

Aesthesis versus Logos: Two Doctrines of Music and Possibility of Reconciliation

Abstract. The problem of the dualistic nature of music is found in the doctrines of music created by Pythagoras and Aristoxenus. The article assumes that the opposite perceptions of music were determined by different philosophers' attitudes to the issue of body-soul relationship. The first section presents the controversy between understanding music as a sensual and music as a philosophical thing. The second part analyses fragments about music from Plato's dialogues in order to uncover the unity of body and soul in Plato's philosophy. The aim of this article is to disclose the philosophical point of view in which the sensible and intelligible contents of music (μουσική) is not opposing each other.

Keywords: music, body, soul, Plato, harmony, philosophy.

Introduction

Dualistic debate about the aims of music has been rephrased in irrelevant ways; music based on rationality *versus* music based on intuition, high art *versus* folk art, sacrum *versus* profanum, traditional *versus* progressive etc. The importance of the mind and sensory criterion is relevant to the foundation of the principles of music composing, aesthetics and acoustics. The problem of music's dualistic nature is discussed by many philosophers and music theorists in various topics. This paper invites to look back at the origins of dualistic debate about the nature of music in philosophical/religious context during the Classical period. The article assumes that the opposite perceptions of music created by Pythagoras and Aristoxenus were determined by different philosophers' attitudes to the problem of body-soul relationship. The issue of the relationship between soul and body was first discussed by Plato. The object of investigation is fragments about music from Plato's dialogues, found in the *Phaedo*, the *Republic* and the *Timaeus*. Based on the work of the scholar Francesco Pelosi *Plato on Music, Soul and Body* the article uses the method of musical analogy to disclose a philosophical point of view, in which the sensible and intelligible content of music (μουσική) does not oppose each other.

I. Perception of Music as a Spiritual and Sensual Masterpiece

Pythagoras (582 BCE–496 BCE) believed that everything in the Universe corresponds to mathematical rules and proportions. For him and all Pythagorean tradition the philosophical mind is more valuable than empirical knowledge. Even though his theory was primitive, it serves to give us a picture which was later developed by philosophers such as Boethius, Johannes Kepler, the Rosicrucian Robert Fludd, and, in contemporary times, by scientists working with quantum relationships. Charlene Douglass (Douglass 2005: 1) summarizes the main ideas of Pythagoras:

- All things are numbers. Mathematics is the basis of everything, and geometry is the highest form of mathematical studies. The physical world can be understood through mathematics.
- The soul resides in the brain and is immortal. It moves from one being to another, sometimes from a human into an animal, through a series of reincarnations called transmigration until it becomes pure. Pythagoras believed that both mathematics and music could purify.
- Numbers have personalities, characteristics, strengths and weaknesses.
- The world depends upon the interaction of opposites, such as male and female, lightness and darkness, warm and cold, dry and moist, light and heavy, fast and slow.
- Certain symbols have a mystical significance.
- All members of the society should observe strict loyalty and secrecy.

The Pythagorean doctrine of music postulates that music has a primal connection with the World (conceptually). Everything in the Universe corresponds to mathematical rules and proportions, which means that numbers let us understand the structure of the Cosmos. The heavenly bodies also appear to have moved in accordance with the mathematical ratios that govern the concordant musical intervals in order to produce music of the heavens, which in the later tradition developed into “the harmony of the spheres” (Proust 2011: 358). Pythagoras and his followers conceived the universe as a vast lyre, in which each planet, vibrating at a specific pitch, in relationships similar to the stopping of the monochord's string, harmonized with other heavenly bodies to create “music of the spheres”, a concept which remained viable for centuries (see Figure 1). The idea of the harmonious unity of the universe is being developed up to Johannes Kepler's book *The Harmony of the World* (Smirnov 1998: 521).

