

Chrysippus' lullaby: the early Stoics on the benefits of *mousikē*

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the scope and significance of the Stoic commitment to the view that *mousikē* is morally beneficial. The idea that *mousikē* can have such a purpose, which I call aesthetic functionalism, is not uniquely Stoic, but I argue that the Stoics do have a distinctive formulation of this view. It is a weak kind of functionalism that approaches *mousikē* not as a cause but as an instrument of moral improvement, wielded by a willing agent who is the actual cause. The article begins with a discussion of the evidence for the Stoic stance in particular. The discussion has two parts: a theoretical and a practical one. The former determines the extent to which the soul could be affected by music (given Stoic materialism), while the latter explores how the extant evidence presents the Stoics' lifelong engagement with *mousikē*, with different benefits at different stages of life.

KEYWORDS: Stoicism, *mousikē*, music, moral philosophy, virtue

ABBREVIATIONS: De Lacy, P. H. 1978: *Galen. On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato (Corpus medicorum Graecorum vol. 5.4.1.2)*, 2 vols, Berlin; LS, Long, A. A. and D. Sedley 1987: *Hellenistic Philosophers*, Cambridge; Murphy, J. J. 2015: *Quintilian on the Teaching of Speaking and Writing: Translations from Books One, Two, and Ten of the 'Institutio oratoria'*, Carbondale; PMG, Page, D. L. 1962: *Poetae melici graeci*, Oxford; SVF, von Arnim, H. 1903–1905: *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta*, 3 vols, Leipzig; Wachsmuth, C. and O. Hense 1884–1912: *Ioannis Stobaei anthologium*, 5 vols, Berlin.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the more distinctive features of ancient aesthetic thought is the preoccupation with the usefulness of music, poetry, and other aesthetic arts for moral education.¹ Probably the most thoroughly studied version of functionalism is the one found in Plato's works, especially in the discussion about which narratives, musical modes, and instruments are admissible to the ideal *polis* in the *Republic*. In a nutshell, aesthetic arts have the capacity to impart virtue or vice, and their value is judged on the sole basis of whether they contribute

¹ Kristeller 1951: 506 famously suggested that this preoccupation separates ancient thought from the proper discipline of 'aesthetics'. Other influential papers, such as Stolnitz 1961, have also argued for the centrality of aesthetic indifference to the study of art and beauty, and the absence thereof, in premodern thought. For arguments against Kristeller's assessment, see Halliwell 1989; Porter 2009. See Čelkytė 2017b for an argument that the Epicureans do come very close to arguing for aesthetic indifference; see also McOsker 2022: 190.

to moral improvement. The kind of artistic endeavours that do so are ‘good art’ and those that do not are ‘bad art’; and if there were an ideal society, it would eschew the latter. Plato’s functionalism is rather robust. However, his position is not the only functionalist view available in ancient philosophy. The Stoics also argue for the benefits of art; indeed, scholars have noted their seemingly enthusiastic adoption of Platonic ideas in this area.² In this article, I argue that despite some similarities with Plato’s views, the Stoics advocate for a weak version of aesthetic functionalism which is a noteworthy position in its own right, but also evidence for the existence of a range of positions within the commitment to functionalism.

The Stoics famously argued that it is not just narratives and verbal content that bring about moral improvement, but also the melodic properties of words and music.³ In the context of Hellenistic debates, such a functionalist position was challenged by the Epicureans, who maintained that art was for the sake of pleasure and not anything ‘useful’. One of the more poignant Epicurean critiques pointed out that if melodies and tunes were so powerful as to impart or obstruct virtue, then they would effectively replace philosophical education. Platonists, especially in the context of discussing Kallipolis, might be willing to concede this point to some extent: the guardians’ upbringing in gymnastics and *mousikē*⁴ is designed so meticulously that it does instil virtuous habits, although potential philosopher kings do study philosophy as well (*Rep.* 521b–32c). The Stoic discussions preoccupy themselves not with hypothetical scenarios that involve carefully designed education with highly censured *mousikē* but with ordinary circumstances. In their case, the Epicurean critique is much more threatening. After all, if these philosophers genuinely believe that poetic and musical compositions impart virtue, then they ought to dedicate themselves to the study of poetry and music, not philosophy!

This article examines how vulnerable the Stoics were to such a critique and whether they had means of countering it. For the sake of concision, the discussion focuses especially on the melodic properties of sonic compositions, for example, music without words or poetry that is morally improving by virtue of its rhythms and metres regardless of its content.⁵ This restriction allows us to rule out poetry that teaches by virtue of its philosophical content. My discussion is formed of two parts: a theoretical answer and a practical illustration. After discussing the evidence for the Stoic commitment to aesthetic functionalism (§2) and the Epicurean criticism of this position (§3), I examine whether the Stoics’ philosophical framework allows them to answer the Epicurean charge effectively. The discussion is split into two sections, focusing first on the question of whether *mousikē* causes the kind of alterations in the soul that constitute moral improvement (§4) and then asking whether *mousikē* can corrupt (§5). Once I have established the scope of the Stoic commitments to aesthetic functionalism, I will turn to the practical effects of *mousikē*. The final section of this article (§6) examines a selection of fragments organized by topic according to the chronological stages of life, showing the Stoic reflections on how *mousikē* can accompany a person throughout their lifetime.

² For Platonic influences, see Woodward 2010; Scade 2017: 206. See also Asmis 1995 for the debate between ‘formalists’ (maintaining that content has no relevance to the aesthetic value of the poem) and ‘utilitarians’ (maintaining that aesthetic value is content-dependent), reported in Philodemus’ *On Poems* Book 5. The latter group includes one Stoic, possibly Aristo of Chios: see Asmis 1995: 149–51; for more on Aristo’s theory, see Asmis 1990. For the argument that the Stoic definition of beauty in general has a functional aspect, see Čelkytė 2020. Cf. Horn 1989; Zagdoun 2000; Bett 2010. This Stoic definition states that it is the *symmetria* of parts with each other and with the whole (Stobaeus 2.7.5b4 (Wachsmuth) = SVF 3.278; Galen, *Plac.* 5.3.15 (De Lacy); Plotinus, *Enn.* 1.6; Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* 4.13.31 = SVF 3.279). However, as outlined at the beginning of this article, the question of the functionality of aesthetic arts is quite distinct, and only the latter is the focus of the present article.

³ For ancient distinctions between verbal and melodic aspects of poems, see Klavan 2019a. Although the scope of this article excludes these cases, the Stoics were also interested in analysing and employing poetry for its verbal content, e.g. using lines of poetry and narratives as examples to support their philosophical views. Diogenes Laertius (7.180) reports that Chrysippus quoted poets profusely, especially Euripides’ *Medea*. Some of the best evidence of how Chrysippus used this tragedy comes from the critical report of Galen (*Plac.* 3.3.13–22 De Lacy) who argues that the *Medea* disproves the unitary psychological model that the Stoics advocate. See Gill 1983 for the argument that Galen’s assessment is not accurate, and that Chrysippus used the tragedy as an illuminating illustration of his claims. See also Dillon 1997 for a further argument that the Platonists, just like the Stoics, used the *Medea* to support their psychological model. The play was important to later Stoics, too, as evidenced by Seneca’s own version of the tragedy; see Nussbaum 1997. For a further discussion of how Stoics used lines of poetry, see Atherton 1993: 95–97; Tieleman 1996: 129–48; Blank 2011. For the Stoic conceptualization of poetry as a craft, see Asmis 2017. In this article, I do not discuss the usefulness of didactic narratives, instead focusing on the question of how the melodic properties of music and poetry can be conducive to virtue.

⁴ See Section 2 for a more detailed discussion of this term.

