

Platonic Eurhythmmy (4th century BC) - part 2

Saturday 24 December 2016, by [Pascal Michon](#)

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Eurhythmmy as Divine Making of Society - *The Laws*, 2 (bet. 361-347 BC)

In the *Laws*, Plato elaborates further the concept of *eurhythmmy*. But in order to understand this new developments we must outline first the argumentation context.

In Book 1, as in *The Republic* which addressed first the danger of wild rhythms, Plato discusses the effects of wine-parties and drunkenness that were commonplace practices in Athens, in other Greek cities and, he notices, among Barbarians as well. The question is how to assess their usefulness or dangerousness for the State as much as for individuals, and what the “lawgivers” should do about them.

But the perspective has changed. Whereas eurhythmmy was discussed in *The Republic* from an educational viewpoint, it is now examined from a quasi cultural-anthropological angle. While Plato was building his ideal City through the education of the individuals, he seems in *The Laws* to contemplate it through a new holistic approach.

— **Athenian:** So let us deal more fully with the subject of drunkenness in general for it is a practice of no slight importance, and it requires no mean legislator to understand it. I am now referring not to the drinking or non-drinking of wine generally, but to drunkenness pure and simple, and the question is—ought we to deal with it as the Scythians and Persians do and the Carthaginians also, and Celts, Iberians and Thracians, who are all warlike races, or as you Spartans do; for you, as you say, abstain from it altogether, whereas the Scythians and Thracians, both men and women, take their wine neat and let it pour down over their clothes, and regard this practice of theirs as a noble and splendid practice; and the Persians indulge greatly in these and other luxurious habits which you reject, albeit in a more orderly fashion than the others. (*Laws* 1.637d-e trans. R.G. Bury)

In Book 2, Plato makes “the correct establishment of the institution mentioned,” viz. the wine-parties, a decisive example of the challenge that lawgivers must address. But unexpectedly he does

not condemn those practices and propose instead a religious and anthropological analysis of their significance for society—which reminds in many ways that which will be elaborated by Mauss and Evans-Pritchard at the beginning of the 20th century (Michon, 2015b, 2016). Festivals, he says, have been instituted by the gods “in pity for the human race” in order to foster the effect of child-training which otherwise would “grow slack and weaken to a great extent in the course of men’s lives.” They provide occasions for the citizens to associate with the “Muses,” goddesses of *musikê*, viz. music, poetry and dance, but also with both Apollo and Dionysus. Thus their effect on the participants is, in the end, their better integration into the State. As the Athenian remarks, “they may at least set right again their modes of discipline by associating in their feasts with gods.”

— **Athenian:** Very good. Now these forms of child-training, which consist in right discipline in pleasures and pains, grow slack and weakened to a great extent in the course of men’s lives; so the gods, in pity for the human race thus born to misery, have ordained the feasts of thanksgiving as periods of respite from their troubles; and they have granted them as companions in their feasts the Muses and Apollo the master of music, and Dionysus, that they may at least set right again their modes of discipline by associating in their feasts with gods. We must consider, then, whether the account that is harped on nowadays is true to nature? [...]

Drunkenness should not be condemned as in Sparta which sustains a too harsh policy regarding these rituals and behaviors. In order to give good laws to the City, the lawgivers should take into account the fact that “every young creature” is indeed simultaneously “able of keeping either its body or its tongue quiet” and “always striving to move and to cry.”

[...] What it says is that, almost without exception, every young creature is able of keeping either its body or its tongue quiet, and is always striving to move and to cry, leaping and skipping and delighting in dances and games, and uttering, also, noises of every description. [...]

But they must also keep in mind that human beings, contrarily to other living creatures, were “granted the pleasurable perception of [eurhythmy] and [enharmony]” by the very gods who are in these festivals our “fellows in the dance.” And that by participating in these rituals, citizens are linked with the gods but also “one with another by means of songs and dances.” In short eurhythms are gifts of the gods to the humans, who are yet endowed with a rhythmical capacity, and are therefore crucial in the making of society.

