

A Review of Plato's Dual Theory of Music in Musical Philosophy

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Abstract: Plato (c. 427–347 BC) stands as one of ancient Greece's most eminent philosophers and is regarded as a foundational figure in modern philosophy of art. This review aims to examine the current state of research on Plato's dual theory of music within the field of musical philosophy. Firstly, by analysing Plato's theory of forms, we explore the core of his musical philosophy. Secondly, using the theory of mimesis in *The Republic* as a lens, we investigate the essential nature of Plato's musical art. Thirdly, grounding the theory of mimesis within the theory of forms, we conduct an in-depth analysis of the construction of Plato's dual theory of music. Subsequently, the value of the dual conception is examined from dual perspectives of moral ethics and aesthetic enjoyment. Finally, the limitations of current research are highlighted, calling for more scholars to engage in in-depth and systematic exploration to advance the deepening and development of related academic studies. This review contends that Plato's dual conception of music possesses enduring scholarly value. It not only holds significant importance for research into ancient Greek musical philosophy and aesthetics but also provides theoretical underpinnings and inspiration for contemporary musical philosophy studies, necessitating further academic exploration and expansion.

Keywords: Plato, Dual Conception of Music, Musical Philosophy, Research Review.

1. Introduction

Plato stands as a colossus of ancient Greek philosophy and is regarded as a founder of modern philosophy of art. His extensive writings span diverse domains including religion, the arts, education, and political participation. Within philosophy, his thought bridges past and future, reflecting influences from earlier philosophers such as Socrates and the Pythagoreans while laying foundations for later developments like Aristotle's musical theories. As Plato did not produce a dedicated treatise on music, his musical ideas must be distilled from his extensive writings. This study aims to extract the essence of his musical thought from his diverse discourses, thereby approaching the authentic form of Plato's musical philosophy[1].

2. The Foundation of Plato's Musical Philosophy: The Theory of Forms

Plato's Theory of Forms first appears in the prologue to the final book of *The Republic* and is elaborated upon in works such as *The Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. It is evident, therefore, that his musical philosophy is profoundly shaped by the Theory of Forms, which constitutes its theoretical foundation and provides new perspectives and methodologies for the development of musical philosophy[2].

Before delving into Plato's Theory of Forms, the primary task lies in clarifying and analysing the concept of the 'Form.' Zhu Chunyan and Chen Fan's 'The Origin of the Concept of "Form"' provides a detailed examination of Plato's notion of the Form, noting that Plato termed knowledge of the world of Forms as true knowledge, while knowledge of the world of appearances was termed mere opinion. The Form of the Good represents the highest wisdom. Moreover, the authors contend that this division into a 'dual world' endows Plato's philosophy with mystical characteristics, making it a foundational source for medieval Christian theology[3]. Despite the limitations inherent in this dualistic framework, it

remains a cornerstone of Western philosophical tradition, its influence persisting to the present day.

Consequently, regarding Plato's theory of the dual world, we may undertake a thorough and systematic exploration and analysis by leveraging the conceptual framework of the "world of ideas" he constructed. Yu Jiyuan's *On Plato's Construction of the World of Ideas* delves profoundly into Plato's structuring of this ideal realm, particularly his exposition on the Idea of the Good. Plato maintained that reason alone provides access to ethical and value-related Ideas, with the Good constituting the zenith of the ideal world—the origin and destination of all rational cognition, the source and ultimate goal of all knowledge[4]. Zhao Yan and Zhang London, in their 'A Study of Plato's Philosophy of Music Education,' systematically trace the logical trajectory of Plato's theory of forms. They contend that by eliminating the interference of concrete objects, Plato constructed a pure world of forms transcending particularity and contradiction—a metaphysical system of perfection dedicated to the pursuit of 'truth.' The author contends that while this theory demonstrates the heights of abstract thought in ancient Greek philosophy, it simultaneously exposes contradictions and shortcomings in its epistemology and ontology. Moreover, the system Plato constructed was essentially a meticulously crafted metaphysical framework designed to justify the legitimacy of aristocratic government.