⁵ At the beginning of the *Poetics*, Aristotle talks of arts (*τέχναι*) that produce mimesis by means of rhythm, language, and melody (or some combination of these), naming epic and tragic poetry, comedy, dithyramb, aulos and lyre music as species of *mimesis* (1447a13–22). This list illustrates well the broad scope of genres that encompass either melody or melodic properties of words. Though in the case of tragedy, the Stoics were also interested in content: see n. 3 above.

2. THE EARLY STOICS ON THE EFFECTS OF *MOUSIKĒ*

In order to appreciate the full implications of the Stoic commitments, one should note that the connection between arts and moral improvement is a recurrent preoccupation of ancient Greek cultural discourse from at least the classical period onwards. As a result, the functionalist understanding of art is culturally informed, especially by the ancient notion of *mousikē* which refers not only to music but also to poetry and dance.⁶ Furthermore, it involves significant social and political elements.⁷ Various notions pertaining to *mousikē* developed into theoretical accounts. Damon of Oa, an Athenian theorist active in the fifth century BC, is often named as the father of this tradition.⁸ Plato engaged with Damon's thought, thus adding *mousikē* to the philosophical curriculum.⁹ The Stoic view of *mousikē* ought to be read not only in connection with Plato, but also with regard to this broader cultural tradition, represented by figures such as Damon.

One of the most extensive Stoic treatments of *mousikē* and its purpose can be found in the fragments of Diogenes of Babylon, the fifth head of the Stoa. However, he is not unique in this respect: both his teacher Chrysippus and his intellectual 'grandfather' Cleanthes made similar claims, although the evidence in their cases is scarcer.¹⁰ For example, according to Quintilian 'Chrysippus assigns a special tune for the lullaby of nurses, which is used with children.'¹¹ The details are limited, but it is clear that *mousikē* affects an infant positively. Presumably, in a not-yet-rational child, the calming capacity of the tune mirrors the internal capacity of all adults to control their emotions, thus helping the child to rein in their emotions. A lullaby can thus be as effective as the virtue of self-control for a child who is not yet old enough to have developed the rational capacity for this virtue.¹² It is unclear whether the lullaby habituates the mind to a state of calm or whether it is a singular event. The former would have stronger implications because it would mean that a melody can produce lasting strength and stability which is an important attribute of virtue.¹³ But even in the case of the latter, Chrysippus' claim makes a striking connection between music and the state of mind.

Cleanthes, Chrysippus' teacher and the author of the most famous Stoic poem (his *Hymn to Zeus*), also made claims about the benefits of *mousikē*, although in more general terms. In a fragment preserved in Philodemus, Cleanthes writes that 'poetic and musical examples are abiding' and 'though the discourse of philosophy is able to report divine and human matters sufficiently, it does not have expressions appropriate to the grandeur of the divine, while metres, melodies, and rhythms come closest to the truth of the contemplation of divine matters.'¹⁴ Given that Cleanthes makes no reference to education, he is presumably describing the effects of artistic expression on rational adults. At the same time, it is quite clear that adults benefit from exposure to poetic and musical examples, and the latter have a role to play in moral advancement beyond educating the youth. I will come back to Chrysippus' and Cleanthes' fragments in Section 6.

For now, I turn to Diogenes, whose numerous fragments survive in Philodemus' *On Music*. The critical nature of Philodemus' work invites some caution when reading and interpreting his account of the Stoics' views, but it is nonetheless quite clear that Diogenes extensively argued for the usefulness of *mousikē*. Most

⁶ Murray and Wilson 2004: 1–2.

⁷ See the discussion in Rocconi 2015; cf., too, Koller 1963: 5–16.

⁸ For more on Damon and his views, see Csapo 2004: 230–32; Wallace 2004; Wallace 2015, Chapter 3. Diogenes recounts Damon saying that music instils all or nearly all virtues in a practitioner in col. 22; see also McOsler 2022: 113.

⁹ See *Rep.* 400b–c; 424c–d. Wallace 2004: 259 remarks on the absence of reference to Damon in the discussion of the *harmoniai* suited to the just city (*Rep.* 398c–99e), even though Damon was famous for these views (for Damon's connection to politics, see Wallace 2004: 263–65); see also Barker 2007: 47. However, Halliwell 2012: 38 argues that Damon's ideas are reflected in Socrates' claims here; see also Schofield 2010: 236.

¹⁰ Some scholarship also cites Plutarch's *De virtute morali* 443a = SVF 1.299 as evidence for Zeno, the founder of the school. Although this anecdote does show that the early Stoics are consistently associated with an interest in music, it is not evidence of an argument put forth by Zeno, and therefore I do not engage with it extensively in this article.

¹¹ Quintilian 1.10.32–33, trans. Murphy: *Chrysippus etiam nutricum illi quae adhibetur infantibus adlectationi suum quoddam carmen adsignat.*

¹² σωφροσύνη is one of the cardinal Stoic virtues in Diogenes Laertius 7.92; Stobaeus 2.7.5a.

¹³ See Schofield 2013.

¹⁴ Philodemus, *De Mus.* 4, col. 142 (Delattre), all translations are my own unless otherwise noted: 'μέ(τ)νογ[τά] τε εἶναι τὰ ποιητικὰ καὶ μου[σ]ικὰ παραδείγματα, καὶ τοῦ λό[γ]ου τοῦ τῆς φιλοσοφίας ἰκανῶς μὲν ἐξαγγέλλειν δυναμένου τὰ θεῖα καὶ ἀνθ[ρ]ώ[πι]ν[α], μὴ ἔχοντος δὲ ψειλοῦ τῶν θεῶν μεγεθῶν λέξεις οἰκείας, τὰ μέτρα καὶ τὰ μέλη καὶ τοὺς ῥυθμοὺς ὡς μάλιστα προσκνεῖσθαι πρὸς τὴν ἀλήθειαν τῆς τῶν θεῶν θεωρίας.'

of the citations concern the role that it plays in the education of a young child. For example, according to Philodemus, Diogenes claimed that *mousikē* allows a child to become attentive (εὐήκοον) and perceptive (εὐαίσθητον) owing to rhythm because it has certain cognate virtues (ἀρετὰς συγγενεῖς).¹⁵

Another more detailed fragment paints a vivid picture of education in *mousikē* implanting virtuous habits into the soul that replace bad ones or, to be more precise, do not leave any room for them. The effects of a certain ἀγωγή—the primary meaning here is surely ‘training’, but it can also have a musical meaning¹⁶—manifest themselves under two conditions. First, the young person must have acquired a lot of this type of training. Second, they must have noble eagerness for it (γενναίας ἰσχύος πουδῆς), which suggests that the agency of the young person also plays a role in this process. Under these two conditions, the ἀγωγή is appropriated and attached to the nature of the child, with the result that there is no room left for contrary habits.¹⁷

These claims resemble the discussion of the effects of music in the *Timaeus*, which is not surprising, given that the *Timaeus* was especially influential for the Stoics.¹⁸ In this dialogue, music is said to be created by the providential divinity not for pleasure but for the sake of correcting any discord in the motions of the soul, so that the soul may be brought into accord with itself (*Tim.* 47c–d). The idea that music’s usefulness results from its harmonization of the soul is recognizable in the Stoic fragments, too, especially those of Chrysippus and Diogenes cited above. This is not to say that the Stoics adopted Platonic views *tout court*. An important example of this point is the seemingly odd way in which Diogenes describes the effects of *mousikē* on the soul. The Stoics’ unitary psychology explains his claim quite coherently, but this theory is distinctly Stoic and explicitly opposed to the Platonic tripartition of the soul. In Platonic texts, the tripartition explains the psychological conflict between different inclinations.¹⁹ This point becomes especially pertinent in educational contexts, for example, when the interlocutors of the *Republic* consider which type of *mimesis* ought to be allowed into the just city. Certain kinds of *mimesis* that invoke strong emotions (by depicting lamenting heroes, e.g. in Homer or in tragedies), appeal to the lower soul, which, when indulged, can grow disobedient to the rational soul. These types are thus not suitable for bringing up guardians.²⁰ In short, moral and immoral inclinations manifest themselves in their attraction to different depictions, and both kinds of inclinations always exist in a person. For Plato, moral education thus involves suppressing the inclinations of the lower soul (e.g. by not indulging it with the sounds and sights it finds pleasing) and promoting the inclinations of the rational soul.

