

**GOOD MUSIC AND BAD**  
**A Lecture Given At Thomas Aquinas College**  
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There are two kinds of lectures. There are the lectures that you want to give, and the lectures that you're talked into giving. This one is in the second category. It's a good lesson to me to keep my mouth shut (something I should know at my age). I tend to speak vehemently on certain subjects, and find before long that I'm challenged to give a rational account of what I've just been asserting so passionately. Well, that's how I got into this particular fix.

I'd like to start off with a little text from Plato, which doesn't seem to have anything in particular to do with our subject, but I think we'll see, as the discussion proceeds, that it has at least in general a great correspondence to our present discussion. Socrates is in jail, waiting for his execution, and some of his friends want to persuade him to escape, and go off to live in Thessaly and have a good time for the rest of his life. In the course of this conversation, his friend Crito says to him, "You can see for yourself, Socrates, that one has to think of the opinion of the many as well. Your present position is quite enough to show that the capacity of ordinary people for causing trouble is not confined to petty annoyances, but has hardly any limits if you once get a bad name with them." Socrates replies, "I only wish that ordinary people had an unlimited capacity for doing harm, for then they might have an unlimited power for doing good, which would be a splendid thing, if it were so. Actually, they have neither. They cannot make a man wise or stupid, they simply act at random."

I think that Socrates is stating a universal truth here that applies to many situations besides his own. One could state the truth this way: things which do us the greatest harm, are the very things which, when they are as they should be, do us the greatest good. Or, conversely, the things which do us the greatest good, are the very things which, when they are not as they should be, do us the greatest harm. Another way this truth is expressed is in the saying "The corruption of the best is the worst". Man is the noblest

of all the animals, but a bad man is much worse than a bad beast, one might even say, more beastly than any beast. Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.

The explanation for this, at least in general, is not far to seek. God arranged all things in number, weight, and measure, and he saw that it was exceedingly good. We see that the goodness of any created thing depends upon measure. When it becomes excessive or deficient with respect to that measure it becomes bad or evil. Thus the human virtues are all forms of moderation, for they deal with things whose goodness depends upon measure; for example, food. If so much food is good for you, it does not follow that more food is better. It's possible to eat too much, and to eat too little, to eat when one shouldn't, and not to eat when one should. The virtues moderate our desires in order to conform them to the measure of the objects themselves, a measure which, of course, must be discovered by right reason.

We can contrast our virtues in this respect with the theological virtues, which have God as their proper object; God, Who is infinite goodness. These virtues are not properly speaking means or middles. We cannot believe in God too much, we cannot hope in Him too much, we cannot love Him too much. But with respect to all created things, it is as we said. Their goodness depends on a kind of mean or moderation.

Tonight, we propose to speak about music, good music and bad music. We shall argue that there is good music, and explain as well as we can what makes the difference between good music and bad music. More particularly, we shall argue that good music at its best disposes the soul to virtue, moral and intellectual, while bad music does the opposite. I add that qualification "at its best" for reasons that will be a little clearer later.

I would like to begin with two qualifications. First of all, we don't say that good music *produces* virtue, but rather that it disposes one for it. Moral virtues, of course, are engendered by repeated actions of the same kind as those which come out of the virtue. One becomes brave by doing brave acts, and by doing

them for the right reason. Intellectual virtues are acquired by study and instruction. So if music has a role to play in making men better, it's a disposing role, rather than one which accomplishes that purpose. Secondly, we must note that there are other influences both for and against virtue that operate at the same time. There are other things that will dispose your soul to virtue, or to vice, besides the music that you listen to. And this is both good news and bad news. Bad news, because bad music is only one of the many influences to vice. It very naturally goes along with the other influences, but it sometimes is in isolation from them for a given individual. But the effect of bad music may, for that individual, be mitigated by other influences that pull him in another direction. He will suffer loss because of his habit of listening to such music, but perhaps not disaster. Further, we find that some individuals appear not to be affected very much at all by any kind of music. I've met people in my time who claim to like Mozart and Bach and Haydn quite well, but they also like jazz and rock music. And they tell me "It all depends on the mood I'm in." I used to be very puzzled by that, and I still am, because it seems to me that the very thing about Mozart's music that would delight them would cause them pain in this other music. There's a saying "He who adds a science, adds a pain." The more perceptive you are about the good of things, the more you notice other things being out of harmony with that good, and suffer from it. Perhaps the truth here is that these individuals are not affected very much by anything, or at least by any music. As regards music, they are like shallow ponds in which you can have ripples but no waves. That was my first qualification.

My second qualification is with my method. In applying general considerations to particular cases we often need premises that are taken directly from perception. Perception cannot be communicated; either one has it, or one does not. If you tell a man blind from birth that snow is white, you cannot communicate to him the perception that was the foundation of that statement. Either he has the sense of sight, which will reveal that to him, or not. But when perception is lacking, one can often argue from signs, from things which always or usually or naturally go with it, and may reveal it more clearly than it reveals itself, at least to a

given individual. For example, music often goes along with certain words, and certain kinds of dancing. It will sometimes happen that the words that go with the music and the dancing that spontaneously and naturally go with it will reveal to a given individual something in that music he might not otherwise have noticed. I read recently about a band or group which got in trouble with the law because the lyrics, if you can call them that, of their music were just too offensive to be listened to. But I heard no report that the music had been found too offensive to be listened to, and perhaps those who realized that the words were impossible should have realized that, after all, they went quite well with the music and revealed even more clearly than the music itself the actual character of what was being played.

We have to note also that custom has a certain effect on us here. When you hear something over and over again, it becomes customary, then ordinary, and then it seems normal. You get used to it. You half tune it out. Therefore people are often shocked when they hear the words or see the dancing which goes with music of a certain sort, because they're not used to that. They've gotten used to the music, but they haven't gotten used to the rest of it. So a lot of our more particular arguments tonight will be from signs, things that go with the good and the bad, and not so much from intrinsic definitions, or by giving specific reasons in each case. Let us begin.

There are three places in the course of study where music is considered. The first, in the order of learning, is the liberal art of music, a part of the quadrivium, which examines music in the light of certain mathematical principles which it exhibits. Here, we see first in the order of learning that music is characterized by a reasonable order. We see in music a kind of unity and harmony between passions and reason. This kind of order is a good thing to see at the beginning because it's proportioned to us. This is the easiest sort of order for us to see and appreciate. Even the young, without a great deal of experience, can apprehend an order of this kind.