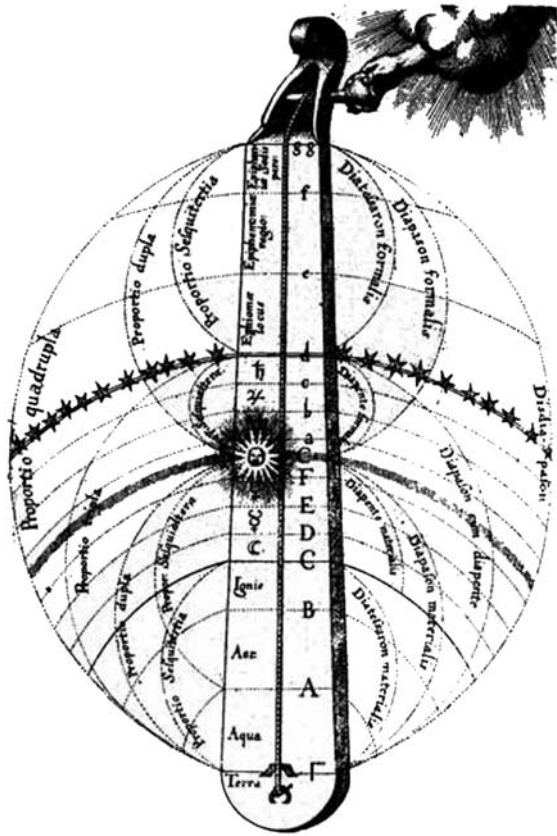


Figure 1. The mundane monochord with its proportions and intervals. Cosmic structure matches the gradation of God's monochord. The position divides the monochord into two octaves – Diapason materialis and Diapason formalis, which represent the spiritual and the material world. Worlds are centred through sun's note (G), from which quintiles intervals are put to both sides, thus determining their further internal order. In such way, the world is organised according to musical laws. Picture from Fludd's book *De Musica Mundana* (Fludd 1617: 10)

Iamblichus the fourth-century scholar who wrote nine books about the Pythagorean sect describes the main principles of music (Brucker 1767: 1056):

1. The harmony of music must be judged not only by hearing, but also by mind, because the sensory perception does not correspond to the proportions of sound and is perceived only by the mind.

2. The music is one of the most reasonable philosophical exercises and is attributed to katharsis (κάθαρσις – purification, cleaning): in order to make the soul healthier and to purify the mindset of disasters. The Pythagoreans had a habit of wiping their souls with music in the morning and evening.

3. Musical harmony is based on irrevocable rules and canons because the mind, seeking what is wise, uses such canons and rules.

4. The Pythagorean tradition of music, being based on philosophy (λόγος), separated itself from Aristoxenians, who solved harmony just from the sensation (αἴσθησις),

and ridiculed the former for their different views. According to Ptolemy, they found the intelligence factor humiliating.

Aristoxenus (449 BCE–401 BCE) was the Greek Peripatetic philosopher, usually pictured as an empiricist whose theory stems from purely practical issues of actual music making. He was the first authority on musical theory in the classical world and wrote *Elementa Harmonica*. In this book he argued with the disciples of Pythagoras who raised the question that was eternally new: are the cogitations of theorists as important as the observations of musicians themselves? His specific contention was that the judgment of the ear with regard to intervals was superior to mathematical ratios. Instead using ratios, he divided tetrachord into 30 parts (Aristoxenus 1902: 249).

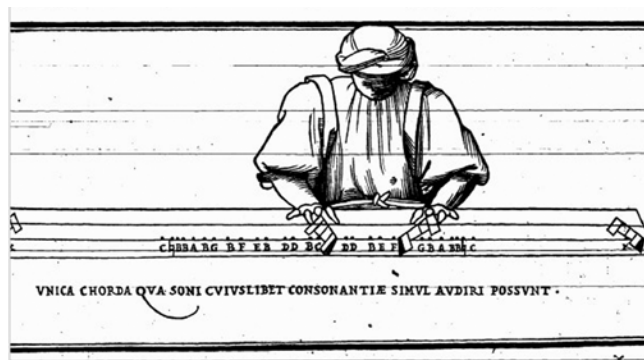


Figure 2. The Monochord. Consonance can be judged just by hearing.

It is usual to assume that the author of the treatise is attributed to the Pythagorean thinking. However, in the chapter "The Monochord. Consonance can be judged just by hearing" (*Unica chorda qua soni cuiuslibet consonantiae simul audiri possunt*) we can recognize the elements of Aristoxenus doctrine. In this picture we can see a man solving a problem of pythagorean comma (between c–fis). In the chapter, the author concludes that consonance (pure interval) can be judged just by hearing.

Picture from treatise *Musica theórica* written in by Ludouici Foliani mutinensis (Foliani 1529: 39)

Therefore Aristoxenus was hailed by the sixteenth and seventeenth century theorists as the inventor of equal temperament¹ and also authority creating new composition techniques in the seventeenth century². However, he may have intended this for the Pythagorean tuning, for most of the other scales he expressed in this unusual way correspond closely to the tunings of his contemporaries. From this we gather that his protest was not against current practice, but rather against the rigidity of the mathematical theories.