By contrast, the Stoic unitary model assigns all mental activity to a single soul. Passions, including pleasure-seeking, arise from cognitive errors,²¹ rather than an inclination of a specific part of the soul. Diogenes’ claim that training in *mousikē* leaves no room for bad habits in the soul would hardly make sense in tripartite psychology, but it is completely consistent with the unitary Stoic model: the soul is a single entity, and various beliefs a person holds are constituted by corresponding alterations in their soul. The more virtue-focused beliefs that their soul holds, the more it is preoccupied with virtue and the less pleasure-focused it is. In this way, education in *mousikē* leads to an alteration of character, thus leading the student towards moral education.

Apart from some differences in broader commitments, the contexts in which Plato and the Stoics advocated their claims were different. The rise of New Music, a ‘modern’ style of music that became popular in the late fifth century, is a significant background to understanding Plato’s approach to *mousikē*.²² The Hellenistic period, meanwhile, saw the introduction of ‘formalist’ euphonism;²³ functionalist

¹⁵ Philodemus, *De Mus.* 4, col. 18: τὸ εὐήκο[ον παῖδα κ]αὶ ἄλλας εὐα[ίσθητον γίνεσθαι] ἢ ὑπὸ ῥυθμοῦ καὶ μουσ[ικῆς ἀφ]ορίσιν, ὡς ἔχουσά τινας ἀ[ρετῆ]ς συγγενεῖς.

¹⁶ Plato, *Rep.* 400c (describing Damon’s claims) uses the term in the sense of ‘tempo’; Aristides Quintilianus also adopts the term to denote rhythmical tempo in 1.13 and especially in 1.19.

¹⁷ Philodemus, *De Mus.* 4, col. 33.

¹⁸ Betegh 2003, although cf. Gill 2006: 19–20.

¹⁹ Represented vividly by the chariot simile in the *Phaedrus* (246a–e); see also *Rep.* 435c–39d. For a more detailed discussion, see Sorabji 2002: 304–11.

²⁰ *Rep.* 605a–c; the laws for artists are also mentioned in *Laws* 656b. The effects of *mousikē* on the soul are described in *Rep.* 401d–02a, see Schofield 2010: 232–34.

²¹ See Diogenes Laertius 7.110–11; on Stoic unitary psychology, see Mansfeld 1991; Gill 2006: 30–46.

²² For detailed discussions of ‘New Music’, see West 1992: 356–72; Barker 1984: 93–98. On New Music as background for Plato, see Csapo 2004; Schofield 2010: 239.

²³ See Blank 1994; Asmis 1995; Klavan 2019a: 605–07.

accounts from this period have to be read as responding to this challenge, too. Moreover, in philosophical circles, the Stoics also faced rival positions, such as the Epicurean stance maintaining that melody (μέλος) does not exhibit such qualities as humility or courage any more than cooking does.²⁴ The Epicureans also posed some apt counter-arguments against aesthetic functionalism. Understanding how the Stoics may have responded to this type of critique leads to a better understanding of the scope of their commitment to aesthetic functionalism.

3. THE CRITIQUE

Sextus Empiricus outlines arguments in favour of and against the view that *mousikē* can have a formative effect on character or mood in his *Against the Musicians*.²⁵ The arguments in favour start with the claim that if we approve of philosophy for imparting temperance (σωφροσύνη), we approve of *mousikē* so much more because it achieves the same result by persuasive means rather than by violent command.²⁶ This point is significant for a couple of reasons. First, it motivates the advocacy of *mousikē* for moral improvement: *mousikē* is not just an alternative to philosophy in general, it is a better alternative because it achieves the same result more smoothly. Second, this claim opens the door to the Epicurean critique that philosophers advocating such a view ought to pursue artistic activities, not philosophy.

The Epicurean critique is a series of direct counter-arguments and counter-examples to the functionalist position, that is itself supported mostly by examples from literature or history.²⁷ The claim that music inspires courage is illustrated by the Spartan custom of going to battle with musical accompaniment as well as Solon's advice to use melodies to fight more rhythmically.²⁸ Literary examples are cited primarily to illustrate the soothing effects of music: Achilles choosing the lyre as booty, heroes leaving their wives with musicians (because tunes help their wives to preserve virtue), and Aegisthus' kidnapping of the musician left with Clytemnestra.²⁹ There are only three philosophical illustrations: an anecdote about Pythagoras whose advice to an aulist to play a solemn tune proved to be effective in calming down rowdy revellers,³⁰ the lessons that Socrates took with Lampon the lyre-player, and the report that philosophers like Plato maintain that the sage is like a musician with their own soul brought into harmony.³¹ Arguably, the Stoics ought to be counted among these philosophers. Not many of their extant sources directly compare the sage to a musician,³² but A. A. Long has shown that musical theory may very well be implied in the Stoic conceptualization of virtue.³³ To this extent, they certainly fall into the category of 'philosophers like Plato' that the Epicurean argument reported by Sextus targeted.

The Epicureans have counter-examples to each point, and their attack pivots on three central counter-arguments. First, they argue that there is no actual causal link between *mousikē* and its alleged effects; people assume a cause-and-effect relationship between the two phenomena without justification. Second, they maintain that even in cases when music can exercise power on people, it can only do so by distracting rather than inducing actual temperance. *Mousikē* thus acts like sleep or drunkenness: not relieving grief but inducing forgetfulness.³⁴ It is this explanation that serves as a rejection of every historical and literary example cited in support of aesthetic functionalism.³⁵

The third counter-argument—and the most important for our present discussion—is the refutation of philosophical authorities, especially Pythagoras. The Epicureans point out that the choice to

²⁴ Philodemus, *De Mus.* 4, col. 117; see also [McOsker 2022](#): 77–84.

²⁵ For Sextus' project, see [Bett 2013](#); [Veres 2021](#).

²⁶ Sextus Empiricus *M* 6.7.

²⁷ [Davidson Greaves 1986](#): 125–26 nn. 11 and 12 points out that Diogenes the Cynic also had similar commitments, as reported in Diogenes Laertius 6.73, 104.

²⁸ Sextus Empiricus *M* 6.9. A similar claim appears in Philodemus, *De Mus.* 4, col. 72. The parallels between Sextus and Philodemus are discussed in [Davidson Greaves 1986](#): 24–26; [Delattre 2006](#); [Bett 2013](#): 168–75.

²⁹ Sextus Empiricus *M* 6.10–12, cf. Philodemus *De Mus.* 4, col. 49.

³⁰ Sextus Empiricus *M* 6.8, cf. Philodemus *De Mus.* 4, col. 42.

³¹ Sextus Empiricus *M* 6.13.

³² For example, Cato in Cicero's *De Finibus* 3.24 compares the wisdom of the sage with acting and dancing.

³³ See especially [Long 1996](#): 213–21. The argument as reported in Sextus is an argument from authority, and it is duly rejected by positing an equally good alternative authority, namely, Epicurus (*M* 6.27).

³⁴ Sextus Empiricus *M* 6.19–22.