The next place that music would come up in the course of study is in a way analogous to Aristotle's consideration of tragedy in the *Poetics*, as a mode of imitation. This would be a thorough or definitive consideration in terms of the proximate genus, which is imitation, and the specific differences, imitation of what? and by what means? We can contrast this with the kind of treatment we find in the liberal art, where a doctrine which is abstract and general is applied to a particular subject matter, a doctrine which has not been derived from that subject matter, and from consideration of its peculiarities, but from a more general and abstract consideration. The numerical ratios and proportions we study in harmony are common to music and other things as well.

The third consideration of music in the course of study is in ethics and political philosophy. We find this, for example, in Book VI of Plato's *Republic*, in Book II of his *Laws*, and in Book VII of Aristotle's *Politics*. Here, music is considered in terms of education. This is because, in the opinion of Aristotle and Plato and many others, music not only amuses and pleases, which is perhaps a sufficient reason for its being, as a kind of recreation and rest from life's effortful activities, but it's also dispositive. It has an effect on the soul for good or for ill. Therefore it pertains to ethics and politics to consider it. It pertains to education, which is concerned with the acquisition of virtue, which is of political and social as well as familial concern. We are all concerned that the citizens be good men.

Tonight, our consideration will be aimed at this third sort, the ethical significance of music, and the effect which the best sort of music has on character. However, we don't argue, as we indicated before, that all good music is essentially of this sort. What pleases and refreshes, if it does not corrupt, is a good thing in moderation. Our life here is not like our life in beatitude, where we can always be doing the very highest thing. Here, we need a break. We need to sleep, and during our waking hours we need some recreation. We will not be maintaining that one ought to find some kind of moral significance in every piece of music that we enjoy. Perhaps it is there --I think in some way it is-- but it is far more evident in one sort than in another. We do maintain that the best kind of music is

dispositive to virtue, and that music of the opposite sort tends to corrupt. The corruption of the best is the worst.

We can't come immediately to this consideration. For we cannot sufficiently consider the end and ultimate good of anything unless we first consider its form, that is to say, its defining principles, and the power that comes from that form. Thus we must first consider music as a mode of imitation, and examine its specific power --how it affects us as music. The order, then, of our consideration, will be this. We will first of all examine the genus of music, which is *imitation*. Then we shall go on to consider its difference, especially as regards the object of imitation --what it is that music imitates. Then we shall consider the unique way in which music is like the object of imitation, and finally, the unique power it has by reason of that resemblance. The last consideration will lead to a consideration of the ethical or moral effect of music. We shall not, however, discuss the mathematical principles involved, except in a very limited way, and later on--the principal reason for this being my ignorance.

At the beginning of his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle divides art into three genera. There are the arts which produce necessary and useful things, for example carpentry. These are called "servile" because they provide instruments of life and of the good life. Secondly, there are the arts which aim at recreation and delight, what we now call the "fine arts". The poet and the musician seek to please, and yet this pleasure is not the end of life. Life is not for the sake of recreation and amusement. Thirdly, there are the arts whose end is knowledge, for example, geometry. The proper end of geometry is to know about magnitude and figure. Such arts are called "liberal" because they befit a free man, having value in themselves, because in and of themselves they make us know something worth knowing. And knowing is, largely, the end of life.

The difference between the first and the third of these genera is evident. In the first genus, knowledge is simply for the sake of the making. If we could have the product without the knowledge we would not bother about the knowledge. But in the third case the end sought is the knowledge itself. But as regards the second

genus, the fine arts, the contrast is not so clear. Middles, things in between, are always hard to define. But we can say this. The poet, the painter, and the musician are like the carpenter in this respect at least: their knowledge is for the sake of some work. The art of the poet is for the sake of the poem that he composes or the play or the story, the art of the musician is for the sake of the composition that he makes, the art of the sculptor is for the sake of the statue, and so on. The end of these sciences is making, not knowing, and making is for the sake of the thing made. Nevertheless, when we consider the use of the products of these arts, the fine arts, we perceive a certain likeness to the liberal arts. For the use of the products is not "use" in the ordinary sense; it's in being seen or being heard, that is to say, in some act of knowledge, and knowing something is not using it in the ordinary sense. Thus, when we listen to the poet or the musician, we are not using his product to bring about some further effect by means of it, but we are ourselves being affected. But this affecting is in the first instance a kind of knowing, involving both sense and intellect. Thus we see why these arts are called "fine," at least when compared with the servile arts. The use of the products, here, is a sort of knowing.

Next, we ask what do these fine arts produce such that they should receive such a use? Aristotle, at the beginning of the *Poetics*, gives an answer. He says this: "Our subject being poetry, I propose to speak not only of the art in general, but also its species and their respective capacities". Then he goes on a little bit further: "Epic poetry and tragedy, as also comedy, dithyrambic poetry, and most flute-playing and lyre-playing, are all, viewed as a whole, modes of imitation. But at the same time they differ from one another in three ways: either by a difference of kind in their means, or by differences in their objects, or in the manner of their imitation". (*Poetics* 1447a7-18)

From the discussion that follows in Aristotle's text, we see that Aristotle also regards painting and sculpture as modes of imitation. Aristotle, then, regards this as the most general and fundamental difference between the fine arts and the other arts. Accordingly, an artist of this sort is essentially a maker of imitations. And thus Aristotle goes on to differentiate among the fine arts on this basis.

These arts differ from one another by a difference in the objects imitated, the means of imitation, and the manner of imitation.

This view of the fine arts, that they are arts of imitation, is quite probable on the face of it, and seems to fit the prominent examples which are taken to be typical. It has been the general view throughout most of our history. But there are objections and difficulties, and they are more acutely urged in modern times. Let me state a few of them.

First of all, one says, not all art is representative. So the difference is not universal. We see that those artists that can and do produce representations also produce non-representational art. So the difference is a dividing difference rather than a constituting difference.

Secondly, one argues, when we consider even representational art, it seems that the artist has not made a reflection or reproduction of his original, but has transformed it. His work is significant as a work of art not by what he has taken or received from the original, but by what he has originated himself in the product. An example can be taken from photography and painting. Almost everyone regards painting as more of an art than photography, and yet if we consider just the literal and exact likeness of the object being portrayed it seems that photography is more exact than painting. It seems, on this view, that the likeness of the imitation to its original is less significant than the difference. Along the same lines, all seem to recognize that in some way art improves upon nature, that the imitation improves upon the original. Thus we tend to see the artist as creative, even with his representational work. Accordingly, although not all would draw this conclusion, *creation* rather than representation seems to be the perfection of artistic activity. The work originates in the artist's personal vision.

