



THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MUSIC AND AESTHETICS: CATEGORY, VALUE, MEANING, AND INTERPRETATION

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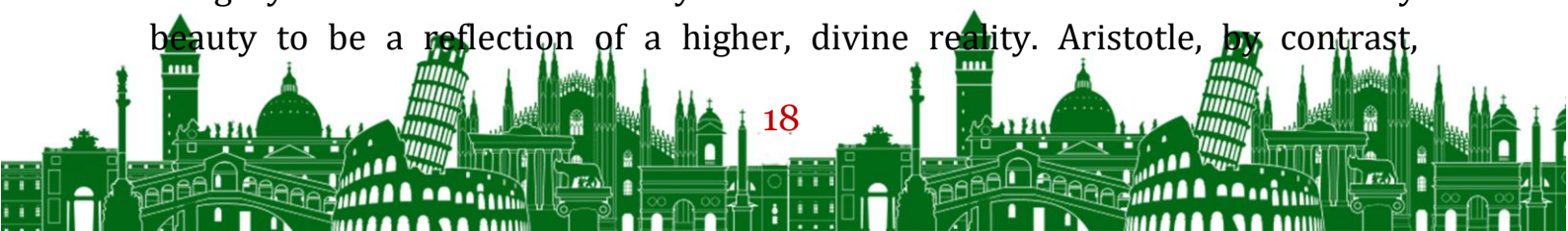
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From ancient times to the modern era, philosophers have paid considerable attention to the nature of art and beauty, developing fundamental aesthetic categories such as beauty, sublimity, tragedy, and comedy, as well as the concepts of perfection and catharsis. These categories constitute the principal conceptual framework through which aesthetic experience is interpreted and evaluated. Aesthetics, a term introduced by the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten (1714–1762), is defined as the philosophical study of sensory perception and human experience of the world. It examines the subjective ways in which individuals perceive art, culture, and nature, and belongs to the branch of philosophy known as axiology, or the theory of values.

Classical philosophers distinguished several fundamental categories that describe the qualities of artistic phenomena. Beauty and ugliness, for example, represent opposing aesthetic categories associated with attraction and aversion. Likewise, sublimity and baseness express experiences of grandeur, awe, and elevated dignity on the one hand, and vulgarity or inferiority on the other. Similarly, tragedy and comedy denote principal emotional-aesthetic modes in art: tragedy evokes pity and fear, whereas comedy generates laughter and feelings of lightness.

Harmony, within aesthetic theory, generally refers to the internal balance and pleasing arrangement of parts within a whole. This concept originated in ancient Greek musical theory—most notably in the Pythagorean doctrine of the “harmony of the spheres”—and later expanded metaphorically to encompass the visual arts and literature. Catharsis, a concept particularly associated with Aristotle, originally referred to the effect of tragedy upon spectators; however, it was subsequently applied to musical experience as well, denoting the purification or cleansing of emotions through artistic engagement. Each of these categories has been examined philosophically in order to understand how art, and music in particular, evokes emotions and communicates meaning.

In classical philosophy, beauty was often regarded as the central aesthetic category. Plato associated beauty with eternal Forms and considered earthly beauty to be a reflection of a higher, divine reality. Aristotle, by contrast,





understood beauty in terms of order, symmetry, and clarity. Beauty remained a foundational concept in aesthetics and was sometimes used synonymously with aesthetics itself; indeed, for a long period aesthetics was referred to as the science of beauty.

The category of the sublime gained particular prominence during the Enlightenment and Romantic periods through the works of thinkers such as Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant. The sublime refers to experiences of grandeur and power in art and nature that transcend ordinary beauty, inspiring awe and even pleasurable fear—for example, a majestic mountain landscape or a powerful symphonic composition.

Tragedy originated in ancient Greek art and philosophy. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle analyzed how tragic drama produces catharsis, or emotional purification, through the evocation of pity and fear. Tragic elements in music—such as mournful melodies or lamentations—similarly confront listeners with suffering and fate, potentially elevating the human spirit through empathy. Comedy, conversely, represents the opposite pole of tragedy and manifests itself in music through humorous, playful, or light-hearted compositions, including comic operas and cheerful folk melodies.

Bu matnning taxminan 15–20 foiz qismi hisoblanadi. Agar xohlasangiz, qolgan qismlarini ham shu akademik uslubda, xalqaro ilmiy maqola standartlariga mos ravishda ketma-ket tarjima qilib beraman.