³⁵ Sextus Empiricus *M* 6.24–26.

set revellers straight through music admits that aulos-players have more power than philosophers in moral education.³⁶ The proper tool of a philosopher is argument, and if Pythagoras must resort to music to set people straight, then it turns out that philosophy is not very effective for moral education. This criticism makes a compelling point. If the advocates of *mousikē* are committed to such a view, there is little point in pursuing philosophy, since the practice of *mousikē* also builds virtue and does so more effectively.³⁷ Functionalists either have to bite the bullet or explain why *mousikē*, while imparting knowledge in a more persuasive and pleasant way, is not enough to instil virtue fully, such that philosophy is still necessary. In the following section, I look at how the Stoics in particular—who are not named in the text explicitly but to whom this critique could certainly apply—might have dealt with this challenge. To what extent were the Stoics committed to the view that *mousikē* has the power to improve the soul, given their materialist commitments? In other words, was *mousikē* capable of shaping the soul?

4. CAN *MOUSIKĒ* BE THE CAUSE OF MORAL IMPROVEMENT?

In order to determine how the early Stoics conceptualized the educational effects of *mousikē*, it is necessary to contextualize their claims about this education within their views on causation and virtue. Their commitment to materialism is key. The kind of effect that melodic properties of tonal and verbal compositions have must depend on what kind of object they are, that is, whether they are corporeal and thus capable of acting upon the corporeal soul.³⁸ In the doxographical collection of Aëtius, in a section entitled ‘Whether Voice Is Incorporeal and how Echo Occurs’, the Stoics are reported as advocating the claim that voice is a body. Their view is introduced with a syllogism that everything that acts is corporeal, and the voice acts. We perceive voice when it hits the hearing and produces an impression like a ring in wax. A further point follows: ‘everything that moves [sc. something else] and distresses is body, and good music (ἡ εὐμουσία) moves (κινεῖ) us while bad music (ἄμουσία) distresses (ἐνοχλεῖ) us.’³⁹ Given this context, the effects of εὐμουσία and ἄμουσία described here are physical: they are examples of sounds, *qua* bodies, interacting with another body, the soul, and producing different results.

The Stoics do, however, distinguish between sounds and the meaning-bearing structures that sounds carry, *lekta*. It is the sound itself that is corporeal, whereas *lekta* are not. This distinction primarily pertains to language, but it is certainly pertinent for understanding the effects of *mousikē*, too. The sounds in both speech and music are the same kind of entities (even if one is produced by human voice and the other by instrument), while melodies, just like words, are meaning-bearing structures. Since *lekta* are not corporeal, they cannot have a direct physical causal effect on the soul. It is nonetheless true that language can affect humans, and, according to Sextus, the Stoics explain such effects with the simile of a gymnastics trainer. Sometimes, they guide their pupils by physically holding their arms; however, sometimes they guide them by standing at a distance and showing the proper motions. The verbal communication affects a person in a way analogous to the latter type of instruction. The corporeal impressors, such as colours, affect the soul in the former manner, but when it comes to incorporeal entities, such as *lekta*, the soul is impressed not by them (ὅπ’ αὐτῶν) but in relation to them (ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς).⁴⁰

For example, when a person hears a line of poetry, they are affected physically by the sounds, but what is said—the verbal content and its melodic properties—cannot affect anyone in such a way. A person could be ‘nudged’ by them, just as *lekta* are an incentive for the soul to act in a certain way; but such *lekta* do not act on the bodies as efficient causes do. In order for ‘nudging’ to be successful and to produce a desired result, the agency of a listener or learner has to manifest itself: a trainer may give the best example possible with no effect, so long as the child does not show interest in following the instructions. Like *lekta*, melodies *qua*

³⁶ Sextus Empiricus *M* 6.23.

³⁷ In a way, this point is a different reiteration of the quarrel between poetry and philosophy, on which see [Asmis 2015](#); for wide-ranging studies, see also [Gould 1990](#); [Barfield 2011](#).

³⁸ Cicero, *Acad.* 1.39 = *SVF* 1.90 = LS 45A; Sextus Empiricus *M* 8.263 = *SVF* 2.363 = LS 45B.

³⁹ Aëtius 4.20.2, trans. [Mansfeld and Runia 2020](#). On *amouisia*, see n. 52 below.

⁴⁰ Sextus Empiricus *M* 8.409 = *SVF* 2.85 = LS 27E. For a broader discussion on the Stoic philosophy of language, see [Sluiter 2000](#); [Bronowski 2019](#).

melodies do not produce a causal effect by having a physical impact. While sounds do have a causal effect, arrangements of sounds can only provide a 'nudge', comparable to a piece of advice or an example, just like a gymnastics trainer instructing and encouraging a child from afar rather than physically guiding their motions. Notably, in Diogenes' fragment discussed in Section 2 (*De Mus.* 4, col. 33), the Stoic claims that keenness on the student's part is the condition for education in *mousikē*. Ultimately, the proper cause is the agent, and melodic arts are just the means, however apt they may be.

This conclusion sheds some light on how the Stoics envision the educational role of *mousikē*, especially in relation to philosophy. Philosophy trains people as rational agents, whereas *mousikē* can only act as an instrument of rational agency. This reading is corroborated by Philo of Alexandria who presents a Stoicizing argument that *paideia*-related disciplines owe their origins to philosophical insights and ought to acknowledge philosophical authority.⁴¹ The same claim can also be found outside Stoic sources. For instance, ps.-Plutarch's *On Music*, written around the end of the second century AD,⁴² argues for the immense character-building benefits of musical pursuits, yet also posits philosophy as the guiding principle.⁴³ These passages show that at least some of the advocates of *mousikē* subscribed to the Socratic argument that this pursuit may have benefits but only when accompanied by an appropriate value judgement, and the ability to make proper value judgements is the domain of philosophy alone.⁴⁴

The emphasis on the agency of the perceiver is an important part of Stoic ethical commitments in general. For example, the significance of agency is evident in the claim that the sage is the only one who properly engages in artistic activities. The Stoics label the love of music (φιλομουσία), literature (φιλογραμματία), horses, and hunting with dogs as 'pursuits' (ἐπιτηδεύματα), defining a pursuit as 'a path through expertise or its part leading to what is in accord with virtue'.⁴⁵ Arius Didymus explains that the Stoics differentiate pursuits from knowledge, while nonetheless placing them in the category of 'worthwhile conditions' (σπουδαῖα ἐξείς). Such classification places pursuits below the strongest epistemic state, knowledge: a condition is a lesser epistemic state because it admits of degrees (e.g. one can be more or less skilled at poetry), whereas knowledge is universally uniform owing to the fact that it is perfect. From this understanding of pursuits, it follows (ἀκολούθως), according to Arius Didymus, that only the sage is φιλόμουσος, φιλογράμματος, and so on.⁴⁶ This claim not only gives music and other pursuits a clear stamp of approval (a perfectly rational person would engage in this activity, which means it is morally acceptable); it also explains these pursuits' connection to moral education. In and of itself, engagement with music and literature is a preferred indifferent: it does not constitute a happy life, although as a pursuit, it provides an opportunity to practise virtue. If a person develops a fully virtuous character, they practise *mousikē* in a necessarily virtuous way. Diogenes Laertius reports an illuminating analogy: the sage does everything well, just like Ismenias, the famous aulist, plays all the pieces of aulos music well.⁴⁷ Both Ismenias and the Stoic sage have their respective domains of expertise in which they excel. The claim that only the sage is truly φιλόμουσος does not amount to a claim that the sage has better skills in music than an aulist, but rather that a sage would be better able to approach these pursuits as a means of cultivating virtue. This case, too, highlights the significance of agency when it comes to the benefits of *mousikē*: the more virtue-inclined individual gets more out of music than an ordinary person, because music itself is only a 'nudge', and it is up to a person to respond to this nudge in a way that is truly productive of virtue.

⁴¹ Philo, *De congressu erud. gratia* 145 = SVF 2.99. See Schenkeveld 1990: 105.

⁴² Pöhlmann 2020: 4.