This view, however, cannot be sustained. We wonder, to begin with, why one says "create" and not "make". The choice of that word is, I think, significant. The terms "create" and "creation" are terms which have a peculiar weight and significance in the Western



tradition, because of the Catholic faith and sacred doctrine. To apply these terms to the artist, the maker, is to attribute to him, in one way or another, and more or less, what is uniquely true of God's efficient causality. That is to say, to call the artist "creator" is to consider him Godlike in that respect in which he had previously been considered most unlike God. For God's making of the world is called "creation" specifically for two reasons. First of all, He does not make by transforming any pre-existent matter. That's what's usually meant by "making the world out of nothing". Secondly, He does not work from any exemplar, or ideal, or model other than Himself. That is, the form by which he acts is simply His own form, in no way acquired from another. Thus creation, properly understood, means a making in which there is no principle other than the maker himself.

Now our making, by contrast, requires both a matter and a form, neither of which we originate, but only find. This is obviously true as regards the matter. Not even the most enthusiastic partisan of artistic creativity maintains that the artist can make anything out of no material. But as regards the form, it might seem that there is a kind of true originality, and that with respect to form that the artist is indeed a creator. But this can't be so. For the human intellect is natively a blank. It has no forms of itself by which it might know and act. This is why Aristotle compares it to prime matter; it is purely potential in its own order. It is that which can be understanding, but is not. It becomes actually understanding by what it receives from experience --certain forms and notions that belong to the objects of experience and are not originated by the artist himself. Therefore, since the maker makes from what he knows, and he knows only what he has received and what is virtually contained in what he has received, he can only (1) reproduce the very form he has seen, like someone having seen the moon might draw a circle, or (2) produce a likeness of what he has received. The principle here seems altogether universal: every agent makes something similar to himself. It may be univocally similar, as when man generates man, or it may be equivocally similar, as when a man builds a house, but in every case the making involves a kind of assimilation of the object to a form possessed by the maker. Even God is no exception in this respect; He knows only Himself, and

knows other things through knowing Himself. Their knowability is derived entirely from their resemblance to him. But He can make only things which are like Himself, that is to say, like His essence.

Nevertheless, one might say this: the artist takes certain qualities and forms from nature, for example, colors and lines in painting, pitches and tones in music, and so forth, just as he takes his materials, but the arrangement of these in the artistic whole is strictly original. But even this cannot be sustained. For insofar as the arrangement he gives is intelligible, that is to say, something ordered, it must derive from some form which the maker possesses already, which he has discovered and not originated. Take an example: even such an extravagant fiction as a centaur, the half-man half-horse of mythology, draws upon forms already perceived in experience, and not only the form of man and the form of horse. For even the way they're put together in the complex whole which is the centaur is an imitation of the way living things are put together in nature. You don't stick a centaur together just any old way. All the artist can produce with entire originality is disorder. It's as true in art as it is in morality, that everyone who speaks out of himself is a liar.

Nevertheless, there are certain difficulties with what Aristotle says, difficulties which give plausibility to the opposite view. For example, one might say this: if an imitation is a likeness, a more perfect imitation will be a more perfect likeness, so the most perfect imitation will be an exact copy of the original, some individual of the same type not distinguishable from the original. For example, I might watch an artisan making a chair. I could select the same sorts of materials and follow the same procedure step by step. The result would be a chair exactly like the chair he made, indistinguishable from it. There would be a perfection of likeness there. But no one would maintain that this is what the artist is up to.

The second objection is somewhat the opposite of an objection stated earlier. Imitation is too general to be the defining principle of art. Aristotle has a saying: art imitates nature. But Aristotle says this about every art without exception. When I first heard that

dictum about forty years ago, I thought it referred to the fine arts. But when I read it in context, I saw that Aristotle was talking about all arts without exception, and with particular reference to the servile arts that make useful things, because there the resemblance to nature's procedures is more obvious. So it seems that "imitative of nature" is just too universal a difference to characterize the fine arts.

Also, the point made earlier needs to be considered. Does not the artist transform the original in his making? Does he not even improve on it? It seems that no imitator, insofar as he imitates, improves on his original. Where he does, it seems that he is something more than and something better than an imitator. To take an extreme example, consider the imitation of Christ. In our imitation of Christ, we don't expect to improve upon Him; we expect, of course, to fall short.

Let's consider these things for a moment. To the first and second objections, there is a common answer. Although all artifacts come about through a kind of imitation, and although they are all like the objects of nature, they are not all defined as such. To be a chair is not to be the imitation of something. Thus the second chair, the copy, is exactly the same kind of thing as the first is. Imitation is no more what it is than it is what the first chair is, even though it came to be by imitation. The useful artifact, for example the chair or the knife, although it resembles the natural, is not defined as a likeness of it, but by its use. Its form is understood in relation to that use, and not in relation to some original in nature.

Further, within the fine arts the product is intended to be a likeness of the object, but not the object itself, or something of the same kind, specifically or generically, or to share the same qualities and characteristics. Thus, to define imitation properly as the objective of the fine arts, one requires this negation: that the product not be the thing that it's a likeness of. For an obvious example, consider an actor on the stage, taking the part of an angry man. It's important, essential I suppose, that he should look like an angry man and sound like an angry man. It is not at all essential, in fact it is accidental and probably an obstacle, that he should

actually be angry himself. The actor who is himself angry, but who doesn't look angry and sound angry, has a greater intrinsic likeness to the object of imitation. And yet, he fails as an imitator. That negation, then, is necessary to understand what it is that's being aimed at in the fine arts. We can compare the imitator to the sophist and to the hypocrite. They are, all three, makers of imitations or likenesses. The sophist is described as the man who would rather appear wise than be wise, or more fully, as one who would rather look wise and not be wise than be wise and not look so. The hypocrite is the same thing with respect to virtue. He is concerned with the likeness, but not with being the thing, which he is making a likeness of. Of course, we also see in these examples a difference, because the sophist does not wish to be taken for the likeness of a wise man, but to be thought wise, and the hypocrite does not want you to conclude that he *looks* good, but that he *is* good. So their intentions are quite different in this respect from the intention of the imitator, who does not intend that you should mistake his imitation for the original.

Even the qualities and characteristics of the original are not intended by the imitator. For example, if I were to paint the picture of a ripe orange, I don't know how I could do it without orange paint. There's got to be orange on the canvas. But if I could get it to look orange without being orange, maybe by little dots of red and yellow, as long as it looked orange I would have accomplished my object as an imitator. In some ways I would be even more admirable as an imitator. The more you can make a thing look like what it is not, the better an imitator you are, in this order.