[...] Now, whereas all other creatures are devoid of any perception of the various kinds of order and disorder in movement [*κινήσειν τάξεων οὐδὲ ἀταξιών*] (which we term rhythm and harmony [*οἷς δὴ ῥυθμὸς ὄνομα καὶ ἀρμονία*]), to men the very gods, who were given, as we said, to be our fellows in the dance, have granted the pleasurable perception of [eurhythmy] and [enharmony] [*ἐνρυθμόν τε καὶ ἐναρμόνιον*], whereby they cause us to move and lead our choirs, linking us one with another by means of songs and dances. (*Laws* 2.652a-654a, trans. R.G. Bury, my mod.)

Eurhythm as Means of State Control - The Laws, 2

In the *Philebus* (probably composed as *The Laws* between 361 and 347 BC), Plato, after emphasizing through Socrates' character the significance of intervals, whose combinations have been called "harmonies" (*ἁρμονίας* - *harmonías*), and mentioning similar qualities inherent in the movements of the body, which are "measured by numbers" and "must be called rhythms and measures," suggests again that both should be used as ethical and political models: "they tell us that the same principle should be applied to everyone and many." Since music, viz. harmony and rhythm, show how to introduce agreement in both soul and body, ethics and politics should be based upon them.

Socrates — But when you have learned what sounds are high and what low, and the number and nature of the intervals and their limits or proportions, and the systems compounded out of them, which our fathers discovered, and have handed down to us who are their descendants under the name of harmonies; and the corresponding effects in the movements of the body, which they say are measured by numbers and must be called rhythms and measures [*ῥυθμούς καὶ μέτρα* - *rhuthmoùs kaí métra*]; and they tell us that the same principle should be applied to everyone and many; when you have thus grasped the facts, you have become a musician, and when by considering it in this way you have obtained a grasp of any other unity of all those which exist, you have become wise in respect

to that unity. (*Philebus*, 17c-e, transl. Benjamin Jowett and Harold N. Fowler)

But the conversation then goes on in a different direction and he does not elaborate further. To understand exactly what he means we have to come back to *The Laws*, book 2.

Because eurhythms and enharmonies are gift of the gods to the arrhythmic humans, rhythms and harmonies will be strictly limited by the State and be intensively used as means of education and control of the citizens. A good citizen will follow intense choir-training and "will be able both to sing and dance well [...] provided that he sings good songs and dances good dances."

- **Athenian**: Shall we accept this account to begin with, and postulate that education owes its origin to Apollo and the Muses?
- **Clinias**: Yes.
- **Athenian**: Shall we assume that the uneducated man is without choir-training, and the educated man fully choir-trained?
- **Clinias**: Certainly.
- **Athenian**: Choir-training, as a whole, embraces of course both dancing and song.
- **Clinias**: Undoubtedly.
- **Athenian**: So the well-educated man will be able both to sing and dance well.
- **Clinias**: Evidently.

- **Athenian:** Let us now consider what this last statement of ours implies.
- **Clinias:** Which statement?
- **Athenian:** Our words are,—“ he sings well and dances well”: ought we, or ought we not, to add,—“provided that he sings good songs and dances good dances”?
- **Clinias:** We ought to add this. (*Laws* 2.654a-c, trans. R.G. Bury)

Then Plato naturally addresses the question of the “goodness of posture and tunes in relation to song and dance.” If an ethically and politically correct education rests on a rhythmic training based simultaneously on gymnastics, dance and poetry/song, the required qualities of postures and tunes should be specified.

- **Athenian:** If, then, we three understand what constitutes goodness in respect of dance and song, we also know who is and who is not rightly educated but without this knowledge we shall never be able to discern whether there exists any safeguard for education or where it is to be found. Is not that so?
- **Clinias:** It is.
- **Athenian:** What we have next to track down, like hounds on the trail, is goodness of posture and tunes in relation to song and dance; if this eludes our pursuit, it will be in vain for us to discourse further concerning right education, whether of Greeks or of barbarians. (*Laws* 2.654d-e, trans. R.G. Bury)

As already mentioned, “music” comprises both dance and song, and includes instrumental accompaniment, whether executed by single performers or by groups (*χορεία* – *khoreía*). The “postures” are those of the dancers, the “tunes” those of the singers, given that they could be performed by the same person(s) and that we do not know for sure if songs were sung during gymnastic exercise. As there are generally good and bad rhythms and harmonies, there are more specifically good and bad postures and tunes. The former “attach to goodness of soul or body, or to some image thereof,” while the latter “attach to badness are exactly the reverse.” Thus some dances and tunes are noble and dignifying, whereas others are indecent and degrading.