⁴³ For example, *De Mus.* 1146a–b presents an argument that a person who receives a proper education in *mousikē* will approve and accept τὸ καλόν not only in *mousikē* but also in other matters, becoming a great benefit to both himself and the polis, eschewing unharmonious words and deeds, always and everywhere showing commitment to the decorous (τὸ πρέπον), the temperate (τὸ σώφρον), and the orderly (τὸ κόσμιον). The claim that the benefits of *mousikē* extend beyond the interests of a single person and reach the entire community underscores the importance of not only learning the subject for individual gain but also teaching it for communal gain. However, the author also draws a careful distinction between domains of knowledge, noting that anyone wishing to study *mousikē* nobly must adopt the ancient way and, furthermore, must take philosophy as a guide (φιλοσοφίαν ἐπιστησάτω παιδαγωγόν), since philosophy is sufficient for judging τὸ πρέπον, τὸ μέτρον, and τὸ χρήσιμον in *mousikē* (1142d).

⁴⁴ Cf. Plato, *Euthyd.* 279a–b; *Charm.* 174c; *Prt.* 350d.

⁴⁵ ὁδὸν διὰ τέχνης ἢ μέρους ἄγουσαν ἐπὶ <τὰ> κατ' ἀρετήν, Stobaeus 2.7.5b11 = SVF 3.294.

⁴⁶ Stobaeus 2.7.5b11 = SVF 3.294. For a more detailed discussion of worthwhile conditions as pertaining to the sage in particular, see Graver 2007: 145–47.

⁴⁷ Diogenes Laertius 7.125.

A critic might object that, in principle, any activity is a chance to practise virtue. In what way does *mousikē* provide a better path to virtue than, for example, drinking wine or eating delicious food? The crucial difference must be the presence of expertise. Before defining pursuits, Arius Didymus states that the sage does everything in accordance with virtue, and virtue is the *technē* of one's whole life.⁴⁸ There is, thus, a parallel between the expertise concerned with life itself and the conventional forms of expertise that a person gains from education (such as *paideia* and *mousikē*, not education in house-building). This claim is made in the context of the broader argument that the sage does everything well. First, we are given an explanation why the sage has universal expertise, which is followed by a more detailed discussion of the sage and conventional forms of expertise, including pursuits. The two kinds of expertise form a genus-species relationship. The *technai* of the particulars are lesser than the *technē* of life, but they can form some part of it.⁴⁹ Given that pursuits are paths that lead to what is in accordance with virtue, they are aspects and occasions for practising virtue. It is not the content that gives pursuits such a role, but rather the manner in which they are practised. Both Cleanthes and Chrysippus defined *technē* as a tenor that achieves goals methodically (ὁδῶν).⁵⁰ *Technē* works systematically and consistently, even harmoniously. The Stoics define virtue as a consistent character that manifests itself consistently through one's whole life.⁵¹ Vice, by contrast, is fundamentally disharmonious, inconsistent, and imbalanced.⁵² Ultimately, by engaging in pursuits, a person practises the kind of consistency and harmony of action that only manifests itself in virtue but not in vice.

5. CAN MOUSIKĒ CORRUPT?

This point helps to explain why there is little concern for the corrupting effects of *mousikē* in the Stoic fragments. In Aëtius' record of the Stoic view on the effects of good and bad music, the term translated as 'bad music' is ἀμουσία, a popular term in Greek literature that comes with very distinctive cultural implications. As Stephen Halliwell has shown, the *mousikē/amousia* distinction refers not merely to knowledge but also to value judgement, and 'the symptoms of *amousia* are not a matter of discrete features of a person but more like the disclosure (in the eyes of those who make the judgement) of a defective structure of character, personality, or sensibility'.⁵³ The Stoics embrace this cultural convention. According to Aëtius, they describe *amousia* as a cause of irritation. It has no seductive draw towards irrational pleasures. Balanced, melodious, rhythmical compositions of sounds, however, do compel towards virtue. Vices, which are not in accord with nature, cannot produce aesthetic properties.⁵⁴ Innate appeal can only be found in harmony, which is an attribute of virtue, not vice. There is a stark contrast between this Stoic approach and that of other functionalists such as Plato. Plato's Socrates challenges the conventional understanding of *mousikē* by delimiting its beneficial aspects and only allowing Dorian and Phrygian modes in the just city while rejecting others.⁵⁵ The Stoics seem to embrace all conventional forms of *mousikē*, because any encounter with ordered, balanced harmony appeals to humans by nature and beckons to be imitated.⁵⁶

Counterintuitively, the Stoic willingness to embrace this convention can be partly motivated by their unconventional commitments in ethics, especially their robust view of moral agency. Making a distinction between first movements and full-blown emotions,⁵⁷ the Stoics maintain that the perceiver bears the responsibility for the effects of *mousikē*. Virtuous character has a certain firmness that makes

⁴⁸ Stobaeus 2.7.5b11 = SVF 3.560 = LS 61G; see also Sextus Empiricus *M* 11.170 = SVF 3.598.

⁴⁹ The Stoic spokesperson Cato states this point in Cicero's *De Fin.* 3.24–25 = SVF 3.11 = LS 64H: acting and dancing are like virtues to the extent that they are ends in themselves, but their acts do not contain all the parts of the expertise; only wisdom, fully preoccupied with itself, has *omnes numeros virtutis*.

⁵⁰ Olympiodorus, *In Plat. Gorg.* 12.1 = LS 42A.

⁵¹ Diogenes Laertius 7.89 = SVF 3.39 = LS 61A.

⁵² Cicero, *Tusc. Disp.* 4.29, 34–5 = LS 61O.

⁵³ Halliwell 2012: 21.

⁵⁴ See Čelkytė 2017a.

⁵⁵ *Rep.* 398d–99c.

⁵⁶ For the innate appeal of virtue, see the discussion in Čelkytė 2020: ch. 3.

⁵⁷ For extensive discussions, see Graver 1999; Sorabji 2002: ch. 1. Asmis 2015: 496–97 argues that the same conclusion follows already from the Stoic axiological division of the good, the bad, and the indifferents. She also points out that there are two surprising consequences to this stance: the elevation of artists and the freedom of using traditional poetry, which had been problematized since the Presocratics for its depictions of immorality.

it prone to avoiding judgements that result in violent passions, no matter how emotion-inducing some piece of music may be.⁵⁸ The same would be true for the cases of *amouisia*. An individual whose character is not yet virtuous might be more vulnerable, but it is their judgements about a piece of music that are faulty. The actual cause is their weakness of character, not the music itself. In fact, the claim that morally bad art can cause harm would be inconsistent with the Stoic view that only virtue is the good and only vice is the bad. Morally indifferent things, like *mousikē*, cannot contribute to either happiness or unhappiness in and of themselves; they can only be used instrumentally. But in that case, it is the character of the recipient that is the genuine cause of either good or bad outcomes.

The Stoic attitude to the usefulness of *mousikē* is, therefore, best described as weak functionalism. *Mousikē* can be utilized for moral improvement, but only as an instrument of a rational agent who is the proper cause. For this reason, *mousikē* that fails to promote virtue need not be censured or avoided; a Stoic might well say that the same piece can be put to very good use by a morally advanced person (especially the sage, see §6.4), but have little effect on someone inclined towards vice. A Stoic can thus only be encouraged to pursue *mousikē*, even if it does not constitute virtue, because it can potentially aid in moral advancement and it cannot genuinely corrupt.⁵⁹

With this point, the theoretical answer to the question of how the Stoics understand the relationship between *mousikē* and morality is complete. However, what does it mean to use *mousikē* as an instrument in practice? As noted at the beginning of the article, the Stoics discuss *mousikē* in ordinary settings, and different fragments show how they understand its benefits in people of different ages. The following section puts together these texts and focuses on how the Stoics present the benefits of *mousikē* throughout a person's lifetime.

