, he named something an iamb and something else a trochee, and he added longs and shorts. And in some of these he criticized or praised the tempo of the foot no less than the rhythms themselves, or else some combination of the two; I can’t say. But let these things, as I mentioned, be postponed for Damon’s consideration, for to determine the truth would require no little discourse. Or do you think otherwise?

It is amusing enough that in our principal source for Damon’s theories, Plato’s typically ironic Sokrates claims not to understand what he was about. *Ánō kai kátō*, ‘up and down,’ meant the raising and lowering of the dance foot but also ‘topsy-turvy’¹⁶ – the double entendre is a little joke at Damon’s expense. Sokrates jokes again with the odd use of ‘finger’ as a metrical term: in Classical Greek the usage occurs only here and in Aristophanes’ *Clouds* 651–52, which is also joking. Finally, in the phrase *enóplíon tina*, the indefinite signals unfamiliarity or unintelligibility. Plato’s Sokrates feigns ignorance of Damon’s rhythmic research probably because Plato distrusted and disliked technical knowledge that was not directed to the good.

Among the many interesting questions raised by this passage, I would like to ask: what rhythm or meter was suited to disgraceful behavior, or to madness, or to *húbris*? Later writers provide some – and sometimes contradictory – correlations between particular meters and different emotional qualities. The same is true of the *harmoníai*. What correlations might Damon have made between particular meters and *éthē*? And how far were these related to meters as used in his own day?

¹⁵ Plato, *Rep.* 400bc.

¹⁶ Cf. Plato, *Crat.* 386c–e; *Phaed.* 89d–90c; 96b; Hdt. 3.3.

A moment's glance at any modern treatment of Greek meter reveals how imperfectly almost any meter will itself have correlated with any particular *êthos*. In Greek practice, as West and others point out, some meters – most famously, the dactylic hexameter – had certain associations, in the hexameter's case with epic and everything that epic implies. However, all meters were used in a wide variety of poems, and in many different contexts. West notes that in the later Classical and Hellenistic periods, the hexameter itself was “the usual medium of narrative, didactic, and oracular verse, besides being used for hymns, bucolic poetry, satire (Crates, Timon), laments, and other things.”¹⁷ If the dactylic hexameter had an *êthos*, how could the *êthos* of a lament compare with that of heroic poetry? Furthermore, within each hexameter poem many different kinds of emotions were sung in the same meter, to the same rhythm, and the same instruments, from Achilles' rage against Agamemnon to Hektor's poignant discussion of her fate with his wife Andromache. The iambic trimeter was used for earnest political poetry but also scurrilous iambic verse; it was also the dialogue meter of speakers in Attic tragedy, in all kinds of contexts.¹⁸ So, what was the *êthos* of the iambic trimeter? Are we to imagine that scurrilous iambs were recited in a different tone, or at a different speed, or at a different pitch, from tragic iambs? There is no evidence for variations of that type, and whenever we can hear poetry, such factors only rarely apply. When Ajax appears on stage insane at the opening of Sophokles' play, he speaks in the same iambic trimeters as the arrogant goddess Athena and the cautious, prudent Odysseus, all within the same scene.

It is therefore not surprising how rarely modern metricians mention any correlations of meters or rhythms to specific emotions, not to mention behavior. In the very few entries under the term ‘ethos’ in his index to ‘Greek Metre,’ West notes that Cretics were “most energetic,”¹⁹ that from Aeschylus's Agamemnon on trochaic tetrameters are “associated with scenes of heightened tension,”²⁰ that in dochmiacs the “tone is always urgent or emotional,”²¹ and that “sotadeans” (a meter cultivated especially by the poet Sotades in the 280s and 270s) are associated with low-class entertainment especially of a salacious sort, although they are also “used for

¹⁷ West 1982, 152.

¹⁸ West 1982, 39–40.

¹⁹ West 1982, 55.

²⁰ West 1982, 78.

²¹ West 1982, 108.

moralizing and other serious verse.”²² The source for West’s characterisation of Cretics as “most energetic” is the fourth-century historian Ephoros.²³ This passage calls Cretics *suntonōtatoi*, “most high-pitched (?)”. It may surprise to learn from this text that Cretics were therefore judged especially useful for military training.

Similarly in her book on lyric meters, A. M. Dale writes very rarely of *êthos*, observing only that dochmiacs and iambo-dochmiacs, which are “exceedingly common in tragedy,” “to a much greater extent than any other metrical type appear[s] to have a definite emotional connotation. All three tragedians use [these meters] freely to express strong feeling, grief, fear, despair, horror, excitement, occasionally triumph and joy.”²⁴ So, what is this meter’s *êthos*? As Dale notes, in some of tragedy’s most impassioned speeches dochmiacs are mixed with trimeters, normally a calmer spoken meter.