It follows that Plato's Theory of Forms bears not only weighty theoretical significance but also profoundly embodies the core ethos of his musical ethics. In Plato's Forms, Zhao Guangming elucidates how Plato's theory was profoundly influenced by Socrates' ethical teleology, delving into the universality of value-laden concepts such as beauty, goodness, and justice. He contends that Plato's 'Ideas' constitute the fundamental essence and bedrock of existence, transcending the concrete forms of the sensory world to embody purity and eternity. The Idea of the Good, acting as a bridge, connects the intelligible and sensible realms, thereby highlighting the central epistemological position and function

of Ideas. In their analysis of Plato's musical philosophy, Wu Huashan and Long Yulan, in their paper 'An Exploration of Plato's Ethical Values in Music,' contend that the Theory of Forms constitutes the core of Plato's philosophical system. Building upon this theory, Plato derived his epistemological theory of recollection. Both his Theory of Forms and epistemology provide a philosophical foundation for the ethical value of music[5].

In summary, Plato's 'Ideas' transcend mere philosophical concepts, constituting the very essence for discerning the nature of both the world and the individual. Grounded in the Idea of the Good as the cornerstone of the world of Ideas, he posited that 'Ideas' not only critique and guide the sensible world but also perpetually elevate or purify the inner world of humanity-the human soul. The author contends that while Plato's theory of forms remains contentious, his profound exploration of the world of forms holds immeasurable value for grasping the essence of the world and the mechanisms of human cognition.

3. The Essential Attribute of Musical Artistry: The Theory of Mimesis

The theory of mimesis, also termed the theory of imitation, originates from the ancient Greek concept of 'mimesis'. This perspective took shape during the ancient Greek period and exerted a profound influence on subsequent artistic creation and theory. Plato's theory of mimesis not only broadened the horizons of artistic research but also deepened philosophical speculation. It guided people to explore core issues such as the intrinsic connection between the real world and the world of ideas, the essential attributes of art, and its value and significance.

Specialised academic treatises on Plato's Republic contain dedicated and profound discussions of his 'mimesis theory.' For instance, in Poetics of the Republic, Mr Wang Keping proposes that the term "mimesis" should not be understood merely as mechanical replication or photographic reproduction. "Mimesis reflects a relationship between the copy and the archetype. Plato creatively elaborates upon this in Book X of The Republic, thereby establishing the "theory of mimesis" as the essence of art. The connotations of mimesis can be understood through Plato's discussion of the three types of beds-the bed of nature, the bed of the craftsman, and the bed of the painter[6]."

Academic papers examining Plato's theory of mimesis abound. For instance, in his work An Outline of Ancient Greek Aesthetic Thought on Music, Mr. Xiu Hailin delves deeply into Plato's views on artistic imitation, focusing particularly on the concrete manifestation and application of this concept in music and other art forms. In her article Comparative Study of Confucius and Plato's Harmonious Musical Thought, Wang Ting ingeniously integrates Plato's theory of mimesis with his theory of forms for an in-depth and systematic exploration. She demonstrates that early ancient Greece already held notions of music imitating natural sounds, which Plato systematically deepened, thereby forming a new mode of mimesis-regarding the divine-created forms as eternal and unchanging, the material world itself and the entire cosmos as creations of these forms. The musical realm thus constitutes an imitation of the material world, with musicians drawing upon inspiration to compose exquisite music. Concurrently, in 'On Plato's Musical Philosophy: An Approach from Historical and Comparative Perspectives,'

Zeng Xueling examines Plato's criteria for evaluating music as an imitative art. He maintained that 'the language, modes, and melodies employed in music should reflect the moral values of their prototypes,' opposing composers' use of complex rhythms and mixed musical modes, arguing that such practices were detrimental to establishing a stable and harmonious political order within the city-state[7].