We could discuss, in this connection, the example of the sculptor Pygmalion, who created so perfect a statue of a woman that it became an actual woman. That was a very spectacular effect. But we should have to say that Pygmalion failed in his art. He failed by excess. In all human activities, as we were saying earlier, moderation needs to be observed, and one can sin by excess or by deficiency. Pygmalion sinned by excess.

If we put this together with what we said earlier about the use of a work of art, that its use is to be seen and to be heard, we can

say something a little more complete: that the artistic imitation is defined as an imitation, imitation is what it is, and it is intended to be taken as such. If it is not, then there is a failure either on the part of the imitator, or on the part of those who are hearing and seeing what he does.

Some of you may remember the early three-dimensional movies in which the makers couldn't resist the temptation to create an illusion which was no longer perceived as such. Everybody was ducking down in his seat to avoid something that was coming out at him. Again, in this the artists lost control of themselves and lost sight of the end of their art, which was not meant to be mistaken for the real thing, but only to be taken for a likeness of that thing.

To the third difficulty, the reply is more interesting. We said, does not the imitator transform and even improve the original, and is this not something beyond imitation? In reply, we concede that the imitator improves on the original in some ways.

But what is this improvement? Is it to make a likeness of something better and more beautiful than the original? It might seem so, particularly when we look at certain works of art and say "I never saw anything that looked that good". But then, of course, the artist wouldn't be improving on the original; he would have chosen another original to depict. E.g. as if he started out to paint a picture of Mrs. Snodgrass and instead painted a picture of Athena. He would have painted something grander and more beautiful, but he would not have improved on the original--he would have chosen another original. Then it might seem that since the artist is a maker of appearances, he must be making the object appear better than it is. It seems this would be flattery rather than imitation. Imitation seems to require a kind of fidelity to the object being imitated. Sometimes portrait painters will in fact make their subjects look better than they are, but we recognize this as an abuse of their art. It may please their patrons, but it is not good art insofar as the picture is intended to be a likeness of that person.

Is not this the case? The imitator makes the object

appear as it ought to appear, for it ought to appear as it is. We can make this a little clearer by reflecting that imitation in the arts seems to answer to and in a way remedy a deficiency in things. Things are not always what they appear to be, and what they are seldom appears clearly. We have no way of discovering about them what they are except from their appearances, and yet these appearances do not easily reveal what they are. This is especially true as regards singulars. To discover what someone thinks, intends, feels, or his temperament, or his virtues from what outwardly appears is very difficult, and deception is more often the case than true perception.

We might illustrate this point by an example. All of us have had the experience of looking at photographs of someone we know very well and have lived with for a long time, and we usually find ourselves rejecting most of those photographs as poor likenesses. When someone asks us why, we say "That's not typical of him, that's not the way he looks". Now when we say this, we're not criticizing the camera for some failure on its part to record exactly the external appearance of that person. What we are saying, I think, is that of all those expressions and postures which the camera reveals, only a few are typical. That is to say, that most of us don't often look like what we are. We know that when we're looking at pictures of someone whom we know. It is not just because we love them and we want them to look good; that would be another motive. But it's because we know them and we know they are not that way, even though in that particular picture they look that way. In this case, then, "typical" does not mean "statistically predominant". Perhaps those expressions that are truly revealing seldom occur.

We might note another thing about the photograph; the *way* it improves. Of course, the painting does this, too. It brings to rest that which exists only in motion. One of the problems with those expressions that pass over people's faces is that that's just what they do, they pass over, and then they're gone. The object at rest is more knowable than the object in motion. The painter and photographer, by putting the object at rest (so to speak), make it more knowable than it is in itself. This putting at rest makes the

appearance speak to the underlying reality more clearly than it does when the thing is in motion.

We see this with respect to irrelevancy, also. How many of us have had the experience of looking at a photograph that was otherwise successful, but then remarking "What's that cupboard door open back there for? And why's that dirty stocking on the carpet up here?" There are things in the picture that are irrelevant, and their very irrelevance irritates us because we always desire a kind of unifying whole without the accidental, but life, as it ordinarily goes on, is full of incidentals and accidentals which make what's going on quite difficult to understand.

We see a similar principle in a play or a story. Motives for what is said and done are more evident in stories than they are in real life. Actions are more consistent with character as we gather that character from speech and from other actions. We often find ourselves saying about somebody, "He's not himself today", meaning that his behavior today is not such as we would expect from his character as we know it from his previous actions and speech. The teller of stories and the maker of plays improves upon reality in this way. The person's actions are more consistent with his character as we have seen it beforehand.

We see something of the same principle in certain particular manners or means. For example, in a play we often have a character soliloquize, speak his thoughts out loud --something we rarely do, especially when we're in the prime of life. (When you get on towards old age, it happens more and more frequently.) The character's thoughts and feelings are perceptible to us in a way they would not be in real life. The story or play departs from the most literal and exact external likeness of the subject, in order to reveal more clearly and more truly what is within. Narrative is like that, too. The narrator can take you inside characters in a way that you cannot be inside them in life. You can follow their internal monologues and dialogues, and this makes their actions more intelligible.

I think this can be clarified even further by considering why we delight in imitation. Aristotle has this to say about imitation:

It is natural for all to delight in works of imitation. The truth of this second point is shown by experience: though the objects themselves may be painful to see, we delight to see the most realistic representations of them in art, the forms, for example, of the lowest animals and of dead bodies. The explanation is to be found in a further fact: to be learning something is the greatest of pleasures, not only to the philosopher, but also to the rest of mankind, however small their capacity for it; the reason of the delight in seeing the picture is that one is at the same time learning --gathering the meaning of things, e.g. that the man there is so-and-so, for if one has not seen the thing before, one's pleasure will not be in the picture as an imitation of it, but will be due to the execution or coloring or some similar cause. (*Poetics* 1448b8-20)

There's a kind of learning here, and learning is naturally pleasurable to man. But this learning is more like recognition, something immediate, spontaneous, accessible to all. The pain that accompanies discursive learning, the long hard road, is absent. It's easy and natural. We might compare it to Adam, in the Garden, naming the animals. They were brought to him one by one, and he imposed on each one a name that was appropriate to it. He did not precede the naming with a prolonged biological investigation. It's as if, right away, seeing the outward and visible form of the animal, he discovered what the right name would be, a name that revealed something more fundamental, more essential, in the beast. If only we could know that way! Somewhere St. Thomas mentions that in beatitude, when the body is reunited to the soul, we shall have a similar way of apprehending singulars.