The Marxist historian George Thomson once dared to venture further, correlating a series of literary texts with metrical ethos in his 1929 book ‘Greek Lyric Metre.’ His conclusions were immediately and then continuously condemned as hypothetical and arbitrary.²⁵ More recently (and more subtly), W. C. Scott analysed metric patterns in Aeschylus and Sophocles, extracting meaning from echoes of metrical patterns and other metrical phenomena (e.g., a consistent meter indicates a speaker’s certainty, but mixed meters the opposite.)²⁶ Although Scott’s books have mostly been ignored, in a review of the ‘Sophocles’ D. H. Roberts writes that Scott’s conclusions are sometimes ad hoc, contradictory, or simply unconvincing.²⁷ Does a simple meter always indicate ‘naiveté’? “It’s not as if one could establish a set of rules or procedures for determining the effect of a particular meter or metrical pattern.”

A useful illustration of the seemingly random correlations of meter and content is provided by Timotheos’s Persians, composed in the polymetric style of the late fifth and early fourth centuries. This text is espe-

²² West 1982, 144.

²³ FGrH 70 F 149 = Strab. 10.4.16.

²⁴ Dale 1968, 110.

²⁵ See, e.g., Koster 1953, 15 (“hypothétique et subjectif”); Irigoin 1962, 163 (“vues très personnelles... sur l’êthos des rythmes”). Thomson’s book is nowhere cited in West or Dale.

²⁶ Scott 1984; 1996.

²⁷ Roberts 1998.

cially interesting as immediately post-Damonian. In West's analysis,²⁸ the poem begins with one or more hexameters; through line 126 iambs predominate with occasional choriamb and some "trochaic segmentation"; cretic sequences occur at lines 44–45 and 116–120, dochmiacs at lines 66–69, dactylic cola at 82 and 139, anapaests at 88–89, and aeolics at 90–93. In these 126 lines I can detect no basis in the content for the variable meter. The same applies to the remainder of the poem. Timotheos's was a tour de force of metrical variation, *poikilia*. Many other poets mixed meters: for example, lines 966–77 of Aeschylus's Agamemnon mix trochaic, dactylic, and dochmiac; Pindar's sixth Pythian mixes Paeonic and Aeolian; Aristophanes' comic choruses contain a mix of meters. Why and to what effect? Modern commentators (including the metrically expert Dover) offer no explanation for Aristophanes' metrical variations. Conversely, as in tragic choruses, the same metrical patterns characterize stanzas of contrasting emotional qualities. I confess, I usually do not understand why poets chose particular meters. It seems no one else does either.

Rather than linking meters with ethos, modern scholars sometimes associate ethos with metrical variation within meters. West remarks that (in conjunction) "long syllables were felt to produce an effect of grandeur in themselves;"²⁹ Dale mentions that uncommon metrical resolutions are associated with stress.³⁰ To be sure, these are rather generalized emotional effects – tension or grandeur, rather than Plato's "madness," *húbris*, or "ungentlemanly behavior."

Returning now to Damon and Republic 400, I asked what metrical rhythm is associated with madness, *húbris*, or *aneleutheria*. We can now answer that no particular meter is, or rather, that many meter might be: and this may help explain Sokrates' tone of puzzlement in the Republic, and the fact that he and the musician Glaukon draw no conclusions about the best meters, except that the question is hard.

What can we infer about Damon's work on the *êthos* of metrical rhythm? By proposing to ask Damon, Plato's Sokrates does imply that Damon studied the *êthos* of different meters. We now confront a choice. As Plato does with *harmoniai*, did Damon posit some more or less artificial or reductive evaluations of different meters based on certain conventional or perhaps even arbitrary associations, e.g. that the hexameter was or should

²⁸ West 1982, 138–39.

²⁹ West 1982, 55 n. 66, citing Dionysios of Halikarnassos and later writers.

³⁰ Dale 1968, 63.

only be used for serious verse? These evaluations will be arbitrary or reductive, because in Greek practice, we have seen, most meters in themselves did not have much in the way of *êthos* correlations. Or did he principally study what modern scholars also detect, that certain metrical practices (such as runs of long syllables) or else metrical variations, *poikilia*, have consequences for the *êthos* of its verse?