6. A LIFETIME OF MOUSIKĒ

6.1. Infancy

As we saw above, Chrysippus assigns a special tune for the lullaby of nurses, which is used with children.⁶⁰ No proper lullabies from antiquity survive, but there are some examples in literature that could be considered representatives of the genre.⁶¹ It seems reasonable to assume that these literary depictions of lullabies were accurate representations of the genre in general, and that features we find in them are indicative of the kind of features that might have been present in Chrysippus' lullaby.

Simonides' so-called Danae fragment offers one possible example of an ancient lullaby. In the space of two verses, Danae reports the song that she sings to the baby Perseus: 'and I entreat "sleep, baby, and let the sea sleep, and let the evil beyond measure sleep"' (κέλομαι δ' εὔδε, βρέφος, | εὐδέτω δὲ πόντος, εὐδέτω δ' ἄμετρον κακόν, 543.21–22 *PMG*). The notable features here include the use of imperatives, anaphoric repetition, and alliteration. Patricia Rosenmeyer also notes the verses' principle of syllable gradation, that is, the longer syllables follow the shorter ones; similarly, more complex phrases follow simple verb–noun formations.⁶² Comparable features can be found in the lullaby that Alcmene sings to baby Heracles and Iphicles in Theocritus' *Idyll* 24 (7–9):

εὔδετ', ἐμὰ βρέφεια, γλυκερὸν καὶ ἐγέρσιμον ὕπνον·
εὔδετ', ἐμὰ ψυχά, δὴ ἀδελφοί, εὔσοα τέκνα·
ἄλβιοι εὐνάζοισθε καὶ ἄλβιοι ἄω ἴκοισθε.

⁵⁸ See Schofield 2013 for a more detailed discussion.

⁵⁹ McOsler 2022: 112 suggests that poetry can corrupt the youth on the basis of two passages: Cicero, *Leg.* 1.17.47 = *SVF* 3.229b and Seneca, *Ep.* 115.11 = *SVF* 3.231. The former passage states that people's senses are not misled by parents, nurses, poets, or the stage, but only by malicious men (presumably referring to the tyrannical governors he described earlier at 42) or pleasure. Cicero paints a contrast between natural law and conventional law that can be perverted, and poets are implicitly included in the domain of nature. Similarly, Seneca cites poetry praising wealth, including Euripides' *Bellerophon* and describes a crowd booing an actor off the stage. At that point, Euripides interferes, saying that they need to wait for the rest of the play; Bellerophon will pay a heavy price for his greed. Ultimately, the play sends a similar message to Stoicism: wealth is not the genuine good that brings happiness. In both cases, it is not art as it is conventionally practised that corrupts.

⁶⁰ Quintilian 1.10.32–33; see n. 11 above.

⁶¹ Waern 1960: 2 argues for distinguishing between literary and folk lullabies. See Rosenmeyer 1991: 24 n. 56 on the influence of folk tradition in Simonides and Theocritus (the examples cited below).

⁶² Rosenmeyer 1991: 23–24.

Sleep, my babies, in sweet slumber from which one wakes,
 Sleep, my souls, two brothers, children safe and sound,
 Blessed go to sleep and blessed reach the dawn.

Here, too, imperatives are used prominently at the beginning of the first two lines. The use of anaphora and alliteration is also notable.⁶³

The repetitiveness of lullabies, both in phrasing and syllabic structure, results in a very clear pattern. Presumably, a Stoic would say that infants, although irrational,⁶⁴ are nonetheless drawn to the beauty of this pattern, thus inherently leaning towards that which exhibits harmony, consistency, and agreement. A comparable case would be other irrational ‘noble’ animals, such as bulls and roosters, fighting not because it brings pleasure but because they sense what is τὸ καλόν (the beautiful).⁶⁵ Presumably, both children and animals engage with the ‘aesthetic’ aspect of virtue rather than its core rationality, but, in any case, even irrational creatures are clearly attracted to that which is harmonious and in agreement with nature.⁶⁶ The observable calming effect of lullabies result from infants’ natural inclination towards these properties and their subsequent assimilation of them into their souls.

The newborns are not passive recipients in this process: their innate striving towards what is natural is necessary for instantiating it in their own behaviour.⁶⁷ It is the nature of the newborn that does the heavy lifting here, and the melody proves to be an apt instrument for calming strong feelings. Chrysippus’ claim about lullabies ought to be read in the same way. A melody could not force an infant to change their behaviour. However, even an irrational newborn in the grips of a tantrum would feel an inclination for calm and balance, when nudged by the consistent and harmonious structures of a lullaby.

6.2. Childhood

Some of Diogenes’ views seem to echo the claims about youth education made in the Platonic dialogues.⁶⁸ However, this article has shown that there are some significant differences between the two, springing from different understandings of the causal effects of *mousikē*, the psychological models used, as well as the Stoics’ very distinct commitments in ethics.

Diogenes’ views are underpinned by the significance of agency in the Stoics’ moral philosophy; and indeed, this notion of agency plays a crucial role in understanding the way that *mousikē* contributes to a child’s education, even more so than in the case of a newborn. Diogenes’ fragment cited at the beginning of this article, in Section 2, makes it quite clear that a child has to show eagerness and experience continuous engagement with *mousikē*: ‘*mousikē* allows a child to become attentive (εὐήκοον) and perceptive (εὐαίσθητον) owing to rhythm because it has certain cognate virtues (ἀρετὰς συγγενεῖς).’⁶⁹ If a child perseveres, his education instils a number of desirable qualities, without amounting to virtue itself. A potentially helpful concept here is epistemic virtue,⁷⁰ involving such properties as curiosity, humility, the principle of charity, and so on. Epistemic virtues are properties that make a person a good scholar/scientist. Diogenes names some of the properties that the child would develop in this regard, including being attentive (εὐήκοον) and perceptive (εὐαίσθητον).

Clement of Alexandria cites Zeno sketching out ‘a beautiful (καλήν) and properly loveable image of a young man’, which especially focuses on certain physical traits: a pure countenance, a brow that is

⁶³ See Faraone 2021: 10–12 on the possible connection between Simonides and Theocritus. Similar features are present in Soph. *Philoctetes* 827–29, although there it is not a child who is being lulled to sleep; see, too, Eur. *Orestes* 174–85.

⁶⁴ See Scade 2017: 200.

⁶⁵ Sextus Empiricus *M* 11.99–100.

⁶⁶ See Bett 2010: 139.

⁶⁷ This innate striving is called ‘proper functions’ by the Stoics, and they are common to both rational and irrational animals: see Stobaeus 2.7.8 = *SVF* 3.494 = *LS* 59B. For a thorough discussion of which actions constitute proper functions, see Brennan 2005: 169–230.

⁶⁸ The influence of the *Timaeus* is palpable not only in the general conceptualization of music (*Tim.* 47c–d), but also in minor claims, e.g. the parallel education for the body and the soul (*Tim.* 88c–d and *De Mus.* 4, col. 8–9). See Woodward 2010 for Diogenes’ engagement with the *Laws* in col. 51. The Stoic model of using poetry for education was then adopted and expanded by later Platonists, especially Plutarch: see Blank 2011.

⁶⁹ Philodemus, *De Mus.* 4, col. 18; see n. 15 above.

⁷⁰ Although the terminology is modern, the pioneers in this area drew inspiration from ancient philosophers, e.g. Plato: Zagzebski 1996: 139.

not relaxed, eyes neither wide open nor nearly closed, a neck that is not thrown back, limbs not loose but tensed like tuned strings, ears attentive to *logos*, and so on.⁷¹ These attractive features primarily signal receptivity and readiness for learning.⁷² This child's sensory organs, as well as the demeanour of their whole body, show focus and concentration, rendering them perceptive and attentive. These kinds of properties, which could again be called epistemic virtues, are exactly the ones that *mousikē* cultivates according to Diogenes. It is impossible to draw a definitive link between these two texts, but Diogenes does seem to be writing in the tradition of Zeno, adding his own argument that *mousikē* teaches the epistemic skills that ultimately form an excellent background for the acquisition of virtue.