II. Musical Analogy in Plato's Philosophical Theory of Soul

The alliance of music and soul. Italian scholar Francesco Pelosi's work *Plato on Music, Soul and Body* suggests applying the musical analogy method in order to reveal Plato's body and soul philosophy:

“My intention is to demonstrate that Platonic reflection on music provides a useful opportunity to reread the mind–body question in Plato. This will allow us, with relatively new instruments, to plumb the psychological and epistemological fields of the theories of the constitution of the soul and its relationship with the body, and the relationship between sense perception, emotion and thought” (Pelosi 1999: 3).

Music that has an acoustic nature and physical expression the ideal of harmony prevailing in ancient aesthetics, connected with the spiritual world and combining the state of body and soul and ethical purpose, becomes not only one images of Plato's philosophy, but also suitable analogies as methods for interpreting his philosophy.

So dualistic debate about music can be discussed in the coherence with the soul and body relation problem; it concerns the philosophy of religion and can already be found in ancient orphism beliefs. Ideas about the soul in philosophical conception first appeared in Plato's dialogues. As mentioned by Pelosi, it is a field that, in recent years, has been the object of a lively interest on the part of many scholars, who are trying to go beyond the traditional and reductive paradigm of Plato as a rigid dualist (Pelosi 1999: 3). In our days we have two camps of Plato's expounders: the first camp is saying, that “as a whole, Plato's philosophy is an idealistic system resting on a sharply defined dualism between mind and matter, God and the world, body and soul” (Zeller 1969: 144–147); the opposite approach to the Platonic corpus has been given a label of “unitarism”. For example, Harold Cherniss points to Plato's interest in three ethics, epistemology and ontology (metaphysics) and in the dialogues found clear evidences of Plato's intense endeavour “to find a single hypothesis which would at once solve the problems of these several spheres and also create a rationally unified cosmos by establishing the connection among the separate phases of experience” (Cherniss 1936: 445–446). “Unitarian tradition” in Lithuania represented by works of Naglis Kardelis' (study *The Insight of Unity in Plato's Philosophy*) and Tatjana Aleknienė's (study *Harmonies of the Soul*). They reveal the main aspects of the Greek conception of soul (ψυχή).

Music as one of the solutions to the rational argumentation problem. Ideas about the soul in Plato's dialogues (*Phaedo*, *Republic*, *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*) are special for their aspiration to consider the soul not through mythological, but philosophical conception. In *Phaedo* the theory of immortality of the soul is presented, the condition of which is to understand everything through the mind; however, Kardelis observes that the dialogue fails to express any undeniable proof of the soul's immortality, and that after long philosophical discussions and arguments no clear or definitive answers are found (Kardelis 2007: 246–247). Participants of the dialogue compare the soul to musical harmony, a tailor; Socrates himself eventually moves on to the *Myth of the True Earth*. It is obvious that even though the author criticises different ways of knowledge, this and his other works cannot do with merely rational explanations and so other methods, such as analogy, are used.

¹ As mentioned by Willem Kroesbergen, during Bach's lifetime it was generally accepted that Aristoxenus was the first who described equal temperament by making all the fifths a bit narrow by ear. (We can find it in Mersenne *Harmonie Universelle* (1636) Livre Second, des instruments a cordes, p. 58–61; Sébastien de Brossard *Dictionnaire de Musique* (1701), p. 147 or under ‘Temperamento’ in later prints; Mattheson *Grosse General-Bass-Schule* (1731, p. 147; Mattheson, *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (1739); Corrette *Maitre de clavecin* (1753), p. 87.) After the translation of Aristoxenus *Elementa harmonica*, mainly two methods of temperaments were in use: 1. Meantone (or modified meantone) by tuning the octaves pure, 11 fifths out of tune, the last one became the ‘wolf’ 15 and most thirds pure; 2. Equal temperament tuned by ear: octaves pure, fifths so little out of tune that they sound pure and the thirds as wide as the ear can accept (Kroesbergen 2015: 4).

² For example, composer M. Scacchi, who was in probably famous polemics during the seventeenth century with old style composer P. Siefert, in one of letters wrote, that “I wish to act according to true reason, I ignore and despise these who prefer angry words to modesty. In any case, to satisfy the curious, I shall say that in this cantilena of mine we must consider the doctrine of Aristoxenus, where the tone is divided into two equal parts, that is, into two semitones” (Scacchi 2016: 100).