An answer to these questions may be found by returning to Damon's work on the *harmoniai*. As I have noted, many scholars (including myself) have been tempted to suppose that Damon associated particular *harmoniai* with particular *êthē*: that the Dorian was manly and promoted manly conduct, and so forth. Plato makes such correlations in his discussion of *harmoniai* just before his discussion of meter, and some general correlations of this sort certainly occur, mostly in post-Platonic sources. However, it is worth looking closely at Plato's words about *harmoniai*. Sokrates asks Glaukon which are the dirgelike *harmoniai*, and Glaukon says, "the Mixolydian and the tense Lydian and similar such." Which of the *harmoniai* are soft and sympotic? Glaukon replies, "certain Ionian and Lydian *harmoniai*." These different *harmoniai* are all banished: Plato retains for his polis only the Dorian *harmonia*, as promoting enforced activity in war, and the Phrygian *harmonia*, as promoting voluntary peaceful activity. Various points occur. First, Plato implies that not all Ionian and Lydian *harmoniai* were soft and sympotic – though he banishes them all. Ionian poetry included epic, elegiac, and iambic: all genres with potentially different *êthē*. Furthermore, are we to suppose that the only songs ever sung in Mixolydian, tense Lydian, and similar such were dirges? Aristotle's student Herakleides Pontikos wrote that the Mixolydian combined Lydian emotion with the nobility of Dorian, and was therefore suitable for tragedy.³¹ West writes that in the archaic and classical periods, the Dorian *harmonia* was "used for processions, paeans, songs of love, and in tragedy, especially for laments," and hence was "clearly compatible with more than one mood."³² He adds, "generally, however, it was perceived as dignified and manly." West's pre-Platonic sources for the latter conclusion are Pratinas, who calls Dorian music more serious than aulos music, and Pindar, who calls "the Dorian melody [*mēlos*] most serious [*semnótaton*]." These passages may refer to other cultural qualities of Dorian music, rather than

³¹ Heraclid. Pont. fr. 163 = ps.-Plut., *Mus.* 1136c.

³² West 1992, 179.

strictly to the Dorian *harmonía*. In all these conclusions, Plato seems to be – to put it mildly – rather arbitrary.

Finally and just so, it cannot be that the Phrygian *harmonía* was always played, and had to be played, in a “voluntary, peaceful” *trópos*: Aristotle himself took Plato to task for that supposition.³³ As West writes,³⁴ the Phrygian *harmonía* encompassed “a range of moods, from cheerful bonhomie or pity to wild excitement or religious frenzy.” If the qualities and uses of the Phrygian *harmonía* were well established and transparent, how could Plato have so fundamentally misconstrued it? Aristotle tells a story that Philoxenos tried to compose his dithyramb ‘The Mysians’ in Dorian, but was compelled to go back to the appropriate *harmonía*, the Phrygian.³⁵ West discusses what is probably Aristoxenos’s analysis of this work, that in fact it was composed in different modes: first Hypodorian, then Hypophrygian and Phrygian, and then Dorian and Mixolydian.³⁶ As West notes, dithyrambs are attested in Dorian.³⁷

The *harmoníai* therefore present a situation comparable to metrical rhythm. Each rhythmic meter and each *harmonía* could be used in different ways, reflecting different *éthē*. The character of the song would shape the playing of its *harmonía*.

Did Damon simply, and bluntly, link certain *harmoníai* with certain *éthē*, as Plato did? Plato does not attribute to Damon his approach to the *harmoníai*, and there is no reason to think that Damon was so reductive or arbitrary. Damon was a professional music theorist; Plato was not. As with meters, so in Damon’s period the *harmoníai* in themselves mostly did not have simple *éthos* correlations. Sad or happy or serious music could be played in any *harmonía* – Dorian, Lydian, Phrygian, or other. In Laws 669–70, Plato himself comes to recognize that music mixes different *harmoníai*, rhythms, instruments, and dance. He abandons his prohibitions of specific rhythms and *harmoníai* in favor of what proper singers judge to be appropriate.

How then did Damon approach the *harmoníai*? If he could not have categorized the *éthos* of each individual *harmonía* because that *éthos* varied from song to song, what remains are the other variable qualities of music, the *poikilía*, including pitch and tempo, *agōgḗ*, an interest in which

³³ Aristot., *Pol.* 1342a32–b12.

³⁴ West 1992, 180.

³⁵ Aristot., *Pol.* 1342b.

³⁶ West 1992, 364–65.

³⁷ West 1992, 181.

Republic 400 expressly attributes to him. As with meter, the *poikilia* made music an immensely flexible tool for generating mood and emotion. When the Dorian *harmonía* was used differently in one song or another, did Damon study those differences? A little later in Republic 424c, Plato seems to confirm this interpretation. In the one passage where Plato actually mentions Damon's approach to music, Sokrates states, "never are musical *trópoi* changed without changing the greatest *politikòí nómoi*. So Damon says and I believe him." *Trópoi* are not *harmoníai*, but wider aspects of music which Sokrates does not attempt more precisely to define. Surely this points the way to an answer to our question about Damon's approach to rhythm and music. In both meter and music, Damon explored more widely than the formalism either of basic quantitative patterns or the musical *harmoníai*. For the *êthos* of Greek songs did not lie in the formalisms of meter and *harmonía*, but in wider expressive qualities.

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