Let us notice here an interesting play with the various terms meaning *form*. In this instance, *rhuthmós* is clearly homonymous with *skhêma*. Hence *eurhythmy* and *enharmony* are not any more fitness to something changing but replication of perfect eternal Forms.

- **Athenian:** Well said, my friend. But in, fact, while postures [*σχήματα*] and tunes [*μέλη*] do exist in music, which deals with rhythm and harmony [*ῥυθμὸν καὶ ἁρμονίαν*], so that one can rightly speak of a tune or posture being [“eurhythmic”] or [“enharmonious”] [*εὐρυθμον μὲν καὶ εὐἁρμωστον*], one cannot rightly apply the choir masters metaphor “well-colored” to tune and posture [*δὲ μέλος ἢ σχῆμα*]; but one can use this language about the posture and tune of the brave man and the coward, and one is right in calling those of the brave man good, and those of

the coward bad. To avoid a tediously long disquisition, let us sum up the whole matter by saying that the postures and tunes [*σχήματά τε καὶ μέλη*] which attach to goodness of soul or body, or to some image thereof, are universally good, while those which attach to badness are exactly the reverse. (*Laws* 2.655a-b, trans. R.G. Bury, my mod.)

Then comes the most famous “exclusion of the poets” who should be strictly banned from the ideal City. Poets should not be allowed to disturb the State order of education and to introduce dangerous germs of “depravity.” Since Plato, this ban has been regularly and rightly contested—particularly in the 20th century when authoritarian regimes have rigorously controlled artistic expression—on the ground that it entails giving too much power to the State and destroys the mere possibility of art. But to this criticism we should add that this ban aimed more precisely at impeding or better yet suspending any possibility for the citizens to invent new eurhythms and harmonies, i.e. not only new poems or tunes but *new ways to make society*. Because their job is to invent ever new forms of rhythm and song [*ῥυθμοῦ ἢ μέλους*], poets epitomize another kind of *eurhythm*, which is closer to the Democritean than the Platonic model. I will come back to this point in the last chapter of this book when I discuss the Nietzschean aesthetics and ethics.

— **Athenian:** Now where laws are, or will be in the future, rightly laid down regarding musical education and recreation, do we imagine that poets [*τοῖς ποιητικοῖς*] will be granted such licence that they may teach whatever form of rhythm or tune [*ῥυθμοῦ ἢ μέλους*] they best like themselves to the children of law-abiding citizens and the young men in the choirs, no matter what the result may be in the way of virtue or depravity?

— **Clinias:** That would be unreasonable, most certainly. (*Laws* 2.656c-d, trans. R.G. Bury)

Egypt with its immemorial monarchic State which seems to strictly control painting as well as music, dance and poetry is presented as a model. “Any innovation or invention” regarding those arts have been prohibited for centuries and “it has proved possible for the tunes which possess a natural correctness to be enacted by law and permanently consecrated.” In the ideal City *eurhythm* and *enharmony* will be enforced by law and thus bound to last 10 000 years because they will be the best artistic and social replica available on earth of the divine Forms.

— **Athenian:** But at present this licence is allowed in practically every State, with the exception of Egypt.

— **Clinias:** How, then, does the law stand in Egypt?

— **Athenian:** It is marvellous, even in the telling. It appears that long ago they determined on the rule of which we are now speaking, that the youth of a State should practise in their rehearsals postures and tunes that are good: these they prescribed in detail and posted up in the temples, and outside this official list it was, and still is, forbidden to painters and all other producers of postures and representations to introduce any innovation or invention, whether in such productions or in any other branch of music, over and above the traditional forms. And if you look there, you will find that the things depicted or graven there 10,000 years ago. [...] This, however, is a true and noteworthy fact, that as regards music it has proved possible for the tunes which possess a natural correctness to be enacted by law and permanently consecrated. (*Laws*

Poets must be “persuaded” or, if necessary, “compelled” to “portray by [their] rhythms [*rhuthmois*] the gestures [*skhêmata*], and by [their] harmonies [*harmoníaisin*] the tunes [*mélê*], of men who are temperate, courageous, and good in all respects.” In other words, rhythmic and harmonic arts will be used by the State to shape according to its values both the gestures and discourse of citizens. From the 1920s, similar ethical and political programs will be extensively applied in many European countries and we will have to get back to it (for an introduction see Michon, 2016).