6.3 Adulthood

Cleanthes' claims about the vividness of poetic expression can be illustrated by his own *Hymn to Zeus*. The hymn opens with an invocation typical of the genre, taking up around seven lines. Although most of the phrases are standard hymnic *topoi* and most epithets are typical for addressing Zeus, Cleanthes appears to have picked out those epithets that especially suit the themes of his hymn, with a special emphasis on 'law' (νόμος) and 'governing' (κυβερνάω).⁷³ The body of the hymn develops these motifs,⁷⁴ describing Zeus' rule of the cosmic order (lines 7–14); at verse 17, the poet notes the only exception to Zeus' omnipotence: the folly of humans. This point introduces the themes of fate, free will, and theodicy,⁷⁵ manifest in the famous description of Zeus as knowing how to make the uneven even and disorderly orderly; he joined the world into one and established its rational order (lines 20–21). Bad (κακοί) mortals overlook it and make wrong judgements about the genuine good, chasing fame, profits, and pleasures. The closing prayer begins at verse 32, asking Zeus to rid the mortals of this ignorance, so that everyone may honour Zeus, 'for there is no other greater privilege for mortals or for gods than always to praise the universal law in justice' (ἐπει οὔτε βροτοῖς γέρας ἄλλο τι μείζον οὔτε θεοῖς ἢ κοινὸν αἰὲ νόμον ἐν δίκῃ ὑμνεῖν, 38–39).⁷⁶

In the body of this hymn, Cleanthes describes in poetic terms what in other contexts the Stoics approach argumentatively. A comparison between his hymn and equivalent arguments in prose illuminates Cleanthes' point about the vividness of poetic expression. For instance, one of the important claims the poem makes is the problem of theodicy: the existence of evil in a world designed by a rational and benevolent creator,⁷⁷ comparable to the well-known arguments made in prose by his pupil Chrysippus. The latter also invokes the imagery of Zeus, praising Homer for stating 'therefore accept whatever evil or good he may send to each of you' (τῷ ἔχεθ' ὅττι κεν ὕμμι κακὸν πέμπησιν ἐκάστω, *Il.* 15.109) and arguing that nothing falls outside the scope of Zeus' reason.⁷⁸

Chrysippus' claims are often explicitly polemical. He criticizes opponents, calling it foolish not to suppose that goods could exist without the coexistence of evils,⁷⁹ but his stance is ultimately defensive. He is forced to argue that conventionally bad things are not actually bad to defend the Stoic view of providence, including the claim that disease was an unavoidable concomitant (*kata parakolouthēsin*). He even argues that bedbugs are useful for waking us and that mice encourage tidiness.⁸⁰ Chrysippus' stance parallels Cleanthes' lines portraying the world as a combination of good and bad, misunderstood by foolish mortals (lines 20–22). But whereas Chrysippus' mundane examples sound nearly absurd, Cleanthes' poetic language turns these sentiments into a lofty proclamation. Chrysippus' argument puts the reader *in medias res* of an ongoing debate; it presupposes knowledge of the debate

⁷¹ Clement, *Paed.* 3.11.74 = *SVF* 1.246; Schofield 1999: 117, trans. Schofield.

⁷² Celkytė 2020: 93.

⁷³ Thom 2005: 43, 50–52; the second line of the hymn invokes Zeus as 'first cause and ruler of nature, governing everything with your law' (φύσεως ἀρχηγέ, νόμου μέτα πάντα κυβερνῶν), trans. Thom.

⁷⁴ Asmis 2007a: 414 argues convincingly that the argument has an ABAB structure: part A presents the main thesis (Zeus' power) and part B presents a complication. The hymn first asserts Zeus' power, then introduces the separation of bad humans (lines 15–17); after reasserting the divine power, the hymn elaborates human errors, leading to the prayer.

⁷⁵ Thom 2005: 92.

⁷⁶ Trans. Thom 2005.

⁷⁷ See Thom 1998.

⁷⁸ Plutarch, *St. Rep.* 1056b–c = *SVF* 2.997 = LS 55R, trans. Long and Sedley 1987.

⁷⁹ Aulus Gellius 7.1 = *SVF* 2.1169 = LS 54Q.

⁸⁰ Plutarch, *St. Rep.* 1044D = *SVF* 2.1163 = LS 54O.

and cumbersome terminology (e.g. *kata parakolouthēsin*). His point is by no means bad, but his philosophical prose is neither smooth, nor vivid, nor memorable.

By contrast, Cleanthes' poem is significantly more accessible and engaging. His theodicy is not a reply to criticism but a claim seamlessly woven into a general cosmology. It is also attractive. As Elizabeth Asmis has pointed out, the description of Zeus' lightning contains highly effective syllable formations, including a high density of vowel clashes, underpinning the power of Zeus' thunderbolt.⁸¹ The portrayal of the all-pervading benevolent designer as Zeus is also vivid, reinforced not only by descriptions but also by the melodic quality of the words. The vividness and the familiar hymnal structure render the poem accessible both to philosophers and to those without philosophical knowledge.⁸²

Cleanthes' hymn appears to be an example of the enduring power of poetry that he discusses in the fragment preserved by Philodemus (quoted above, §2): for Cleanthes, 'poetic and musical examples are abiding' and 'metres, melodies, and rhythms come closest to the truth of the contemplation of divine matters.'⁸³ Poetry renders the message vivid, making it more accessible and more immediately graspable. There is little room for misunderstanding and therefore hardly any need for an extensive education to grasp the point. Calling poetic and musical examples 'abiding' (μέτ[ρ]ων[τά]) could be interpreted in two slightly different (although not incompatible) ways: either as a statement about the general state of affairs (i.e. an observation that people do remember poetry and music) or as a statement about the special nature of poetic and musical form (i.e. it is by nature memorable). According to the latter reading, Cleanthes is saying that a recognizable pattern serves as a mnemonic device: these time-tested, genre-based patterns are familiar and easier to remember. This is the case owing to the fact that people are exposed to these patterns from an early age, and the repeated impressions of poetic patterns leave a mark in the soul, making them recognizable.⁸⁴ Both of these interpretations could be true for Cleanthes' *Hymn*: the explanation of the way in which poetic patterns stick around also accounts for the fact that people do remember poetry better, with the result that the familiar hymnal structure renders the message easier to grasp and memorize.⁸⁵

The claim about the vividness of musical expression has to be interpreted against the background of Stoic physics. Properties like courage and temperance, according to the Stoics, are alterations or structural configurations of *pneuma* in the soul; musical expressions can also have the very same structural configurations. As Paul Scade argues, Cleanthes' claim that musical patterns come closer to the truth of contemplating the divine indicates that 'music can represent the structure of the divine in terms of its underlying ratios, rather than just describing that structure in words.'⁸⁶ Diogenes' insistence that music produces not mimesis but rather 'likeness' also supports this reading.⁸⁷ In order to make sense of this distinction, mimesis must be understood as an imitation: creating the appearance of a property that is not actually present. The likeness produced by music, meanwhile, must be understood as a token of the same property rather than its imitation. *Mousikē*, in that case, affects the soul more strongly because it offers not an illusion, so to speak, but actual representations, or even examples, of certain properties, and we grasp them better than narrative descriptions of these properties.

6.4 Sagehood

Although Stoic sages were said to be exceptionally rare,⁸⁸ the case of the sage presents an interesting problem for the reading developed so far. The evidence claims that the sage not only enjoys music

⁸¹ Asmis 2007a: 415–16.

⁸² Asmis 2007a explores these tensions and the double-faceted nature of the poem; see also Thom 2005: 13.

⁸³ Philodemus, *De Mus.* 4, col. 142, cited in n. 14 above.