Synthesising the above discussion on Plato's Theory of Forms and Theory of Imitation, we may draw the following conclusions. Firstly, Plato constructed a tripartite world system: beyond the distinction between the world of Forms and the world of appearance previously mentioned, there exists an imitative world of art grounded in the latter. The authenticity of these worlds diminishes successively, with the imitative world separated from truth by three strata. Secondly, imitation serves as the bridge connecting these three worlds, achieving their unity. Thirdly, mimetic art originates from the irrational part of the soul. If this part receives proper guidance, it promotes harmony within the soul-precisely the core objective of Plato's musical education.

4. Conceptual Exploration of Plato's 'Dual Theory of Music'

Building upon the preceding in-depth analysis of Plato's 'tripartite world' theoretical framework and philosophical thought, we may now proceed to a detailed examination of his 'dual theory of music.'

Regarding Plato's conception of art, returning to his original work, the Phaedrus, Plato explicitly states: 'I devote myself to musical composition solely for the sake of philosophy and the supreme art of music.' Within the same text, he categorises humanity into nine classes, placing 'the lovers of wisdom, the lovers of beauty, and the devout followers of the Muse and Eros' in the foremost rank, while 'poets and other imitative artists' are assigned to the sixth class, ranking below physicians, diviners, and astrologers [Plato. The Complete Works of Plato [M], translated by Wang Xiaochao. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2003.]. This classification profoundly reflects Plato's philosophical doctrine of the 'dual theory of music.' Tian Hui's 'The Banished Poet and Cultural Censorship: Reflections on Reading The Republic' elucidates Plato's 'three beds' theory, noting that Plato synthesises ideas, phenomena, and art, asserting that only the first bed aligns with his ideal, where truth resides within the form; the second kind of bed crafted by artisans merely approximates reality and may be included within the realm of the ideal; while the bed depicted by the painter ranks at the lowest level.

Regarding Plato's dual conception of music, Zhang Hao's 'Returning to the Essence of Musical Spirit: A Rational Reflection on Plato's Musical Philosophy' delves into Plato's dual perspective. Here, the 'music' of the Forms is regarded as perfect, true, and eternal, while the music of craftsmanship is an imitation and re-imitation of this ideal music, possessing a certain illusory and incomplete quality. The two form a dialectical relationship. Zeng Xueling, in 'On Plato's Musical Thought: An Approach from Historical and Comparative Perspectives,' proposes that "Plato possesses two distinct conceptions of music-music as a craft in the real world and music as the highest form of intellect or wisdom in the realm of ideas. This does not imply a fragmentation of his thought; rather, these two conceptions are intrinsically linked to his division of the two worlds-the real world and the world of

forms". Concurrently, Huang Xiaoyin observes in 'Plato's Musical and Artistic Thought within the Horizon of The Republic' that in Book VII of The Republic, Plato distinguishes through Socrates' dialogue with Glaucon between 'audible music' and 'inaudible music.' The former constitutes an 'imitative' form of music, while the latter represents a music achieving harmony between the soul and the cosmos[8].

From the foregoing, it is evident that Plato's conception of musical art is deeply rooted in metaphysics. Adhering to abstract principles, he traces aesthetic perception and emotion back to the source of 'Ideas.' His 'theory of imitation' is founded upon the 'theory of Ideas,' extending the realm of music from audible sound to the silent mechanisms of culture, thereby constructing a 'dual theory of music' within the philosophy of art. On this basis, the author contends that Plato placed greater emphasis on music requiring spiritual listening, whose essence lies in a harmonious existence transcending sensible phenomena.

5. An Inquiry into the Value of Plato's Dualistic View of Music

Plato's dualistic conception of music carries profound significance. Grounded in this core musical philosophy, this paper shall focus on two dimensions-moral ethics and aesthetic enjoyment-to conduct a thorough examination and analysis of the musical values and functions articulated within Plato's musical philosophy.

