

Catharsis and Therapy of the Emotions in Iamblichus

HANDOUT

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1. Iamblichus, *Reply to Porphyry (De mysteriis)* I.11.30.4-15 Saffrey-Segonds:

Ἔχει δ' ἔτι ταῦτα καὶ ἄλλον λόγον τοιοῦτον. Αἱ δυνάμεις τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων παθημάτων τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν πάντη μὲν εἰργόμεναι καθίστανται σφοδρότεραι· εἰς ἐνέργειαν δὲ βραχεῖαν καὶ ἄχρι τοῦ συμμέτρου προαγόμεναι χαίρουσι **μετρίως** καὶ ἀποπληροῦνται, καὶ ἐντεῦθεν **ἀποκαθαιρόμεναι** πειθοῖ καὶ οὐ πρὸς βίαν ἀποπαύονται.

Διὰ δὴ τοῦτο ἔν τε κωμῳδία καὶ τραγῳδία ἀλλότρια πάθη θεωροῦντες ἴσταμεν τὰ οἰκεῖα πάθη καὶ **μετρίωτερα** ἀπεργαζόμεθα καὶ **ἀποκαθαίρομεν**· ἐν τε τοῖς ἱεροῖς θεάμασι τισι καὶ ἀκούσμασι τῶν αἰσχυρῶν ἀπολυόμεθα τῆς ἐπὶ τῶν ἔργων ἀπ' αὐτῶν συμπιπτούσης βλάβης.

There is also another similar point to be made on this matter. The powers of the human emotions that are within us, when they are repressed, become correspondingly stronger; but if one exercises them in brief bursts and within reasonable limits, they enjoy **moderate** relief and find satisfaction and hence, **being 'purified'** are laid to rest through persuasion, and not by violence. That is why, when we behold the emotions of others both in comedy and in tragedy, we stabilise our own emotions, and render them more **moderate**, and **purify** them; and similarly in the sacred rites, by viewing and listening to obscenities we are freed from the harm that would befall us if we practised them. (Trans. E. Clarke, J. Dillon and J. Hershbelle, modified)

Aristotle on *catharsis* in tragedy: *Poetics* 6.1449b24-7.

2. Iamblichus, *Reply to Porphyry (De mysteriis)* III.9.

Ἄ δὲ λέγεις ἐπὶ τούτοις ἐστὶ ταῦτα· ὥς τῶν ἐξισταμένων ἐνιοὶ τινες αὐλῶν ἀκούοντες ἢ κυμβάλων ἢ τυμπάνων ἢ τινος μέλους ἐνθουσιῶσιν, ὥς οἱ τε κορυβαντιζόμενοι καὶ οἱ τῷ Σαβαζίῳ κάτοχοι καὶ οἱ μητρίζοντες· δεῖ δὴ καὶ περὶ τούτων τὰς αἰτίας διελθεῖν πῶς τε γίνονται, ἐπιτελούμενά τε τίνα ἔχει λόγον.

Τὸ μὲν οὖν κινητικὸν τι καὶ παθητικὸν εἶναι τὴν μουσικὴν, καὶ τὸ τῶν αὐλῶν ἐμποιεῖν ἢ ἱατρεῦειν τὰ πάθη τῆς παρατροπῆς, καὶ τὸ μεθιστάναι τὰς τοῦ σώματος κράσεις ἢ διαθέσεις τὴν μουσικὴν, καὶ τὸ ἄλλοις μὲν μέλεσιν ἀναβακχεύεσθαι ἄλλοις δ' ἀποπαύεσθαι τῆς βακχείας, καὶ πῶς αἱ τούτων διαφοραὶ πρὸς τὰς τῆς ψυχῆς ἐκάστας διαθέσεις προσαρμόττουσι, καὶ ὅτι τὸ ἄστατον καὶ ἀκατάστατον μέλος πρὸς τὰς ἐκστάσεις οἰκεῖον, οἷα δὴ ἐστὶ τὰ Ὀλύμπου, καὶ ὅσα τοιαῦτα λέγεται, πάντα ἀλλοτρίως μοι δοκεῖ λέγεσθαι πρὸς τὸν ἐνθουσιασμόν· φυσικὰ τε γάρ ἐστι καὶ ἀνθρώπινα καὶ τέχνης ἡμετέρας ἔργα· τὸ δὲ θεῖον ἐν αὐτοῖς οὐδ' ὅπως οὐδὲν διαφαίνεται.