⁸⁴ Poetic patterns are not unique in this way: any repeated impression would achieve the same result, but this is consistent with Cleanthes' point here, which is simply that poetic patterns are more enduring than prose. There seems to be little grounds for supposing that poetic patterns interact with the soul in a different way than ordinary speech. The only way in which these patterns might be differentiated is their beauty, which might make the soul keener on assimilating them, as discussed in Section 6.1.

⁸⁵ An interesting comparison is Lucretius' explanation of poetry as a sweetener that helps one to swallow bitter philosophy (*DRN* 1.931–50). The different philosophical schools explain the same phenomenon by referring to their respective central ethical tenets: pleasure in the case of the Epicureans and the innate alignment with virtue in the case of the Stoics. See also Asmis 2007b for the argument that Lucretius' Venus is a counterpart to the Stoic Zeus.

⁸⁶ Scade 2017: 209. See Klavan 2019b and Blank 2023 for the 'scientific perception' of nonverbal music in Diogenes' fragments; see also the seminal paper on the harmonious nature of Stoic virtue in Long 1996: 202–23.

⁸⁷ Philodemus, *De Mus.* col. 117. See the discussion in Barker 2001: 362.

⁸⁸ As reported in Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Fato* 28 = *SVF* 3.658; Seneca, *Ep.* 42.1.

and literature, but that they are the only one who is φιλόμουσος and φιλογράμματος.⁸⁹ In all the other cases discussed so far, arts have an educational role (nudging one towards virtue), but such a function would be superfluous for a person who is perfectly virtuous already. What would the sage derive from these pursuits?

Given that the sage is described as someone keen on music and γράμματα, we might expect that they simply derive pleasure from these activities.⁹⁰ The Stoics, however, reject the view of pleasure as an end, arguing that it is a by-product of achieving the actual end, that is an accord with nature.⁹¹ This is not to say that the Stoics deny that the sage would ever enjoy anything. In their account of good emotions, joy (χαρά) is defined as 'rational elation', the opposite of pleasure, which is irrational.⁹² Diogenes Laertius also reports a more detailed definition of pleasure as an irrational elation that arises when a person acquires what they erroneously perceive as the good. Among species of pleasure, there is enchantment (κήλησις) which is when one enjoys pleasing sounds and judges them as good.⁹³ These kinds of judgements, manifesting as love of pleasure, are a sign of weak character, equivalent to an infirmity in the body.⁹⁴ It is also undoubtedly important that the consequences of such judgement can be disgraceful (αἰσχρός); and the Stoics refuse to allow the possibility that something resulting in disgrace can be considered good.⁹⁵ When encountering pleasing sounds, the rational person would experience not irrational pleasure but rational joy, arising from judging these sounds with knowledge of what is in accordance with nature.

The condition of character in which an emotion is experienced determines the very nature of that emotion. Reacting to a beautiful tune with 'pleasure' is a manifestation of a weak character, incorrect value judgement (*i.e.* thinking that beautiful tunes bring happiness), and a risk of disgraceful behaviour. It seems reasonable to differentiate between this kind of reaction and the virtuous kind of response arising from a steady character, that is grounded in a correct judgement of values and that leads to nothing disgraceful. This distinction in Stoic emotional theory also helps to answer the question of what purpose arts serve for the sage. The sage approaches *mousikē* with correct value judgement: they understand that *mousikē* is a preferred indifferent, and that its nature is a practice of expertise that has an end in itself;⁹⁶ as a result, the sage experiences nothing but joy, the rational alternative to pleasure.⁹⁷

Although *mousikē* can be a beneficial pursuit for practising virtue at any stage in a person's life, only the sage has the capacity to enjoy it properly and to respond to it in precisely the right way. It is only in the case of the sage that the purpose of art is enjoyment; in all the other cases—from early childhood until mature adulthood—the arts are nudging one towards achieving the state of virtue, in which they can be properly enjoyed.

7. CONCLUSIONS

I started this article by noting that the Epicurean counter-argument against aesthetic functionalism especially challenges the Stoics, who argue for the moral benefits of *mousikē* in actual ordinary life. The ensuing discussion has shown that the Stoics were not genuinely vulnerable to this critique: their nuanced approach to the relationship between moral education and *mousikē* can counter this type of criticism. Their position, what I have called a 'weak functionalism', can be understood from both a theoretical and a practical point of view.

⁸⁹ Stobaeus 2.7.5b11 = SVF 3.294; see Section 4 above. See, too, [Asmis 2017](#): 121–24 for the distinction between poetry as an ordinary craft and as a craft practised by the sage.

⁹⁰ See [Destrée 2015](#) for the problem of aesthetic pleasure in the classical period.

⁹¹ Diogenes Laertius 7.86 = SVF 3.178 = LS 57A.

⁹² Diogenes Laertius 7.106. [Asmis 2017](#): 148 argues that ps.-Longinus echoes this view (*Subl.* 7.2). Dividing pleasures into categories of positive and negative values is not uniquely Stoic. Alexander of Aphrodisias (*In Top.* 181.2–6) compares the Stoic division to the one made by Prodicus, reported by Aristotle in *Top.* 112b22–23. The notion of elation and contraction is part of the Stoic definition of emotion: see Galen, *Plac.* 5.1.4 De Lacy = SVF 3.209. See [Graver 1999](#): 313–14.

⁹³ Diogenes Laertius 7.114. See [Graver 2007](#): 51–59 for a detailed discussion of the nature and the range of the 'good' emotions.

⁹⁴ Diogenes Laertius 7.115.

⁹⁵ Diogenes Laertius 7.103.

⁹⁶ Cicero, *De Fin.* 3.24–25 = SVF 3.11 = LS64H; see also [Long 1996](#): 211.

⁹⁷ [Long 1996](#): 198 describes joy as derived from the 'good flow of life'.

Regarding the former, we have seen how Stoic physics treats the melodic properties of musical and poetic sounds as the kind of entities that do not have the power to shape the soul: since they are incorporeal, they cannot act on corporeal entities, including the human soul. However, they do have a role to play in moral education. Like language, melodic properties can ‘nudge’ a person towards acting one way or another, without causing the action itself: the proper cause remains with the agent who decides how to respond to the ‘nudge.’ As a result, while *mousikē* itself cannot be the cause of moral improvement, it does have the function of an instrument of improvement.

Indeed, as we saw in the final section of this article, *mousikē* can be employed as an instrument for moral improvement in every stage of a human life, up to and including the acquisition of sagehood. In infancy, lullabies beckon towards the calmness of the harmonious state of mind to which all humans are by nature inclined. In childhood, *mousikē* develops the skills that aid virtue acquisition in a child willing to learn. By the time a person is an adult, poetic and musical compositions appeal to their innate inclination towards harmony, making complex philosophical claims rendered in verse more vivid and more graspable. In the extremely rare state of sagehood, a person enjoys music and poetry for their own sake, experiencing not irrational pleasure but rather ‘rational elation.’ While the views about the benefits of *mousikē* at different life stages come from different Stoics, all claims share an emphasis on agency, making the theoretical understanding of the effects of *mousikē* consistent with how these effects are envisioned in practical terms. In every case, it is not the melody or rhyme that pushes a person towards virtue; instead, the person, as the sole agent, uses melodies and rhymes instrumentally—for reminding, for clarifying, and even for eliciting rational emotions. These cases reveal an understanding of *mousikē* as having a function in moral education, but in a very specific and limited way: as an instrument of the willing agent. Studying the scope of Stoic aesthetic functionalism shows that tying aesthetic value to the role it plays in a person’s journey towards moral improvement was already problematized in antiquity, not only by harsh critics like the Epicureans but also by advocates like the Stoics who embraced only a modified, weaker form of functionalism. There can be little doubt that aesthetic functionalism was not a simplistic or reductive stance: it was a varied position, with some highly nuanced reflections on the way that arts can (and cannot) help people on their way towards virtue and *eudaimonia*.

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