5.1. Ethical and Moral Value

We may begin by examining the intrinsic connection between music and morality. For instance, Yang Xifan's 'An Evolution of Western Musical Concepts from an Intellectual History Perspective: From Plato to Nietzsche' analyses the relationship between music and ethics from an intellectual historical standpoint. It argues that during Plato's era, musical art served as a symbol of reason and a tool for moral education, asserting that "though Plato intended to employ art to educate philosopher-kings and guardians of the state; here art served merely as a means of governance, becoming an imitation of morality"[9].

In-depth research on the ethical and moral values within Plato's musical philosophy. Liu Yin, in 'The Philosophy of Music and the Music of Philosophy: Confucius and Plato's Discourses on Music,' was the first to point out that Plato believed music possessed a moral educational function, embodying ethical values, and that certain ethical principles were intrinsically linked to specific socio-political structures-the value of music ultimately lay in consciously upholding the established social order. Based on this, the author contends that Plato's musical thought exhibits a rather narrow utilitarianism and pragmatism. Subsequently, in On the Concept of "Harmony" in Ancient Greek Musical Philosophy, Gao Zhimin contends that Plato was the most ardent advocate of music's moral function. He 'emphasised music's ethical role,' asserting that 'music possesses educational influence and moral force, hence the public education system should be founded upon physical training and music as its two principal elements[10].' The two complement each other and neither should be neglected. Moreover, 'in the educational process, modes conducive to cultivating human virtues should be selected'.

Furthermore, academia has undertaken comprehensive and

systematic research into Plato's musical educational philosophy. For instance, Wang Ting, in her Comparative Study of Confucius and Plato's Musical Harmony Concepts, proposes that Plato pioneered the educational principle of music occupying the foremost position among the seven arts. This concept aligns perfectly with the standards for constructing his ideal state, aspiring for music to guide people in adhering to the principles of the ideal state and achieving harmonious development for both the individual and society. In 'A Brief Analysis of Plato's Musical Education Philosophy and Its Implications,' Tang Ming delves into the distinctive features of Plato's musical education philosophy and its relevance to contemporary music education. He notes that Plato regarded musical education as an artistic cultivation for shaping the soul, advocating that it should permeate the entire educational process, simultaneously maintaining that music should be judged by political standards and serving political ends. He maintained that only music conforming to the 'Law' possessed educational value, thereby becoming a vehicle for shaping virtuous social customs.

In summary, as the first ancient Greek philosopher to systematically articulate the relationship between music and music education, Plato accorded music profound value. He regarded musical education as the pivotal means for cultivating civic virtue and harmonious souls, since music embodies cosmic harmony, influences the human spirit, guides individuals towards his envisioned state of development, and is intrinsically linked to specific socio-political structures. The author contends that this constitutes the theoretical logic through which Plato bridges his philosophy of music to political science. Simultaneously, while his musical educational ideas may exhibit certain conservative elements, his influence on subsequent music and music education is undeniable.

5.2. Aesthetic and Recreational Value

An in-depth exploration of the aesthetic and recreational value within Plato's dual conception of music necessarily requires his theory of harmony as its foundational and central support. In his essay 'An Attempt at an Exposition of Plato's Musical Education,' Laudan posits that Plato inherited the Pythagorean school's view that numbers are the foundation of all things. As an art form, music's inherent harmony and order are grounded in mathematical proportions and relationships. This sense of harmony generates a particular pleasure within the soul, satisfying humanity's innate need for harmony and resonance. In her academic paper 'Deviation from the Good and Approach to the Good: A Study of Plato's Musical Education,' Yang Lan delves into Plato's aesthetic philosophy, similarly noting his adoption of the Pythagorean doctrine that 'all things are numbers.' She argues that Plato integrated 'mathematical forms' into his 'line metaphor' of the intelligible world, where appropriate numerical proportions constitute music's order and harmony, thereby conferring its aesthetic value[11].