There's another, and related, delight which Aristotle doesn't mention here, but which St. Thomas mentions at least implicitly. In discussing a poet's use of metaphor, St. Thomas says this: "Poetry is about things which, because of a defect of truth, cannot be taken by reason. Whence, it is necessary that the reason be seduced, as it were, by certain likenesses". (I *Sent.* Prol. Q.1,a.5) There are



certain things which, because of intrinsic lack of intelligibility, cannot be expressed and signified in so many words. Thus they cannot be understood in themselves, for what is understood can be expressed in words. But we can, in a way, capture them in likenesses. How often we hear someone say "I felt just like ...", and then go on to describe metaphorically the way he felt on a given occasion, as if he could do no better than that. One cannot say exactly what the feeling was by proper language; one can only say what it was like. That's a point that will be of some importance later, when we talk about music. It seems to me that one can identify certain general passions in music --joy, sorrow, fear, anger, and the like-- but if one goes on to ask for a more specific answer, one finds that the particularities cannot be captured in words, but only in a likeness. You say to yourself, "I can't put in words what that feeling was, but I felt something like that".

Certain things, then, can't be captured in themselves but only in likenesses. Such are singulars, individuals in their concrete particularity, and singulars are the objects of imitation. Singulars of a type, no doubt, but still singulars. We can sum up these two reasons, I think, as follows. Imitation can make things look like what they are, making outward and visible the inward and spiritual reality. Secondly, it can capture and express in some way what cannot be grasped in itself, but only in a likeness.

Now, at long last, let us turn to music in particular. Music differs from other fine arts in its object and in its means. The means, perhaps, are evident enough for our purposes tonight, but we must discuss the object at some length. Thus, we shall first discuss what the object of imitation is in music. Then we shall speak of the unique likeness which music has to its object, and from this we shall show the effect of this likeness upon the soul, and through this, upon temperament and character.

We begin with our conclusion: the object of imitation in music is the passions of the soul --joy, sorrow, boldness, fear, hope, despair, anger. Now perhaps this is self evident, a matter of perception. But we shall support it with four arguments.

The first argument, and the most obvious argument, is that music is commonly and spontaneously named from the passions. We speak of joyful music, and sad music, fearful music, even angry music. What can this mean, except that the music imitates or represents these passions? The passions are not in the music as in a subject; anger is in the angry man. Nor is music so called because it produces those passions in us. It may do so, and we shall argue later on that it does in a way, but it is not in looking to that fact that we name it so. Nor is it because it comes out of such a passion; the composer was not being moved by the passion when he wrote, except perhaps incidentally. We don't take it as an expression of his passion.

It seems, then, that it must be because it is a sign or likeness of those passions that music is so called. What else is left as a basis for assigning such names to those movements? Now we can distinguish sign from likeness in this way: every likeness is a sign, but not every sign is a likeness. For example, a word is a sign of something, but is not a likeness of the thing that it signifies. But in the case of music, we argue, it is not only a sign of passion, but also a likeness of passion, and it is a sign of passion insofar as it is a likeness of passion. For, first of all, its significance is not conventional, like language. One does not have to learn the conventions of a particular group in a particular time and place in order to apprehend music and appreciate it for what it is. That is why it is called a universal language. It seems that its significance is natural rather than conventional. Nor is it natural the way smoke is a natural sign of fire. That is to say, its significance is not recognized by an observed association with its object. You could see fire by itself, you could see smoke by itself, and you would not on that account recognize smoke as a sign of fire. It would be such, I suppose -- apt to point you to it, but it still wouldn't be significant to you. But this is not the way it is with music. We must, of course, have felt the passions in question to recognize them in an imitation, but when we hear the music, we recognize the passions in the music without having made some separate association of it with them, as we do in the case with smoke and fire. It is, as it were, spontaneously associated with that which we have already felt within ourselves. So we argue that music is a sign insofar as or

because it is a likeness. The music is called angry because the music imitates the passion, unlike the words which express the passion, but do not resemble it. One's tone of voice, to be sure, may resemble the passion, but that's an imitation like that which one finds in music.

Our second argument is taken from the human voice, which is the primary musical instrument. The other instruments are thought of as imitations and in some way derivative of the human voice. We speak of these instruments as having "voices". By nature, the power and the function of our voice is to express what is within the soul. This comes about in two ways. First of all, through language, which signifies the conceptions of our mind. And secondly, through the other sounds, such as groans, sighs, laughs, screams and the like, which signify the passions of the soul. Now words are not, as such, the material means of music. One may sing the words, but music does not consist essentially of words. Putting it better, it's not insofar as the voice forms words that it is the means of music. Thus it must be insofar as it naturally expresses the passions that it is the means of music. Art presupposes nature. So, since the form must fit the matter, and the end the means, what is naturally adapted to expressing the passions, is also apt to imitate them.

The third argument is taken from the nature of sound in general, and the voice in particular. The voice, in particular, is a movement of a kind, just as the passions of the soul are movements. More particularly, in each case we have a movement with a beginning, middle, and end. The beginning is what comes before everything else, the middle is something that has something coming before it and something after, and the end is what has other things before it and nothing after. We find this in the passions: they are aroused, they reach a certain intensity or climax, and then they are resolved and in a sense purged. We see this most clearly in sorrow. Sorrow has a certain growth, a certain arousal, a certain reaching for some intensity or climax, and then come the tears, which in a way relieve and purge the passion, and leave the soul in a calm state. We see this in music also, even in so basic a whole as the major scale. It has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Listen to someone singing: DO RE MI FA SO LA TI ... I stopped, but I didn't

come to an end. I had there a beginning and a middle, but no end. We naturally reach for the completion, which we've been led to expect from the notes that have been sung beforehand. We're looking for resolution of the tension which has been generated by those notes. We have a middle, too, because the steps in the scale are not each exactly like the one before. DO, RE, MI, FA. To go from MI to FA is not the same as to go from DO to RE, or RE to MI. There's a certain otherness there. We are progressing through something different than what we had at the beginning. And yet, if I sing only DO RE MI FA ...I don't reach a resolution. That's the third argument.