— **Athenian:** [...] Similarly in dealing with the poet, the good legislator will use noble and laudable phrases to persuade him—and, failing persuasion, he will compel him—to portray by his rhythms the gestures, and by his harmonies the tunes [*τε ῥυθμοῖς σχήματα καὶ ἐν ἀρμονίαισιν μέλη ποιοῦντα*], of men who are temperate, courageous, and good in all respects, and thereby to compose poems aright [*ὀρθῶς ποιεῖν*]. (*Laws* 2.660a, trans. R.G. Bury)

This control over rhythm of gesture and discourse is larger than the mere control of the content of speech, the way for instance righteous or evil men are described in it. The legislator should make sure that “the whole of the community constantly, so long as they live, use exactly the same language,” literally the same way to utter sounds (*phtéggomai*). The “eurhythmization” of society should then penetrate very deeply in the souls by controlling the various kinds of performance of the speech itself (*ôdaïs kai múthois kai lógois*).

— **Athenian:** [...] then he [the legislator] must devise all possible means to ensure that the whole of the community constantly, so long as they live, use exactly the same language [*ἐν καὶ ταύτῳ ὅτι μάλιστα φθέγγοιτ'*], so far as possible, about these matters, alike in their songs, their tales, and their discourses [*ἐν τε ᾠδαῖς καὶ μύθοις καὶ λόγοις*]. (*Laws* 2.664a, trans. R.G. Bury)

Thus, as in the *Republic*, a certain number of poetic practices, common in Plato’s time, should be censured.

Unappropriateness, in plain language subversion of the main divides organizing society, when “feminine tune and gesture” are assigned to “verses composed for men,” or “rhythms of captives and slaves” to “gestures framed for free men,” or “the cries of beasts, the clash of instruments, and noises of all kinds” mixed with man’s *lógos*.

Senselessness, i.e. instrumental music but also, more surprisingly, poetry devoid of musical accompaniment, when “the poets rudely sunder rhythm and gesture from tune, putting tuneless words into meter, or leaving time and rhythm without words, and using the bare sound of harp or flute.” The *lógos* must absolutely prevail upon harmonic and rhythmic sounds—as in language the signified should prevail upon the signifier—but it must also be accompanied by music as in the most ancient Greek tradition.

Useless virtuosity, when the performer makes a display of the control he has over his limbs and instruments, like a mountebank or “contortionist.”

Ridicule, when the thing represented is paltry or uncouth, such as a duck’s quack.

All these are marks of bad music from the perspective of the educationist and the statesman, since they are neither socially correct nor morally elevating. As such they should be strictly banned from the ideal City.

— **Athenian:** [...] For the Muses would never blunder so far as to assign a feminine tune and gesture to verses composed for men, or to fit the rhythms of captives and slaves to gestures framed for free men, or conversely, after constructing the rhythms and gestures of free men, to assign to the rhythms a tune or verses of an opposite style. Nor would the Muses ever combine in a single piece the cries of beasts and men, the clash of instruments, and noises of all kinds, by way of representing a single object; whereas human poets, by their senselessness in mixing such things and jumbling them up together, would furnish a theme for laughter to all the men who, in Orpheus phrase, “have attained the full flower of joyousness.” For they behold all these things jumbled together, and how, also, the poets rudely sunder rhythm and gesture from tune, putting tuneless words into meter, or leaving time and rhythm without words, and using the bare sound of harp or flute, wherein it is almost impossible to understand what is intended by this wordless rhythm and harmony, or what noteworthy original it represents. Such methods, as one ought to realize, are clownish in the extreme in so far as they exhibit an excessive craving for speed, mechanical accuracy, and the imitation of animals’ sounds, and consequently employ the pipe and the harp without the accompaniment of dance and song; for the use of either of these instruments by itself is the mark of the mountebank or the boor. (*Laws* 2.669c-670a, trans. R.G. Bury)

One can notice the intriguing disappearance of Dionysos in the process and the apparent victory of Apollo, but the former, who is reining in wine-festivals, is actually now subordinated to the latter according to a hierarchical scheme common in Ancient Greece. As a matter of fact, around the middle of Book 2, the Athenian recapitulates the main points of the discussion. Young creatures are “by nature fiery” but they can “attain a sense of order” (τάξις - *táxis*), which is a human privilege. The “order of motion” is called “rhythm,” while the “order of voice” is termed “harmony.” But Dionysos is not forgotten since the gods have granted to us “as fellow-choristers and choir-leaders Apollo and the Muses,—besides whom we mentioned, if we recollect, a third, Dionysus.”