Alongside the mythological explanation of the conception and literary qualities of the texts, researchers of Plato pay attention to the method of allegory and analogy. Various musical examples are used to justify the tripartite soul theory in the fragments of the *Republic*.

Kardelis summarises the sequence of notes by researchers T. S. Eliot and Pseudo-Longinus by concluding that if we were to analyse Plato's texts "purely philosophically" and ignore its style and literary quality, we still would not be equipped to *philosophically* analyse them, let alone grasp the subtleties of its style (Kardelis 2007: 214). According to Kardelis, the popular opinion that Plato's myths are a jump to irrationality and are only used when rational thinking and logical argumentation fail, is unjustified. To him, myths and images rise above discursive reflections and attempt to use vivid, sensory analogies to describe what it is that the soul once saw through the eyes of the mind, not the body; that is considered to be the *primary form of philosophy* (Kardelis 2007: 216). Thus, the arising soul and body unity problem requires an outlook that contains more works and aspects.

Plato's writings often include statements that struggle to be argued philosophically or logically; they are often left unsaid due to reality's set-up and the weakness of human language, as well as the youthfulness of the philosophical language of the time. This kind of situation is especially relevant to the theory of soul (*ψυχή*).

The theory of soul as harmony. Ancient thinkers perceived the soul as the centre of emotions and desires; it was customary to assume that the soul is coherent, although, as seen in *Phaedo*, the counter-arguments of Simmias and Cebes conflict with the immortal soul and body. Nevertheless, the researchers see the similarity of the harmony of the fair soul (*ἀρμονία*) and the harmony of music. Its application is abundant in the *Republic*. Here are three parts of the soul: intelligence, courage, temperance, and relationships in the soul parts – restraint, justice. Plato states that if each element knows its value and occupies it according to its nature and general order, the soul is well-regulated. According to Plato, a person can self-regulate and arrogate oneself: "One becomes friendly to oneself and as if the three tones of harmony – the lowest, the highest and the medium, and any in between – they combine three elements of their own soul, link them together and out of them make a very real one, restrained and harmonious" (*Republic*, IV book: 441 d–e). It is also stated in the work that the sneakiest human form is not a man, but a beast, and the best of its forms is not only human, but simply divine (Aleknienė 1999: 15).

The harmony between the soul and the body is especially emphasized in *Timaeus*. One who wants a good soul must take care of its order and harmony, arising from the balance of the soul and the body – a soul, stronger than the body does not benefit the entire person but makes them unhappy and ugly. For both the body and the soul need to be equally developed so that the two are harmonious in both parts and in each other (*Timaeus*, 87c–88c).



Figure 3. The myth of the chariot in Plato's *Phaedrus*.

Alternative depictions of Plato's charioteer model of the human. These correspond to the honor-loving and appetitive parts of the soul, respectively; on the right the charioteer is "reason", who is the driver [driving force] of two horses, called emotion and desire, but is having trouble controlling the horses. Sometimes reason is in control, but at other times emotion and desire end up setting the direction of the chariot.

The soul as harmony explanation is also found in *Phaedrus*. It is important that in order to know one's body and soul there is a necessity to divide their beings (*Phaedrus*, 270 b). Dialogue also uses the myth of horses: "We compare the soul with the union of a team of winged horses and their charioteer; while the gods have noble horses and charioteers, other souls have a mixture. Firstly, the team of horses is controlled by our (soul) ruler; secondly, one of his horses is beautiful, and of noble birth, while another horse – the opposite of the first one, its ancestors opposite to noble, so it is inevitable that to guide is a dull, hard job" (*Phaedrus*, 246 a-b). Then the myth about Zeus, who takes care of the celestial order that will reveal itself in the inner harmony of the human soul, is told (*Phaedrus*, 246 e). These myths reveal yet another peculiarity of Plato's philosophical speech – the regularity and fractality of the order of the universe and difference, manifested not only in the mythical, but also at the theoretical philosophical level; the dialogue says that not only the life of a person, but also the way of the whole state depends on which side the desire of the soul is more focused on.