Μᾶλλον οὖν ἐκεῖνα λέγομεν, ὥς ἡχοὶ τε καὶ μέλη καθιέρωνται τοῖς θεοῖς οἰκεῖως ἐκάστοις, συγγενεῖα τε αὐτοῖς ἀποδέδοται προσφόρως κατὰ τὰς οἰκείας ἐκάστων τάξεις καὶ δυνάμεις καὶ τὰς ἐν αὐτῷ <τῷ> παντὶ κινήσεις καὶ τὰς ἀπὸ τῶν κινήσεων ροιζουμένας ἐναρμονίους φωνάς· κατὰ δὴ τὰς τοιαύτας τῶν μελῶν πρὸς τοὺς θεοὺς οἰκειότητος παρουσία τε αὐτῶν γίνεσθαι (οὐδὲ γάρ ἐστὶ τι τὸ διεῖργον), ὥστε μετέχειν αὐτῶν εὐθύς τὸ τὴν τυχοῦσαν ἔχον

πρὸς αὐτοὺς ὁμοιότητα, κατοχὴ τε συνίσταται εὐθὺς τελεία καὶ πλήρως τῆς κρείττονος οὐσίας καὶ δυνάμεως. Οὐχ ὅτι τὸ σῶμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ ἀλλήλοις ἐστὶ **συμπαθῇ** καὶ **συμπάσχει** τοῖς μέλεσιν, ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ τῆς θείας ἁρμονίας ἢ τῶν θεῶν ἐπίπνοια οὐκ ἀφέστηκεν, οἰκειωθείσα δὲ πρὸς αὐτὴν κατ' ἀρχὰς μετέχεται ὑπ' αὐτῆς ἐν μέτροις τοῖς προσήκουσιν· ἔχει δὲ καὶ τὸ ἀνεγείρεσθαι καὶ τὸ ἀποπαύεσθαι κατὰ τὴν τῶν θεῶν τάξιν ἐκάτερον. **Ἀπέρασιν** δὲ καὶ **ἀποκάθαρσιν** **ἱατρείαν** τε οὐδαμῶς αὐτὸ κλητέον. Οὐδὲ γὰρ κατὰ νόσημά τι ἢ πλεονασμὸν ἢ περίττωμα πρῶτως ἐν ἡμῖν ἐμφύεται, θεία δ' αὐτοῦ συνίσταται ἢ πᾶσα ἄνωθεν ἀρχὴ καὶ καταβολή.

Ἄλλ' οὐδὲ τοῦτο δεῖ λέγειν, ὥς ἡ ψυχὴ πρῶτως ὑφέστηκεν ἐξ ἁρμονίας καὶ ῥυθμοῦ· ἔστι γὰρ οὕτω ψυχῆς μόνης οἰκεῖος ὁ ἐνθουσιασμός· βέλτιον οὖν καὶ τὴν τοιαύτην ἀπόφασιν ἐκεῖσε μετάγειν, ὅτι δὴ ἡ ψυχὴ, πρὶν καὶ τῷ σώματι δοῦναι ἑαυτήν, τῆς θείας ἁρμονίας κατήκουεν· οὐκοῦν καὶ ἐπειδὴν εἰς σῶμα ἀφίκεται, ὅσα ἂν μέλη τοιαῦτα ἀκούσῃ οἷα μάλιστα διασώζει τὸ θεῖον ἵχνος τῆς ἁρμονίας, **ἀσπάζεται** ταῦτα καὶ ἀναμιμνήσκειται ἀπ' αὐτῶν τῆς θείας ἁρμονίας καὶ πρὸς αὐτὴν φέρεται καὶ **οἰκειοῦται**, μεταλαμβάνει τε αὐτῆς ὅσον οἷόν τε αὐτῆς μετέχειν.

In addition to these things, you say the following: 'Some of these ecstasies, when hearing pipes, cymbals, tambourines or some tune, become possessed as, for example, the Korybantes, those possessed by Sabazios, and those serving the Great Mother.' It is thus necessary to discuss their causes, how they came into being, and what reason there is for performing these rites.