Although music is an abstract art form, it contributes to aesthetic diversity through unconventional rhythms and unusual motifs that may produce comic effects. In aesthetics, harmony refers not only to musical consonance but also to any pleasing and proportionate relationship; philosophically, it may symbolize cosmic or social order. For instance, Confucius taught that music reflects cosmic harmony and possesses the capacity to harmonize society. Ancient thinkers such as Pythagoras were among the first to describe musical harmony mathematically through simple numerical ratios and to associate it with the order of the universe. This idea later influenced Plato and numerous subsequent philosophers. Over time, the notion of harmony evolved into a metaphor for aesthetic wholeness and moral balance, exemplified by expressions such as a “harmonious soul.”

As noted above, the concept of catharsis was introduced by Aristotle. In his *Politics*, he argued that certain forms of music are capable of purifying negative emotions and providing spiritual relief in a manner analogous to tragedy. Consequently, Aristotle attributed both therapeutic and moral functions to music. In contemporary terms, a profoundly moving musical composition may offer





listeners an experience akin to catharsis. A spiritual maqom performance or a dramatic symphony, for example, can facilitate emotional self-awareness and inner purification.

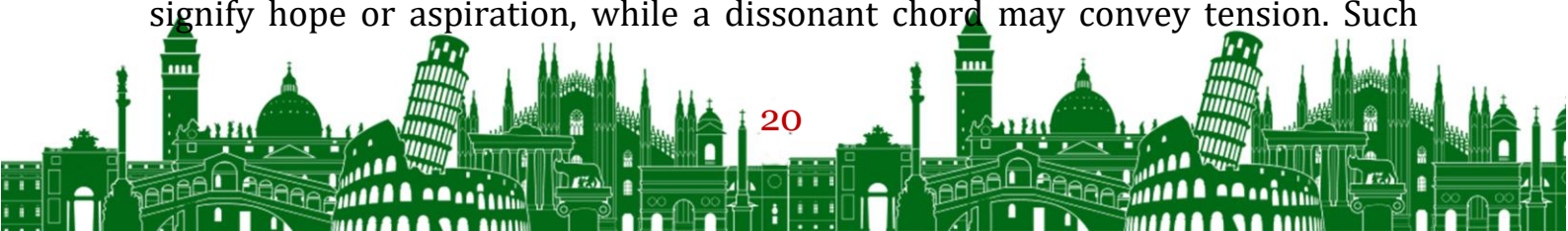
Each aesthetic category—beauty, sublimity, tragedy, harmony, and catharsis—highlights a distinct dimension of music’s aesthetic influence. Together, these categories constitute a conceptual framework for the philosophical analysis of musical art. In this study, they serve as analytical tools for examining the values, meanings, and interpretations embodied in music.

It is important to emphasize that aesthetics concerns not only positive categories such as beauty and harmony but also negative or mixed qualities, including ugliness, baseness, the grotesque, the fantastic, and the marvelous. Music may likewise express elements that are conventionally regarded as “ugly,” yet are aesthetically meaningful within a particular context. Harsh dissonances or dark sonic atmospheres, for instance, may be employed to portray disorder, suffering, or psychological tension. Romantic and modernist composers frequently explored the sublime and the grotesque in music, seeking to evoke wonder and emotional intensity beyond the limits of conventional beauty.

Ultimately, all these categories are interconnected within musical aesthetics. A complex work may combine beauty and sublimity—as exemplified by the lyrical melodies and majestic choral finale of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony—or unite tragedy and catharsis, producing an experience that is painful yet spiritually purifying. As our discussion proceeds, it should be remembered that aesthetic categories are intellectual constructs designed to explain the ways in which music affects us, whereas genuine musical experience often transcends any single category.

Thinkers such as Hans-Georg Gadamer and, earlier, the Russian-Ukrainian philosopher Gustav Shpet extended hermeneutics to all forms of art. In his writings on hermeneutics and aesthetics, Shpet argued that every work of art—including musical compositions—contains layers of meaning that are revealed through interpretation grounded in cultural context and the artwork’s “inner form.” For Shpet, understanding art resembles understanding language: meaning emerges through the interpretation of symbols and through the fusion of the world of the artwork with the interpreter’s own experience.

In the case of music, even when no literal text is present—as in purely instrumental compositions—listeners may still interpret structures, motifs, and emotional narratives as meaningful. An ascending melody, for instance, may signify hope or aspiration, while a dissonant chord may convey tension. Such





interpretations are not fixed but depend upon the cultural and personal experiences of the listener.

The distinguished semiotician Yuri Lotman regarded music as a secondary modeling system within culture. According to this perspective, music functions as a language of emotions in which sounds acquire meaning through culturally established codes. Lotman and other semioticians of culture, including the musicologist Boris Asafyev, emphasized that certain musical expressions gradually become associated with specific meanings and narrative functions. For example, within Western musical tradition, minor tonalities are frequently perceived as conveying sadness or contemplation due to long-standing cultural conventions. Thus, artistic meaning in music emerges from the interaction between internal structure and external interpretation.

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