Regarding Plato's musical aesthetic concepts, Mr. Xiu Hailin notes in 'An Overview of Ancient Greek Musical Aesthetic Thought' that Plato, proceeding from the aesthetic principles of his 'world of forms,' devalued the emotional experience of art, thereby excluding the 'pleasure-inducing' Muses from his 'ideal state.'

Examining his views on music's aesthetic value through this lens, Song Yanghui's 'A Brief Discussion of Plato's Aesthetic Thought on Music' notes that in The Republic, Plato

distinguished between sensory and spiritual pleasures, asserting that only spiritual pleasure is genuine and valuable. Music, he contends, transcends mere entertainment to become an art form capable of stirring human emotions and the soul. Furthermore, Plato introduces the concept of 'simplicity,' asserting that musical beauty should be unadorned, authentic, and conducive to tempering the spirit.

Simultaneously, the moral-ethical value and aesthetic-recreational value within Plato's dualistic conception of music are interrelated. In his 'Research on Plato's Aesthetics of Music,' Song Xiangrui elucidates that Plato advocated for the ultimate goal of musical education to be the attainment of a love for 'beauty itself.' Here, 'beauty' denotes the transcendent 'essence of beauty' beyond phenomena, an object of rational cognition. The "love" referenced is not ordinary affection, but rather an ardent pursuit through a 'spirit of music.'

In summary, the aforementioned research, grounded in Plato's principles of musical education and aesthetics, delves into the intertwined moral-ethical and aesthetic-recreational values inherent in his core musical philosophy. These perspectives not only fully demonstrate Plato's profound recognition of music's value but collectively form his unique insights into musical education and aesthetic worth, providing invaluable theoretical reference and inspiration for subsequent musicological research.

6. Conclusion

In reviewing the entire text, Plato's 'dual conception of music'-as the core of his musical philosophy-not only embodies his profound philosophical principles and musical aesthetic thought but has also exerted a far-reaching influence on subsequent musicological studies. This paper reviews the current state of research on Plato's concepts of the Theory of Forms, the Theory of Imitation, the dualistic conception of music, and their value exploration. Firstly, since the 20th century, through the efforts of successive generations of scholars, research on Plato's Theory of Forms and Theory of Imitation has become relatively systematic and mature. Nevertheless, research on Plato's philosophy of music has received comparatively less attention, indicating significant scope for expansion in musicological studies. Secondly, Plato's dual conception of music is not a singular, simplistic musical theory but rather a synthesis of his multifaceted musical philosophies, forming the core of his musical thought. Consequently, scholars must conduct in-depth investigations from multiple angles and levels to avoid interpretative errors. However, systematic research on this theory remains scarce within academia, and a comprehensive of his theoretical framework is lacking. This indicates that the depth and breadth of research into Plato's dual conception of music remain to be further explored and developed. Moreover, the modern significance and practical applications revealed within this dual conception have yet to be fully recognised and utilised. Consequently, as a crucial subject within music philosophy research, Plato's dual conception of music

requires greater academic attention and in-depth investigation.

Simultaneously, the author contends that although modern science has demonstrated the fallacy of certain aspects of his views, this does not diminish our affirmation and recognition of the supreme spiritual realm Plato pursued within the musical domain. Examining musical art through the lens of a philosopher, Plato's musical thought exhibits idealistic characteristics at the theoretical level; at the level of practical application, however, it demonstrates a strong pragmatic orientation, profoundly reflecting the real-world political significance inherent in his theory. To this day, Plato's philosophical thought continues to offer invaluable perspectives and profound insights for understanding ancient Greek musical philosophy, compelling us to re-examine the essence and value of music. Looking ahead, we earnestly hope that more scholars will dedicate themselves to researching Plato's dual conception of music, thereby comprehensively revealing the rich connotations and far-reaching influence of his musical philosophy, and contributing wisdom and strength to advancing the development of musical philosophy research.

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