Well, then: that music is moving and sensuous, and that the sound of pipes causes or heals disordered passions; that music displaces the temperaments or dispositions of the body; that by some tunes the Bacchic frenzy is aroused, but by others, the Bacchic frenzy is made to cease, and how the differences of these accord with the individual dispositions of the soul; and that the unstable and irregular tune is proper to ecstasies, such as those of Olympus, and all which are said to be such: all this seems to me to be irrelevant when mentioned in connection with divine possession. For these are both physical and human, and accomplishments of our skill, and the divine is in no way manifested in them.

What we would rather say, then, is this: that those things such as sounds and tunes are properly consecrated to each of the gods, and kinship is properly assigned to them in accord with their proper orders and powers, the motions in the universe itself and the harmonious sounds rushing from its motions. It is, then, in virtue of such connections of the tunes with the gods that their presence occurs (for nothing intervenes to stop them) so that whatever has a fortuitous likeness with them, immediately participates in them, and a total possession and filling with superior being and power takes place at once. It is not that the body and soul **interact with** one another or with the tones, but since the inspiration of the gods is not separated from the divine harmony, having been allied with it from the beginning, it is shared by it in suitable measures. Each of them enjoys wakefulness and repose, each singly, according to the order of the gods. But this is never to be called a **purging, purification or cure**; for it does not grow in us primarily on account of any disease, superabundance, or excess, but its whole origin from above and descent below is divine.

But one should not even claim this, that the soul primarily consists of harmony and rhythm; for in that case divine possession would belong to the soul alone. It is better, then, to bring our discourse back to this assertion; before it gave itself to the body, the soul heard the divine harmony. And accordingly even when it entered the body, such tunes as it hears which

especially preserve the divine trace of harmony, it **welcomes** these and is reminded by them of the divine harmony; it is also borne along with this harmony and has an **affinity** with it, and shares as much as can be shared of it. (Trans. E. Clarke, J. Dillon and J. Hershbelle, modified)

3. Iamblichus, *On the Pythagorean Life* 15 (64)

Ἦγούμενος δὲ πρώτην εἶναι τοῖς ἀνθρώποις τὴν δι' αἰσθήσεως προσφερομένην ἐπιμέλειαν, εἴ τις καλὰ μὲν ὀρώη καὶ σχήματα καὶ εἶδη, καλῶν δὲ ἀκούοι ῥυθμῶν καὶ μελῶν, τὴν διὰ μουσικῆς παιδευσιν πρώτην κατεστήσατο διὰ τε μελῶν τινῶν καὶ ῥυθμῶν, ἀφ' ὧν τρόπων τε καὶ παθῶν ἀνθρωπίνων ἰάσεις ἐγίγνοντο ἀρμονίαι τε τῶν τῆς ψυχῆς δυνάμεων, ὥσπερ εἶχον ἐξ ἀρχῆς, συνήγοντο, σωματικῶν τε καὶ ψυχικῶν νοσημάτων καταστολαὶ καὶ ἀφυγισμοὶ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ ἐπενοοῦντο. καὶ νῆ Δία τὸ ὑπὲρ πάντα ταῦτα λόγου ἄξιον, ὅτι τοῖς μὲν γνωρίμοις τὰς λεγομένας ἐξαρτύσεις τε καὶ ἐπαφὰς συνέταττε καὶ συνηρμόζετο, δαιμονίως μηχανώμενος κεράσματά τινων μελῶν διατονικῶν τε καὶ χρωματικῶν καὶ ἐναρμονίων, δι' ὧν ῥαδίως εἰς τὰ ἐναντία περιέτρεπε καὶ περιῆγε τὰ τῆς ψυχῆς πάθη νέον ἐν αὐτοῖς **ἀλόγως** συνιστάμενα καὶ ὑποφυόμενα, λύπας καὶ ὀργὰς καὶ ἐλέους καὶ ζήλους ἀτόπους καὶ φόβους, ἐπιθυμίας τε παντοίας καὶ θυμοὺς καὶ ὀρέξεις καὶ χαννώσεις καὶ ὑπιότιτας καὶ σφοδρότητας, ἐπανορθούμενος πρὸς ἀρετὴν τούτων ἕκαστον διὰ τῶν προσηκόντων μελῶν ὡς διὰ τινων σωτηρίων συγκεκριμένων φαρμάκων.