Sensible and intelligible contents of music. Music, as mentioned by Pelosi, for the soul is useful because of the sensible and intelligible contents:

Now, the process with which music acts on reason, described in these terms, leads on the one hand, in quite a surprising manner, to musical intervention on sensibility, conducted through non-rational channels; while on the other hand it leads to the philosophical journey of ascent (or return) of the immortal soul towards an ideal dimension, a journey that is marked by an important involvement of rationality. (Pelosi 1999: 85) ... To reflect on the nature of music and what it signifies to listen to it, understand it, make use of it and enjoy it leads Plato to the crucial question of the relationship between the sensible and intelligible contents of *mousike* and the impact that they have on sensibility and the intellection of man. I have advanced the hypothesis that Plato's attitude with respect to the question is conditioned by the psychophysical subject that he means to handle with music and the manners of treatment. The twofold nature of the musical phenomenon assumes a series of different expressions in relation to its psychophysical interlocutor (Pelosi 1999: 209).

It is usual to assume that Plato is attributed to the Pythagorean thinking, but it is difficult to summarize the quite fragmented speeches on the subject of music: on the one hand, it is known that Plato recognized the system of the eight main tones of the Pythagoreans and criticized those, who thought that "ear is more important than the mind". It is known that the Pythagorean tuning was recognised by Plato in the *Republic* (IX book, 530 d).

One of the Pythagorean postulates was that music is the structure of opposing subjects; and a great deal of unity and harmony of differences. According to Aleknienė, in *Philebus* Socrates claims that all arts appeared on the divine path – that things called 'eternal' consist of one and many (Aleknienė 1999: 37).

Johann Jakob Brucker's text (Brucker 1767: 1057) about the Pythagorean musical theory which became prominent in Plato's time states that Pythagoras assigned music to katharsis (κάθαρσις – purification, cleaning): The Pythagoreans had a habit of cleaning their soul with music in the morning and evening. In the *Republic* Socrates talks about the internal basis of good and evil behaviour, and applies the image of duly stressed strings to the soul's parts: "releases", "without strain (unsteadily) stresses, is too relaxed..." (*Republic*, IX book, 590 b). Later, Plato states that God gave humans the soul and the body not to cultivate them (as some think), but to reconcile the wicked and good elements of the soul (*Philebus*, 16 c).

According to the Pythagoreans, music should be dealt not only with hearing, i.e. not by observing differences in sounds, but in relationships (proportions) using one's mind, because relationships often do not match sound experience and are perceived only by the mind. In the *Republic* Plato criticised those who thought "ears more important than the mind". The family of Pythagorean musicians created with philosophical minds and separated themselves from the Aristoxenians, who solved harmonies by feelings and ridiculed the former for a different attitude, and, as Ptolemy testified, considered the criterion of the mind to be disgraceful. Harmony in music is based on irrevocable rules and canons, because the mind, seeking wisdom, uses the canons of harmony or rules.

On the other hand, Plato criticized those, who in sounds were looking only for numbers. Socrates, in dialogue about the immortality of the soul *Phaedo* presents the possible of twofold meaning of art (μουσική):

The dream was encouraging me to do what I was doing, that is, to make music, because **philosophy was the greatest kind of music** and I was working at that. But now, after the trial and while the festival of the god delayed my execution, I thought, in case the repeated dream really meant to tell me to make this which is **ordinarily called music**, I ought to do so and not to disobey. (*Phaedo*, 61 a)

Kardelis states that the classical aesthetic standard is best described by the notion of harmony (Kardelis 2007: 236) in the ancient conception, beauty is the property of the part formed by the (and hence the bodily) object, due to the harmonious structure of the parts, embodying certain mathematical proportions. “We will see that our pupils do not try to learn something imperfect and directed not for that purpose. Do not you know harmony is similarly treated? Being confined to accords and hearable singing sounds and measuring, comparing them to each other, they do a useless job. In the accords we hear, they are looking for a number, but do not rise to the problems and do not analyse which numbers are harmonious, and which ones are not and why. ... It would be useful in finding beauty and goodness” (*Republic*, IX book, 531 c).

Thus, from Pythagorean and Plato’s reflections on music it is evident that the philosopher used the art of the criterion of truth and the beauty of kinship to being and good by referring art to the truth of cognition: “The heavenly arches should be used as examples – I said – so that we can know what is invisible” (*Republic*, VII book, 529 e). Possible features of this music: the proportionality, relationship, harmony, and, in particular, the harmony of the spiritual and sensory bases became a model for use in Plato’s philosophy.