The fourth argument is from the effect music has on us, arousing or exciting or soothing, as the case may be. This we will discuss more fully in the next part of our lecture, but here we can ask this question: How can music do this unless it is a likeness of the passions it excites? Contrast this with other cases. Take anger, for example, about something said or something done. We become angry when we hear of an injustice, because we are presented with an object that naturally excites anger. Or something might be done to us that makes us angry -someone strikes us or insults us. It does not seem that music does either of these things. Music does not bring about its effect on us by presenting us with the object of the passion. We do find something like this in an opera, where the plot and the incident tells us what the object of the passion is, but the music does not of itself do this. Nor does music do something else to us, as a result of which the passion is aroused. The arousal of the passion is the effect, right then and there. So it seems we cannot find any explanation for the fact that music excites the passions the way it does, except by supposing that it's a likeness of those passions. Like begets like.

Next, we observe that music is unique or nearly so among the fine arts in the sort of likeness it has to its object. For it has an intrinsic likeness to the object it imitates as opposed to imitating simply through a likeness of its accidents. For example, in a picture a man is represented by certain accidents which go with human nature and character: colors, lines, proportions, and so forth. What is on the canvas is a likeness of these first and through itself, and

thus a likeness of a man only *per accidens*, as it were. That is, it's a likeness of the man insofar as it is a likeness of something in the man. Likewise in a play, or story, where the means are words, the thoughts and passions of the characters are represented through signs which are not themselves likenesses of their thoughts and passions. Words may be the signs of passions and of thoughts, but they are not such by reason of resembling them.

This is not so in music. It does not imitate the passion through being a likeness of something that goes with the passion, but through being an intrinsic likeness of the passion itself. It is an ordered movement of tones imitating the ordered movement of the passions. Now we observe something further. Music arouses or excites and, if good, purges the passions that it imitates. But here we need to make a couple of clarifications. We do not mean, here, the delight in imitation, which is perhaps a passion of sorts, but something that happens even when we are not moved in the way that music can move us. That is to say, we can delight in the excellence of an imitation precisely as such without being moved by the passion being imitated. So, in talking about the way music moves us, we take for granted that we can be delighted by the imitation as imitation. But there is something further: there is engendered in us a passion which is of the sort being imitated.

Secondly, we do not mean that the passion which is elicited is exactly the same as the passion imitated. Consider, to manifest this, the passions of pity and fear, which are aroused by the tribulations of a tragic hero. Pity, or *misericordia* in Latin, is a sadness at the misfortunes of another by reason of a closeness of that other to oneself. *Misericordia* means "misery at heart". This sadness experienced in a play, however, is not quite the same sadness that one would feel at the misfortunes of one's living friends. It's something of quite a different order of intensity and seriousness. Nevertheless, it is still sadness, not some totally different or unrelated passion. Likewise, the fear that I feel when disaster impends in a tragedy is not quite the fear that I would feel if the disaster were hanging over me. And yet, it is fear.

Let's look at some arguments or signs for this. A very simple and basic sign is the singing of a lullaby to a baby as you rock him to sleep. The mother is not concerned with giving the child a delight in imitation, although I suppose that could happen. But what happens is this: the music which imitates an ordered and peaceful passion, tends to order the passions within the soul of the child, just as the steady movements of the rocking chair tend to put the movements which within the child are disordered and agitated into some kind of an order. As a result, the child is relaxed, and he can go to sleep. So the music engenders within the child a condition like unto that which it imitates. You don't play Beethoven's Ninth to get him to sleep.

A baser example is found in seduction. People recognize that the seducer makes use of a certain kind of music in order to put his victim in the mood. He does not play Sousa marches. Rather, he finds music of a kind that will engender certain passions which are like those which it imitates, passions that pertain to the concupiscible part of the soul, what Plato calls the desiring part of the soul.

The third example pertains to the spirited part of the soul: military or martial music. This kind of music seems to imitate or represent the passions appropriate to a warrior, which are boldness, anger, and hope. And such music does have this effect upon those who listen to it. I don't hope ever to march into battle with sword and shield, but if ever I do, I hope there will be bagpipes squealing in the background because they have a way of stirring up the martial spirit in me.

The final example is church music. We all consider music as being in some way essential to worship. Worship is not itself passion, but the condition of your passions when you worship makes a difference to how well you worship. There is a proper emotional condition in which you can be and should be when you are praying and honoring God. There is imitation and enjoyment, of course, because that is inseparable--you can't help enjoying a beautiful piece of church music. But that is not the end intended. The immediate end here is to dispose you to worship by putting

your emotions in that condition that's appropriate for one who worships. Here's a quotation from Pope Paul the Sixth about music:

Singing is a necessity of love, and manifests it. Listen to how St. Augustine speaks about it: "Singing comes from love, and again, singing and chanting is characteristic of those who love. A natural sign of love, singing has, therefore, an irreplaceable role in Christian worship, which is service of charity. Since *de illo quam amas cantare vis* [since about Him Whom you love, you desire to sing]."

Our love for God is also expressed in singing. This singing expresses our love for God, and disposes us to that love.

When we put all this together with our former observations, we can see why music can have so powerful an effect upon the soul. Contrast this with an artwork whose effect is through words. Reason, in that case, mediates. One has, in a way, the distance that the knower has from the object known. Knowledge is sometimes defined as taking on the form of another thing as the form of another, and not as one's own. But it's not this way in music. Here, the impression on the passions is not indirect, by means of knowledge (through the thing as understood, if you will), but direct. The likeness bears directly on the passion itself.

One is reminded of a passage in the dialogue *Protagoras*, where a young friend of Socrates comes to him full of enthusiasm one morning, proposing to go out and receive instruction from Protagoras. Socrates says a number of things to this young man (his name is Hippocrates, I think), and one of them is a warning. He advises him to think carefully about what he is about to do. For buying instruction it's not like buying something one can take home, put in a jar, and think about for a while before using. For instruction is received directly into the soul, and one will be made better or worse by it right then and there, and not from some further use that one may or may not make of it. The arousal of passions in music is of such a sort. The effect that music has on the soul is not mediated by a consideration of reason, not even by the words, but it goes directly from the imitation to the passions.

This leads us to a further point. The passions imitated and thus elicited in us by music are either reasonable, or unreasonable. Those of you who have read Aristotle's *Ethics* will remember that in the beginning he divides the soul into two parts --the rational part and the irrational part. By the rational part, he means reason itself. And he observes that in the irrational part of the soul, there are powers which, although they are not reason, are capable of being subject to reason, and therefore participate in reason. Unlike, for example, the digestive powers, about which reason can do nothing, the passions are, though not themselves reason, capable of being put in some kind of rational order. One might say that much of the business of living a good life is getting one's passions subordinated to reason, so that they do not war with reason, but incline one in harmony with what is reasonable. From this, we can see explicitly the moral or educative power of music. Our passions become reasonable when they are moved, again and again, in accord with reason. Thus the consequence of repeatedly listening to music in which there is a reasonable movement of the passions imitated is that one is disposed, at least, to being moved that way with respect to that passion. On the other hand, if one is moved again and again by imitations in which the passions are moved unreasonably, one is disposed accordingly. This is especially so insofar as one is pleased by the music. A man's character corresponds with his pleasures. If you are pleased with the irrational often enough, you become irrational yourself.