— **Athenian :** At the commencement of our discourse we said, if we recollect, that since all young creatures are by nature fiery, they are unable to keep still either body or voice, but are always crying and leaping in disorderly fashion; we said also that none of the other creatures attains a sense of order, bodily and vocal, and that this is possessed by man alone; and that the order of motion is called “rhythm” [τῇ δὲ τῆς κινήσεως τάξει ῥυθμός ὄνομα εἶναι - *tê dê tês kinêseos táxei rhuthmós ónoma eînai*] while the order of voice (in which acute and grave are blended together) is termed “harmony,” and to the combination of these two the name “choristry” is given. We stated also that the gods, in pity for us, have granted to us as fellow-choristers and choir-leaders Apollo and the Muses,—besides whom we mentioned, if we recollect, a third, Dionysus. (*Laws*, 2.664a-665a, trans. R.G. Bury)

As the Muses and Apollo respectively honored by choirs of children and young men, Dionysus will be honored by a particular choir composed of “old men” less prone to excess and more apt to enjoy wine “as a medicine potent against the crabbedness of old age.”

— **Athenian:** No children under eighteen may touch wine at all, [...] young men under thirty may take wine in moderation but that he must entirely abstain from intoxication and heavy drinking. But when a man has reached the age of forty, he may join in the convivial gatherings and invoke Dionysus, above all other gods, inviting his presence at the rite (which is also the recreation) of the elders, which he bestowed on mankind as a medicine potent against the crabbedness of old age. (*Laws*, 2.665b-666b, trans. R.G. Bury)

Dionysus is a god who must be fully respected by the legislator. But his power must be checked and integrated into the City whole by the intercession of Apollo and the Muses. Disorder may be controlled and transformed into order thanks to rhythm and harmony of the *musike*. The whole eurhythmic Platonic program is thus based on the passage from wilderness and nature to civilization and culture thanks to rhythm.

— **Athenian:** Do we not also remember how we said that from this origin there was implanted in us men the sense of rhythm and harmony, and that the joint authors thereof were Apollo and the Muses and the god Dionysus?

— **Clinias:** Certainly we remember.

— **Athenian:** Moreover, as to wine, the account given by other people apparently is that it was bestowed on us men as a punishment, to make us mad; but our own account, on the contrary, declares that it is a medicine given for the purpose of securing modesty of soul and health and strength of body. (*Laws*, 2.672c-d, trans. R.G. Bury)

At the end of Book 2, Plato sums up in a quite utilitarian way his defense of “the Dionysiac chorus.” The festivals and the use of wine make the citizens’ minds “become ductile” and easier to shape or “rhythmize” by the legislator. Hence even drunkenness can be used for repelling invasive rhythms or lack of rhythm and foster the power of the State.

— **Athenian:** [...] The primary intention of our argument, which was to demonstrate that our defense of the Dionysiac chorus was justifiable, has now been carried out to the best of our ability. [...] And did we not say that when this takes place, the souls of the drinkers turn softer, like iron, through being heated, and younger too; whence they become ductile, just as when they were young, in the hands of the man who has the skill and the ability to train and mould them. And now, even as then, the man who is to mould them is the good legislator; he must lay down banqueting laws, able to control that banqueter who becomes confident and bold and unduly shameless, and unwilling to submit to the proper limits of silence and speech, of drinking and of music, making him consent to do in all ways the opposite. (*Laws*, 2.671a-e, trans. R.G. Bury)

As in Book 3 of *The Republic*, Plato then turns to gymnastics which he defines this time as “the second half of choristry.” This comparison allows him again to rapidly extend the concepts elaborated while discussing rhythm in music and poetry. As music is fit for training the soul, so gymnastics for training the body. The parallel fashions in which he treats them underlines again their complementariness. Nothing new here. Besides he does not develop further his thought because he will come back to gymnastics in Book 7.