Conclusions

Dualistic debate about the nature of music founded during the Classical period. The Pythagorean tradition of music, being based on philosophy (λόγος), separated themselves from Aristoxenians, who solved harmony just from the sensation (αἴσθησις), and ridiculed the former for their different views. The relationship between the sensible and intelligible contents of music is discussed in the coherence with the soul and body relation problem.

Ideas about the soul in philosophical conception first appear in Plato’s dialogues. Alongside the mythological explanation of the conception and literary qualities of the texts, researchers of Plato pay attention to the method of allegory and analogy. Various musical examples are used to justify the tripartite soul theory in the fragments of dialogs. Music that has an acoustic nature and physical expression the ideal of harmony prevailing in ancient aesthetics, connected with the spiritual world and combining the state of body and soul and ethical purpose, becomes not only one of Plato’s philosophy’s images, but also suitable analogies as methods for interpreting Plato’s philosophy.

Ancient thinkers perceived the soul as the centre of emotions and desires, it was customary to assume that the soul is coherent. The researchers see the similarity of the harmony of the fair soul (ἁρμονία) and the harmony of music. The theory of the soul as harmony is recognised in the *Republic*, *Phaedo*, *Timaus*, *Phaedrus*.

Based on the “unitarist” view to the Platonic corpus, analysis of fragments showed that music successfully works in the sensible and intelligible sphere. Consequently, the nature of music can very well unite all perspectives despite their diversity. Music in Plato works has the sensible and intelligible contents, but the main function of music is to “reconcile the wicked and good elements of the soul” (*Philebus*, 16 c).

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Aesthesis versus Logos. Dvi muzikos doktrinos ir jų darnos galimybė**Santrauka**

Kontroversija tarp muzikos kaip juslinio prado ir muzikos kaip filosofinio prado atsirado dar antikoje: pitagorietiškoji muzikos tradicija, matematiniais dėsniais grindusi kosmoso tvarką ir tobulumą, atsiskyrė nuo aristokseniečių, apie muzikos harmoningumą sprendusių pagal pojūčius. Straipsnyje keliama prielaida, kad priešingą stovyklų požiūrį į muzikos prigimtį, paskirtį, praktiką ir akustiką lėmė skirtingi kūno ir proto svarbos kriterijai, todėl muzikos prigimties klausimas svarstomas atsižvelgiant į sielos, proto ir kūno santykį.

Sielos samprata filosofinės koncepcijos pavidalu pirmą kartą pasirodė Platono dialoguose. Šiuolaikinėje platonistikoje aptinkamos dvi pagrindinės sielos teorijos interpretacijos galimybės – dualistinė, kai siela suprantama kaip autonomiška kūno atžvilgiu, ir unitaristinė, kai tarp sielos ir kūno išvelgiamas dialektinis santykis. Straipsnyje, pozicijonuojuojant antrąją kūno ir sielos santykio sampratą, taikoma muzikos ir sielos analogija (kūnas – juslės; siela – Pitagoro „dieviškasis *logos*“) ir atveriamas filosofinis požiūrio taškas, kurio perspektyvoje aptinkama kūniškojo (juslinio) ir sielos (filosofinio) pradų sąveikos galimybė sielos–muzikos koncepcijose.

Platono dialoguose muzika, turinti akustinę prigimtį, fizikinę išraišką, antikinėje estetikoje vyraujančią harmoningumo idealą ir apjungianti kūno bei sielos būvį, tampa ne tik vienu iš minėto mąstytojo filosofijos įvaizdžių, bet ir tinkamą analogijų kaip metodų sielos sampratai perteikti. Nors filosofas tiesiogiai ir nepasako, kuo remiantis reikėtų spręsti apie garsų harmoningumą, galime atpažinti tiek vienai, tiek kitai doktrinai būdingų bruožų: Platonas *Valstybėje* pripažino pitagoriečių aštuonių pagrindinių tonų sistemą ir kritikavo tuos, kurie „ausis laikė svarbesnėmis už protą“; kitur filosofas kritikavo sąskambiuose ieškančiuosius skaičius; galiausiai Sokratas dialoge *Faidonas* pateikė galimą dvejopą meno (*μουσική*) prasmę – amatininkystę ir filosofavimą. Platono harmonijos teorija atsiskleidžia kaip derinanti juslinį (kūniškąjį) ir protinį (dvasiškąjį) pradus, todėl aprėpia tiek juslinį, tiek dvasinį muzikos pradą. Taigi minimi doktrinų postulatai pasirodo ne kaip opoziciniai, o kaip papildantys vienas kitą.