He thought that the training of people begins with the senses, when we see beautiful shapes and forms and hear beautiful rhythms and melodies. So the first stage of his system of education was music: songs and rhythms from which came healing of human temperaments and emotions. The original harmony of the soul's powers was restored, and Pythagoras devised remission, and complete recovery, from diseases affecting both body and soul. It is especially remarkable that he orchestrated for his pupils what they call 'arrangements' and 'treatments'. He made, with supernatural skill, blends of diatonic and chromatic and enharmonic melodies, which easily transformed into their opposites the emotions of the soul which had lately **without reason** arisen or were beginning to grow in his students: grief, anger, pity, misplaced envy, fear; all kinds of desires, appetite, wanting; empty conceit, depression, violence. All these he restored to virtue, using the appropriate melodies like mixtures of curative drugs. (Trans. G. Clark, modified)

See also *On the Pythagorean Life* 25.

4. Seven levels of virtue in post-Iamblichean Neoplatonism: Marinus, *Life of Proclus*; Olympiodorus, *Commentary on the Phaedo* 8.2-4; Damascius, *Commentary on the Phaedo* I.138-44. Full discussion in H.-D. Saffrey and A.-Ph. Segonds (eds.), *Marinus. Proclus ou sur le bonheur* (Paris 2001) lxix-xcviii.

5. Plato, *Republic* 6.500d and 4.430c2-3; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.13.1144b1-18 (on natural virtue), *Nic. Eth.* 2.1-4 (on habituation) and 10.7-8 (on θεωρία). On the Aristotelian background, the place of Iamblichus in the extension of the scale of virtues and on habituated (or ethical) and civic (or political) virtue in particular, see D.J. O'Meara, *Platonopolis* (Oxford 2003) 46-9.

6. Plotinus, *Ennead* I.2 (19) and also *Ennead* I.3 (20).6.18 (natural virtue); Porphyry, *Sententiae* 32. For discussion of these texts, see J. Dillon, 'Plotinus, Philo and Origen on the Grades of Virtue' in H.-D. Blume and F. Mann (eds.), *Platonismus und Christentum*.

Festschrift für Heinrich Dörrie (Münster 1983) 92-105, reprinted in J. Dillon, *The Golden Chain* (Aldershot 1990) Essay XVIII, and R. Chiaradonna, 'Ethics and the Hierarchy of Virtues from Plotinus to Iamblichus' in A. Marmodoro and S. Xenophontos (eds.), *The Reception of Greek Ethics in Late Antiquity and Byzantium* (Cambridge 2021) 36-51.

7. Proclus, *Commentary on the Republic* I.49.13-51.25; Olympiodorus, *Commentary on the Gorgias* §33.3.

8. Aristotle, *Politics* 8.7.1341b32-1342b34: music can be used for *catharsis*; the therapeutic effect of music in religious rites (cf. Plato, *Ion* 536c); criticism of what Socrates says about musical modes and instruments in Plato, *Republic* 3.398c-400e.

9. Pythagorean therapy of the emotions: Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride* 384a: the Pythagoreans used the sound of the lyre to charm and cure the emotional and irrational part of the soul (τὸ ἐμπαθὲς καὶ ἄλογον τῆς ψυχῆς); Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Mathematicos* 6.8; Olympiodorus, *Commentary on the Gorgias* §5.3, and other passages cited in R. Jackson, K. Lycos and H. Tarrant (trans.), *Olympiodorus, Commentary on Plato's Gorgias* (Leiden 1998) 93, n.161. D.J. O'Meara in 'The Music of Philosophy in Late Antiquity' in R.W. Sharples (ed.), *Philosophy and the Sciences in Antiquity* (Aldershot 2005) 140-41, argues that Olympiodorus regards Pythagorean music therapy as operating at the level of habituated virtue.

10. A. Sheppard, 'Music Therapy in Neoplatonism' in R.W. Sharples (ed.), *Philosophy and the Sciences in Antiquity* (Aldershot 2005) 151-2.

11. Theophrastus fr.716, II.130-1: μία δὲ φύσις τῆς μουσικῆς· κίνησις τῆς ψυχῆς ἢ κατ' ἀπόλυσιν γινομένη τῶν διὰ τὰ πάθη κακῶν. 'The nature of music is one. It is the movement of the soul that occurs in correspondence with its release from the evils due to the emotions' (trans. A. Barker).