Eurhythm as Sacred Order - The Laws, 7

Plato comes back for the last time to the question of *eurhythm* in Book 7. In this part of *The Laws*, the vision becomes more pessimistic and Plato concentrates on what should be forbidden and the penalties that would apply in case of disturbance of the eurhythmic sacred order of the City.

Repeating arguments already presented before, the participants in the dialogue rapidly consider once again gymnastics with regard to its use in the ideal City. Some exercise linked with music and dance should imitate the Muses, thus “preserving both freedom and nobility,” while others should aim at “physical soundness, agility and beauty,” so bestowing upon “the various parts and members of the body” “the [eurhythmical] motion [...] which accompanies the whole of dancing and is diffused throughout it completely.”

The lessons may, for practical convenience, be divided under two heads—the gymnastical, which concern the body, and the musical, which aim at goodness of soul. Of gymnastic there are two kinds, dancing and wrestling. Of dancing [τῆς ὀρχήσεως] there is one branch in which the style of the Muse is imitated, preserving both freedom and nobility, and another which aims at physical soundness, agility and beauty by securing for the various parts and members of the body the proper degree of flexibility and extension and bestowing also the [eurhythmical] motion which belongs to each [καὶ ἀποδιδομένης ἐκάστοις αὐτοῖς αὐτῶν εὐρύθμου κινήσεως], and which accompanies the whole of dancing and is diffused throughout it completely. (*Laws* 7.795d-796a, trans. R.G. Bury, my mod.)

But then a new theme pops up in the conversation which, if we think of its previous use by Heraclitus, is of the greatest interest: that of children games—I will return to this more thoroughly below in the chapter dedicated to Nietzsche. The shift of focus is explained by the Athenian as follows: since it should be forbidden “by reverence and fear to alter any of the things established of old,” the good legislator must ensure that the education given to the young prevents any transformation, any innovation. Therefore, in addition to poetry and gymnastics, the legislator must particularly control children games which, if unrestrained, make the individuals to “grow up into men different from their fathers,” to “seek a different mode of life,” and “to desire other institutions and laws,” which is for Plato the most appalling thing that can occur in the ideal State.

— **Athenian:** [...] the whole soul is forbidden by reverence and fear to alter any of the things established of old. By hook or by crook, then, the lawgiver must devise a means whereby this shall be true of his State. Now here is where I discover the means desired:—Alterations in children’s games are regarded by all lawgivers (as we said above) as being mere matters of play, and not as the causes of serious mischief; hence, instead of forbidding them, they give in to them and adopt them. They fail to reflect that those children who innovate in their games grow up into men

different from their fathers; and being thus different themselves, they seek a different mode of life, and having sought this, they come to desire other institutions and laws. (*Laws*, 7.798b-c, trans. R.G. Bury)

But, according to the Athenian, in order to prevent any such thing from happening, children games must be put under severe control. Dance and poetry rhythms and harmonies, which are used in those games, should be “consecrated,” fixed for ever, and consequently anyone trying to induce unknown pleasures by introducing the children with new rhythms and harmonies should be prevented from doing it.

— **Athenian:** Well, then, do we still put our trust in those former statements of ours [2.654e ff.; 2.668a], in which we said that matters of rhythm [*ῥυθμὸς*] and music generally are imitations of the manners of good or bad men? Or how do we stand?

— **Clinias:** Our view at least remains unaltered.

— **Athenian:** We assert, then, that every means must be employed, not only to prevent our children from desiring to copy different models in dancing or singing, but also to prevent anyone from tempting them by the inducement of pleasures of all sorts. (*Laws*, 7.798d-e, trans. R.G. Bury)

The eurhythmic sacred order of the City should be protected at all cost against any potential trouble. First, any other dance and poetry than the one allowed by law, especially the disharmonious and arrhythmic drunkenness and Dionysiac dances and songs, which will be tolerated in certain limited occasions, will be prohibited in all other official instances because they are disorderly and immoral, and their performers “expelled from the feast” and if necessary “prosecuted for impiety.” *Eurhythm*y should be ensured by an unalterable religious order fostered by law.

— **Athenian:** To attain this end, can any one of us suggest a better device than that of the Egyptians?

— **Clinias:** What device is that?

