

The Psychological Underpinnings of the Musical Revolution in Plato's *Laws* (700a3–701c5)

The paper engages with Plato's account of the revolution in popular musical taste described in the third book of the *Laws*. It explains this revolution in terms of three psychological factors identified in the text: human beings' propensity to acquiesce to the judgment of those they recognize as an authority (*αἰδώς*), the exhilarating effects of wine and pleasure (*μέθη*), and people's innate tendency to assert themselves over and against others' opinion (*τόλμα*).

To understand what Plato calls the 'birth of theatrocracy' (700a3), the paper synthesizes recent developments in two fields of Classical scholarship not usually treated together: accounts of shame (*αἰδώς*, *αἰσχύνη*) in the *Laws* and beyond (Schöpsdau 1994; Cairns 1993; Rowe 2007), and studies devoted to the reception of late Classical Greek lyric ('New Music') in general (Ford 2002; Csapo 2004; LeVen 2014) and in Plato in particular (Murray 2013; Folch 2015).

In the third book of the *Laws*, the Athenian Stranger sets out to explain the degeneration of two historical regimes, Persian monarchy and Athenian democracy. In the case of Athens, citizens at first felt *αἰδώς* (698b5-6), i.e. fear of being reproached by their better. But with time they came to be filled with *τόλμα* (700e6), heeding no one's judgment except their own. The Athenian Stranger blames this transition on a generation of poets who convinced the multitude that, since pleasure was all that music was about, they should not follow the educated elite's judgment but their own pleasure (702d2ff.). Many commentators have noticed the role the Athenian gives to these poets in explaining the psychological shift in the people, but none has tried to lay out the exact process by which *αἰδώς* disappears and *τόλμα* comes about in their soul. This paper argues that such a process involves three psychological principles:

The first is that human beings possess an innate fear of being blamed by those they recognize as their better, or *αἰδώς* (646e10-11; 647b5-7; 699c2; 886a7).

Second, under certain conditions (e.g. drunkenness), human beings' *αἰδώς* tend to fade away and give way to self-assertion (649a8ff.).

Third, the drive towards self-assertion that comes out in situations of drunkenness is innate in human beings, and can only be partially suppressed by αἰδώς. For Plato human beings are born with an ingrained egoism (τὸ σφόδρα φιλεῖν αὐτόν, 732b1-2) that inclines them to think that they are able to judge matters pertaining to themselves without referring to any authority (732a4ff.), i.e. to act with audacity (τόλμα, 700e6).

I argue that those three principles jointly explain the 'birth of theatrocracy.' In Plato's view, the Athenian people at first felt αἰδώς for the musical judgment of the cultivated elite (700d1-2, first principle). But the New Music provided such a strong pleasure to its audience that it acted as a kind of drug that put them in a state of quasi-drunkenness (700d5-6), weakening their αἰδώς and strengthening their τόλμα (700e5-6, second principle). The exhilarating effect of the music (along with the message conveyed by the lyrics, 700e1-5) were enough to induce the audience to think that they were competent judges of beauty (τὸ καλόν, 700a1-2). Believing that they were competent judges in such a crucial field, the multitude went on to assert themselves over and against the judgment of their better in all areas of life, out of audacity (701a7-b3, third principle). On the political level, the result was contempt for all authorities (700b6), excessive freedom (701b2), and 'unceasing evil' (701c5).

This account sheds new light on Plato's history of Athenian democracy and on his political psychology. Beyond Plato, it contributes to the understanding of key notions of Greek morality such as τόλμα and αἰδώς, and to the history of the reception of 'New Music.'

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