

Review of FRANCESCO PELOSI'S
PLATO ON MUSIC, SOUL AND BODY (trans. Sophie Henderson)

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It is amazing how even after two thousand years of research and criticism that an original contribution can still be made on the works of Plato. Francesco Pelosi has made such a contribution. The book stems from Pelosi's doctoral thesis from Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa, which he obtained in 2007. The result is an insightful combination and addition to scholarship on both Plato and music. While his research contributes primarily to the study of ancient music and its reception among Greek intellectuals in classical-period Athens, it is also largely applicable to the study of modern music as it explores the physical and mental effects of music. The overarching theme of the book is a unique scholarly approach to Plato's dualism of body and mind.

For Plato, true knowledge is attained through engaging the soul in rational discourse and not through activities of the body. Pelosi is correct to find the exception in music. Where does music fit? Music, to a large extent, is an activity of the body. Plato regards true conditioning of the soul as a pursuit of the mind in an attempt to free itself from the body, and yet music conveys beneficial qualities to the soul: "The most relevant contribution that a reflection on music offers to the study of a philosophy of the mind in Plato consists in illuminating the area of intersection between psychic and physical, which in a dualist perspective tends to remain hidden" (199). Pelosi has made an extensive and careful analysis of Plato's dialogues in order to establish the

connection between the two, with particular emphasis to *Republic*, *Timaeus*, *Laws*, and *Phaedo*.

There are three main approaches in the book: Plato's philosophy regarding the body and mind as separate entities, the relationship between music and the soul, and music itself. Chapter one begins with the exploration of the term *mousikē* and other music-related words in order to draw out their context and meaning within the dialogues. Pelosi demonstrates the relationship between the words themselves and how they apply to Plato's notion of the soul and body, noting how the individual uses of *mousikē* and related words interact with one another. He notes the effects that the combinations have upon both mind and body. He then demonstrates how these effects can be manipulated towards a desired end. Chapter two elaborates further on these ideas. It deals with the attunement of the body and soul, together and individually, through music. Chapter three explores how music is used in education and the effect that it has on a person as part of the learning process. Through careful study, the benefits of music in education are revealed: music affects the *psychē*, specifically the rationality thereof, and restores balance and harmony to the soul; the effect of which is an intervention on the rationality and overall conditioning of the soul. Chapter four continues the analysis of the effects of music, specifically Plato's view towards the perception of music. Pelosi then turns to the discussion of music itself in terms of physical sensation and how it relates to the dualism that Plato is famous for.

Both the ideas expressed and the language used in *Plato on Music, Soul and Body* are oriented towards academics and lay readers who have prior experience reading philosophical analyses. The vocabulary is very clear, precise, thorough and

technical; this is exactly what one would expect of a doctoral thesis. Pelosi does not seem to leave any relevant material out, and concludes with answers as well as questions that inevitably arise from any analysis of philosophy. The result of Pelosi's work is an interesting and stimulating argument regarding Plato's view of music as a medium which bridges the gap between the physical and the mental realms; "The condition in which music, as a science of harmony, is admitted into the curriculum preparatory to dialectic is that it represents a discipline of conversion from the sensible to intelligible" (114).

Pelosi, Francesco. *Plato on Music, Soul and Body*. Trans. Sophie Henderson. New York: Cambridge UP. 2010. Print.