12. (a) Porphyry, *Sententiae* 32.16-18 διὸ καὶ καθάρσεις αὐτὰι λέγονται, ἐν ἀποχῇ θεωρούμεναι τῶν μετὰ τοῦ σώματος πράξεων καὶ **συμπαθειῶν** τῶν πρὸς αὐτό. 'For this reason, these are also called "purifications", consisting in abstention from actions in concert with the body and from **participating in the emotions** that affect it'; *Sententiae* 32.25-6 τὸ δὲ γε μὴ **ὁμοπαθεῖν** συνίστησι τὸ σωφρονεῖν. 'Self-control is the result of not **sharing in emotions**' (trans. Dillon-Gerson, modified).

(b) Plotinus, *Ennead* I.2.5.9-11 τὰς δὲ ἀλγηδόνας ἀφαιροῦσαν καί, εἰ μὴ οἶόν τε, πρῶως φέρουσιν καὶ ἐλάττους τιθεῖσιν τῷ μὴ **συμπάσχειν**. '<The soul> gets rid of pains or if it cannot, bears them quietly and makes them less by not **suffering along with the body**' (trans. Armstrong, modified).

13. Music and mathematics in Plato: *Timaeus* 34-37, esp. 35b-36b; 42e-44a; 69c-72d; 47d-e; *Republic* 7.531a-c; 10.617b; 3.401d-402c, esp. 402a (ἀσπάζοιτο, οἰκειότης).

14. Iamblichus, *On the Pythagorean Life* 15 (65.9-66.5)

ἑαυτῷ δὲ οὐκέθ' ὁμοίως, δι' ὀργάνων ἢ καὶ ἀρτηρίας, τὸ τοιοῦτον ὁ ἀνὴρ συνέταττε καὶ ἐπόριζεν, ἀλλὰ ἀρρήτῳ τινὶ καὶ δυσεπινοήτῳ θειότητι χρώμενος ἐνητένιζε τὰς ἀκοὰς καὶ τὸν νοῦν ἐνήρειδε ταῖς μεταρσίαις τοῦ κόσμου συμφωνίαις, ἐνακούων, ὥς ἐνέφανε, μόνος αὐτὸς καὶ συνιείς τῆς καθολικῆς τῶν σφαιρῶν καὶ τῶν κατ' αὐτὰς κινουμένων ἀστέρων ἁρμονίας τε καὶ συνφωδίας, πληρέστερόν τι τῶν θνητῶν καὶ κατακορέστερον μέλος

φθεγγομένης διὰ τὴν ἐξ ἀνομοίων μὲν καὶ ποικίλως διαφερόντων ροιζημάτων ταχῶν τε καὶ μεγεθῶν καὶ ἐποχήσεων, ἐν λόγῳ δέ τιτι πρὸς ἄλληλα μουσικωτάτῳ διατεταγμένων, κίνησιν καὶ περιπόλησιν εὐμελεστάτην ἅμα καὶ ποικίλως περικαλλεστάτην ἀποτελουμένην. ἀφ' ἧς ἀρδόμενος ὥσπερ καὶ τὸν τοῦ νοῦ λόγον εὐτακτούμενος καὶ ὡς εἰπεῖν σωμασκοῦμενος εἰκόνας τινὰς τούτων ἐπενόει παρέχειν τοῖς ὁμιληταῖς ὡς δυνατὸν μάλιστα, διὰ τε ὀργάνων καὶ διὰ ψιλῆς τῆς ἀρτηρίας ἐκμιμούμενος.

He no longer used musical instruments or songs to create order in himself: through some unutterable, almost inconceivable likeness to the gods, his hearing and his mind were intent upon the celestial harmonies of the cosmos. It seemed as if he alone could hear and understand the universal harmony and music of the spheres and of the stars which move within them, uttering a song more complete and satisfying than any human melody, composed of subtly varied sounds of motion and speeds and sizes and positions, organized in a logical and harmonious relation to each other, and achieving a melodious circuit of subtle and exceptional beauty. Refreshed by this, and by regulating and exercising **the reasoning powers of his mind** thereby, he conceived the idea of giving his disciples some image of these things, imitating them, so far as it was possible, through musical instruments or the unaccompanied voice. (Trans. G. Clark, modified)