Here's a quotation from St. Thomas that applies directly to the poet, but applies, I think, to music as well. He says, "It pertains to the poet to lead one to virtue through a decent (or suitable) representation" (Commentary on Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, Prologue) From the way that he represents things, the poet leads you to feel about them in a certain way. Something like that is true of music also. If music is imitation of the passions, and if the passions can be reasonable or unreasonable, then imitation of the reasonable passions, if it evokes similar passions within the soul, will dispose one to virtue. That will be the very best thing that music can do. Of course, if music is unreasonable, if it imitates an unreasonable movement of the passions, and the soul is moved by



and delights in the movement, then the soul will become unreasonable, and that would be the worst thing music can do.

Let us talk a little bit further about the reasonable and the unreasonable in music. From what we have said, the reasonable and unreasonable in music will correspond to the reasonable and the unreasonable in the passions that are imitated. We observe two ways of being unreasonable, or at least of recognizing the unreasonable, in our passions. One is where we compare the passion to the object. Let's take anger. You say, "He shouldn't be angry about that" or "That doesn't deserve as much anger as he feels". A small thing, big anger. You can judge a passion reasonable or unreasonable in comparison with its object. Clearly, you can't do that in music, because music does not make present to you the object of the passion being imitated. I might hear angry music, but I don't know why the anger came about. I only know that there is anger. But there is another way in which you see reason and unreason in the passions, which doesn't require you to have seen the object. This comes about when we see in the passion itself some kind of excess, or possibly defect (but usually excess). Take the same example, anger. We sometimes speak of a person who got angry, saying, "He blew up". What does that mean? We have observed something in the passion which is disordered and we see it as disordered even without comparing it to the object that provoked it. We say the passion has escaped the bounds of reason. He was no longer in control of himself, the passion was in control of him. This is the unreasonable that we can see in music.

We mentioned before the case of opera. One argument that can be made for the excellence of opera as an art form lies precisely in the fact that the opera presents us also with the object of the passion. We have, as it were, two different ways of assessing the character of the passion: what the character is angry about (if anger is the passion), and also the mode of his anger. In this case, the words and story illuminate the music, and the music illuminates them.

Where do we find the unreasonable in music? Here is where my own, I suppose fortunate, lack of experience stands somewhat

in my way. I'm not one of those people who comes back to tell you of the days when I used to like the stuff, but I was rescued from it by some extraordinary circumstances --the grace of God or something like that. "I alone have survived to tell you." That puts me at a certain disadvantage in discussing specific types of disorder in music, because I can never quite figure out what it is that appeals to people in such music. When you've been moved by something like that yourself, then perhaps later, and in a more sober frame of mind, you can see what it was that appealed to you in that music and what the specific disorder was. But that's hard to do when you've never been involved in that kind of music. I disliked jazz from the first moment I heard it, and I was pretty small. I've never liked rock music even a little tiny bit. If I had, there would be certain aspects of the subject I could deal with a little more properly than I am capable of doing here. So, I have to talk about the unreasonable, to a certain extent, on more general terms.

I thought of three ways in which, it seems to me, I've experienced the irrational in music. First of all, where there is no beginning, middle, and end, or where one of these is lacking. I suppose you can't be lacking a beginning if you've got an end, but maybe that's possible. We see this particular disorder in mood music, which seems never to start and never to stop, and therefore never to begin and never to end. The cause of this impression may be that one pays only half attention to it, and comes in the middle of it and leaves before it's done. Here's a case, then, where a lack of experience stands in my way. And I don't intend to investigate this to find out which is the case.

One might make a general point here, about beginning, middle, and end. Any divisible thing that has no beginning, middle, and end, is irrational, it can't be understood. This pertains to music insofar as it is some kind of work of reason. Anything which is divisible, and is a work of reason, must have a beginning, middle, and end.

For the second example of this kind of music, a particular piece of classical music comes to mind: Ravel's *Bolero*. This music has a beginning, and a sort of middle, but it has no end. It simply

reaches a greater and greater intensity and then there's a crash, and that's it. There's no completion, there's only disintegration. I'm not surprised to read that at its premiere there was a riot. Certain kinds of popular music, especially rock music, exhibit this character likewise. Sometimes the music just stops. It does not come to an end, it just stops. Sometimes it seems like it will never stop, in the sense that it seems to fade away without coming to any kind of a term, and one has a horrible feeling that it's going on forever somewhere else.

Most of the rock music I've heard seems to aim at a kind of irrational excitement, pursued, in a way, for its own sake. In such music, you find no resolution, but only exhaustion. It's like a binge or an orgy; it stops when people are tired out. It has no natural term. One's reminded of the story about some Victorian drinking parties, which were over once every guest had slipped under the table. Such celebrations don't have any internal structure to them, they don't have a beginning, middle, and end, they only go on until they stop. Isn't there a popular song, or one of those rock songs, that says, "I can't get no satisfaction?" Well, if what this music aims at is a sort of permanent emotional high, which is against the very nature of the emotions insofar as they are something of nature (and therefore the work of divine reason), if one tries to stay "up there" forever, then of course one doesn't get any satisfaction. The emotions should be finite movements that have beginnings, middles, and ends.

One is reminded of Don Juan, who is never satisfied with the conquests he has made; he must always make another conquest, and yet another conquest. That, of course, is because one cannot find any completion if there is nothing beyond conquest. One can't get any satisfaction. There is a way of winning a woman, after you court her, but that terminates in marriage and a family. That's the end. The courtship is the beginning; the winning of the woman you wish to marry is the middle. It's not the end. You're not satisfied with just victory.

We find this also in a more drastic way in what's called atonal music, in which the character of the notes relative to one another is

of such a character that there's no sense of movement from beginning to end. Every note is equally a beginning, every note is equally an end, and they are played on a sequence that is arbitrarily determined and not according to a natural curve like that to be found in a movement itself. The composers of such music invent arbitrary rules to determine progression, because there's no progression natural within the music itself. It's not like the major scale that I sang, in which, when I go up to TI, you expect the DO. It's no surprise. This is one kind of defect in music that makes music irrational--that it has no proper beginning, middle, or end.