— **Athenian:** The device of consecrating all dancing and all music. First, they should ordain the sacred feasts, by drawing up an annual list of what feasts are to be held, and on what dates, and in honor of what special gods and children of gods and daemons; and they should ordain next what hymn is to be sung at each of the religious sacrifices, and with what dances each such sacrifice is to be graced [...] if any man proposes other hymns or dances besides these for any god, the priests and priestesses will be acting in accordance with both religion and law when, with the help of the Law-wardens, they expel him from the feast; and if the man resists expulsion, he shall be liable, so long as he lives, to be prosecuted for impiety by anyone who chooses. (*Laws*, 799a-b, trans. R.G. Bury)

Except in very few occasions useful to the State, no person shall “utter a note or move a limb in the dance [...] in violation of public tunes and sacred songs and the whole choristry of the young.” Dionysiac dances, poetry and music are to be severely repressed.

— **Athenian:** [...] let this be the decree on the matter:—In violation of public tunes and sacred songs and the whole choristry of the young, just as in violation of any other “nome” (law), no person shall utter a note or move a limb in the dance. He that obeys shall be free of all penalty; but he that disobeys shall (as we said just now) be punished by the Law-wardens, the priestesses and the priests. (*Laws*, 7.800a, trans. R.G. Bury)

Poets particularly should be closely watched and their compositions controlled by the religious and political authorities. And it is quite enlightening to see that along with some Dionysiac worshippers, poem and game makers are the two main enemies of the new eurhythmic order which Plato is foreseeing for the ideal City.

— **Athenian:** [...] So shall we also lay down this as one of our laws and typical cases regarding music?

— **Clinias:** What law? Explain it to us more clearly.

— **Athenian:** The law that the poet shall compose nothing which goes beyond the limits of what the State holds to be legal and right, fair and good; nor shall he show his compositions to any private person until they have first been shown to the judges appointed to deal with these matters, and to the Law-wardens, and have been approved by them. And in fact we have judges appointed in those whom we selected to be the legislators of music and in the supervisor of education. Well then, I repeat my question, —is this to be laid down as our third law, typical case, and example? What think you?

— **Clinias** Be it laid down by all means. (*Laws*, 7.801c-d, trans. R.G. Bury)

The whole culture should be scrutinized, sorted out and finally purified by destroying the dangerous works and retaining only those that would be recognized as favorable to the order of the new State. Songs, viz. texts, rhythms and harmonies, should be carefully selected by men “under fifty.”

— **Athenian:** [...] As to the songs and the dances, this is the fashion in which they should be arranged. Among the compositions of the ancients there exist many fine old pieces of music, and likewise dances, from which we may select without scruple for the constitution we are founding such as are fitting and proper. To examine these and make the selection, we shall choose out men not under fifty years of age. (*Laws*, 7.802a-b, trans. R.G. Bury)

— **Athenian:** [...] and by thus expounding the intentions of the lawgiver, we shall organize to his satisfaction dancing, singing, and the whole of choristry. In truth, every unregulated [ἄτακτός, lit. not in battle-order] musical pursuit becomes, when brought under regulation [τάξιν λαβοῦσα], a thousand times better, even when no honeyed strains are served up. (*Laws*, 7.802c, trans. R.G. Bury)

Among the songs that would be preserved, the lawgiver should naturally “set apart suitable songs for males and females by making a rough division of them.” Thus rhythms and harmonies would produce and support a clear separation between genders, presented as “natural difference.” In both

the masculine type would convey “what is noble and of a manly tendency,” while the feminine type would express “that which inclines rather to decorum and sedateness.”

— **Athenian:** Further, it will be right for the lawgiver to set apart suitable songs for males and females by making a rough division of them; and he must necessarily adapt them to harmonies and rhythms [*ἁρμονίαισιν δὲ καὶ ῥυθμοῖς*], for it would be a horrible thing for [harmony to be out of tune] [*ἁρμονία ἀπάδειν*, lit.] and for [rhythm to be out of rhythm] [*ῥυθμῷ ἀρρυθμεῖν*, lit.], as a result of providing the songs with unsuitable accompaniments. So the lawgiver must of necessity ordain at least the outline of these. And while it is necessary for him to assign both words and music for both types of song as defined by the natural difference of the two sexes, he must also clearly declare wherein the feminine type consists. Now we may affirm that what is noble and of a manly tendency is masculine, while that which inclines rather to decorum and sedateness is to be regarded rather as feminine both in law and in discourse. (*Laws*, 7.802d-e, trans. R.G. Bury, my mod.)

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