

## Response to “*Mousike* and Bluegrass”

Rodino Anderson

*Mozilla*

I will set up my response in a simple commendation and recommendation framework.

### COMMENDATIONS

**THEME.** *Mousike*, the tuning of the soul and its place in education is a worthy topic of investigation. It is a central topic of education because musicality takes up questions of the deliberate coordination of images in space and time to educe and tune the learner. This deliberate coordination of images was presented in the structural layout of the essay, and, today, we educators carry out that work in the curriculum we use to tune and/or attune our students to make that rugged, jagged, and steep ascent to glimpse something of the “truth” in their learning, and then to descend from that “mountain” back into the context of their “other” life-world, never forgetting what they have seen. That Plato’s *Republic* still teaches today by an investigation into its music and/or musicality is a testament to that tremendous work.

**CONTENT.** The essay does a good job of introducing some important secondary scholarship that analyzes Plato’s *Republic*. Eva Brann’s *Music of the Republic* and Adi Ophir’s *Plato’s Invisible Cities* are deep readings of the *Republic* that pay acute attention to work’s architectonic structure. It is a dimension of Plato scholarship and how to read his works that gets limited attention. If anything, one cannot seriously be engaged with the dialogues as works of art if the relationship between form and content of the work are not confronted.

**QUESTION.** “What things are worth knowing?” The essay ends on this point, and I think the question rightfully drives the investigation catalyzed by the author at the 2015 Philosophy of Education Society conference and our investigations every day.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

**THEME.** It is hard to decipher at times.

1. The use of *mousike* is not clear: Is the essay speaking about music or musicality? If about music qua music, one cannot sidestep the dynamics of music (meter, rhythm, tone, melody, scale, key — the *mathematical* nature of music) in a critical discussion of Plato’s *mousike* (more on the mathematics in a moment). If you are speaking about musicality (colour, sonority, overtones, mode — the *aesthetic* nature of music), then there is the danger that we are speaking about (around) the matter at hand. Yet, perhaps we may only speak *about* any matter at hand.
2. For a comparative work, the structural layout of this essay can be tighter. To use an analogy, I felt that I was reading Plato’s *Sophist* at times following all the divisions of comparison being made in the essay. However, unlike the *Sophist*, these divisions (*analusia*) did not come back into a synthesis (a *sumphonia*) at the close; that is, we made the descent, but never the ascent. A tight structural layout, as the author makes for Charles Frazier’s work, may benefit the essay.

Lastly, it would have been helpful if the author had reminded the reader again of the question at stake: What is the connection between Plato's *mousike* and Frazier's *Cold Mountain* bluegrass?

CONTENT. Just as the essay introduces a world of good secondary texts to read Plato, it sidesteps two things:

1. An entire tradition of *mousike* and education: Augustine (*Confessions*), the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Gottfried Herder, and, most importantly, W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk*, wherein Du Bois is graphically representing Negro Spirituals in a work that is in direct dialogue with Plato's *Republic* and seeks to answer "This country [*polis*]? How came it yours?"<sup>1</sup> There is even a greater secondary literature that opens up this domain of research.
2. The mathematical dimensions of music that Plato is discussing: The mathematical is the crux to understanding Plato, and any work that does not take into consideration this element continues to fall into the camp of effusive poetry, what Eva Brann would come to condemn as "Romanticism" and the central problem of philosophy in her work the *World of Imagination: Sum and Substance*.<sup>2</sup> How is mathematics the crux? Consider the three images of the Sun, the Divided Line, and the Cave. They are all getting at the same thing by employing different means: Ontic (logos, and *analogos*), Mathematic (divided line), Cave (poetic). The mathematic, combining the ontic and the poetic tropes, is the learnable (as the word denotes). To understand Plato, you must enter into those things that are learnable and demonstrable. To rely on Ophir's suspicions over and above Brann's demonstration of how the mathematics of the divided line work, a crucial bridge to understanding how we attune the soul, is a grave oversight. I recommend the author return to reading Brann's discussion of the geometry the divided line is demonstrating and why the conic sections it describes are important. (Hint: esoteric "Pythagorean" understandings are required.) Further, the author should look carefully at Ophir's structural symmetry of the *Republic*. Using calculus to diminish the rectilinear discrepancies, we will notice that we have a parabola. A parabola is a transverse plane of a cone. The cone is described by a right triangle. The right triangle is the most revered geometric figure of Pythagorean learning. Now, return to Brann's demonstration and notice what she is up to.

I share this not to confuse, but to clarify. For us musicians, those who taught us are important because they connect us to a tradition. Tradition — *tradatio* — its etymological root means *a handing down*. That is why my piano teacher, who was taught by one of Franz Liszt's famous students, is important for me to note — it shows in my playing technique. Similarly, Brann is a teacher and philosophic mentor of mine, and a teacher and mentor of hers was Jacob Klein. Klein is renowned for his arguments with Leo Strauss. But, more importantly, Klein is famous for demonstrating that any reading of Plato not attending to the *mathematical* is a weak reading of Plato. Brann

in her reading does not sidestep the mathematical in her musical reading. She must tackle it, for the musical is categorized under the curriculum of the mathematical *quadrivium* we find in Book IX of the *Republic*.

QUESTION. "What things, [then,] are worth knowing?"

---

1. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Pocket Books, 2005), 252.

2. Eva T. H. Brann, *The World of Imagination: Sum and Substance* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993).