A second way for music to be irrational is when there is an excess or deficiency within the music, a kind of disproportion, and especially by way of excess. Music which is deficient usually does not attract continued listening and therefore doesn't have an effect. But music which is excessive within itself can attract people and bring them back again and again. I think this excess is where the passion escapes, more or less, the rule of reason. This is perceivable within the music. You see this in the music of the romantic era when it's contrasted with the classical--Mozart, Haydn, Handel, Bach, and other music of that era. In fact, you do find a particular perfection to the music of the eighteenth century, in that there is a harmony of passion with reason and a subordination of passion to reason which does not destroy the passion, but enhances it, and gives it a proper order. But with romantic music, and even, in a way, with Beethoven (who is a transitional figure and has been called the first modern musician), we find something of excess in the passions. We find in Beethoven, for example, *enthusiasm*, which is an excess of passion relative to reason that we don't find in the older composers. At the end of the Ninth Symphony, and to a certain extent in the Fifth Symphony as well, we see passion straining beyond the limits of right reason.

Another example of this, which is perhaps a little more accessible here, is seen in comparing certain kinds of dancing. One is surprised to read that when the waltz was first introduced as a form of dancing, it was quite controversial. It was considered improper and unfit for civilized human beings. This was in contrast to certain dance forms that had prevailed beforehand, for example,

the minuet. When you compare the minuet to the waltz, you do see in some way what was troubling those critics. In the minuet you see much more clearly the subordination of passion to reason in the dignity and the grace of the movements of the dancers. In the waltz, there's a kind of "letting oneself go". Not entirely, but more so than in the minuet. It is not so much, as in the minuet, the music of sober enjoyment, but the music of intoxication. We see that carried to its limit in Ravel's *La Valse*, which, like much of the rest of his music, does illustrate certain standard deviations from the norm.

You can then compare the waltz to the "swing," which I've seen performed on this campus, and in which you see there's an even greater sense of letting oneself go. Is it utterly beyond the bounds of right reason? I wouldn't go so far as to say that, but when compared to the waltz and the minuet, one sees a successive loosening of the control of reason over the passions. One is to a greater extent possessed by the music when one listens.

A third kind of excess is where variety is pursued to excess. I suppose there's a kind of a mean you have to hit here. Too much regularity leads to monotony, too much variety or difference leads to agitation and incomprehensibility. This problem occurs in music particularly when the irregular becomes in some way the rule. Something that might have been used by an earlier composer for the sake of a particular effect now becomes the dominant character of the music. Syncopation is an example. Where difference is the end, it easily leads to what is ugly and perverse. One sees this in the evolution of rock music from the ugly to the perverse. This degradation is very clearly perceived in the behavior and the appearance of those who sing, in the audience when they listen, and in the dancing that naturally goes with that kind of music (if you can dance to it); all of these indicate the degeneration of what was, to begin with, something different, but in which difference was pursued to the point of the ugly and the perverse.

We find another sign in the choice of musical instruments. One wonders about the choice of some of the instruments that are made. For example, in jazz. You can write jazz for all kinds of instruments, they say, but certain instruments are typical. For

example, among wind instruments, the saxophone. Why is that? Aristotle has a very interesting passage in which he discusses the beauty of animals. He says that the higher animals are more beautiful than the lower animals. The animals that most resemble man are the most beautiful. But then he raises an objection: 'What about the apes? Are they not of all animals the most like man? And yet, are they not ugly?' He answers that by reason of that very closeness, the ape seems more like a caricature of man than a likeness of man. It seems like a man gone wrong, rather than another species having its own proper perfection. I think something like that is true about the saxophone. It has, in certain registers, an uncanny resemblance to the human voice, but the human voice gone wrong. Just enough off to be irritating. If it were, like a clarinet or a violin, more distant, it would seem more like a likeness or an image, and not like a caricature. I've often thought that the music itself (I'm not sure what defines jazz as an art form) is a kind of parody of music, a kind of musical making fun of music. It is somehow deliberately grotesque, and chooses the ugly as a means. But now I'm going into denunciation, so I'll stop.

This talk lacks a certain focus on specific pieces because of my own lack of experience, but I might have had a few more generalities about some items if I had had more experience of them. A lot of other examples might come up in the question period; it seems pointless to discuss them now. There is a final point which I think is worth considering briefly, it may even be essential. There is a limitation in what music can imitate, by reason of the things we said beforehand. The passions of bad men, in their very disorder, cannot sufficiently be imitated by music and for the reasons we gave. They would necessarily themselves be ugly and disordered, and to the extent that they caused within you a sympathetic movement they would be degrading. The object of imitation must be carefully chosen by the musician, and he must be careful not to make those passions which, in ordinary experience, tend to be ugly and disordered, be ugly and disordered in his imitations. It's not true, then, that music has the same range as drama or literature. A great many more things can be put before us in words without indecency than can be put before us in pictures. Much the same thing is true about sounds, and about music. A great many more

things can be imitated decently in words than can be imitated in musical sounds, precisely because of music's direct and immediate effect upon the passions of the soul.

This fact leads the great composers to have a certain caution in imitating certain conditions and passions. They realize they're liable, if they're too true to life, to defeat the ultimate end of music by making something that's ugly and degrading.

Let me finish with a quotation from Mozart about one of his operas, where he brings out this point quite nicely. He's talking to his father in a letter about the composition "The Abduction from the Seraglio", a comic opera, and he's talking about one character, Osmin. This is what he says:

As Osmin's rage gradually increases, there comes, just when the aria seems to end, the allegro, which is in a totally different measure and in a different key. This is bound to be very effective. For just as a man in such a towering rage oversteps all the bounds of order, moderation, and propriety, and completely forgets himself, so must the music, too, forget itself. But, as passions, whether violent or not, must never be expressed in such a way as to excite disgust, and as music, even in the most terrible situations, must never offend the ear, but must please the hearer, or, in other words, must never cease to be music, I have gone from F, the key in which the aria was written, not into a remote key, but into a related one. Not, however, into its nearest relative, D minor, but into the more remote A minor.

I don't understand the last part of that, but I understand the general principle. Mozart is, in his music, anxious, above all, to preserve the mean between excess and deficiency, and in realizing that ideal of art, he also realizes in particular how it must be observed in music, and that the representation of ugly passions in music cannot itself be ugly. It must be given a restraint and order that such passions seldom have in life.

So, we'll give Mozart the last word.

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