



## The role of *phronesis* in the professional ethics of classical music

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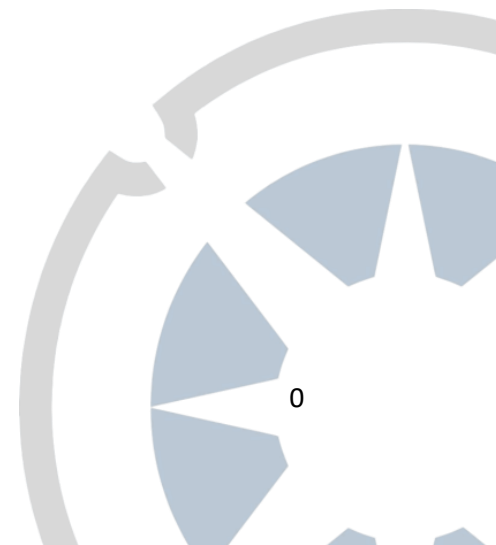
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**Music as vocation.**

**The role of phronesis in the professional ethics of classical music**

*This way of thinking of one's life can be found, but only in a very few people, usually those who from an early age have a vocation for art, or politics, or spirituality. Julia Annas<sup>1</sup>*

The aim of this paper is to show that virtue ethics is the most appropriate ethical approach to the professional practice of Western classical music. I'll focus on two main aspects played by phronesis (that is, prudence or practical wisdom) in this practice: in the act of score interpretation and as a guide to the whole musical career as a vocation. In the first part, I will discuss the main problems of musical interpretation by considering the nature of the musical score. Then, I will illustrate the function of phronesis, which is to prevent the performer from exploiting the vagueness of the score and overstressing their own artistic personality, which while important, in classical music should take a back seat because interpretation has to be work-focused (Dodd, 2020, 3). Finally, I will argue that the musical dimension is a privileged space for exercising a phronetic conduct and that musical expertise fosters the acquisition of ethical expertise in general. Thus, good musicians not only possess a high level of skills, but also a sincere devotion to music; moral responsibility towards the musicians they play with and the public; as well as the ability to overcome psychological and ethical challenges. In summary, ethics has a twofold function in music: it helps performers fulfill their role responsibility and it may contribute to making performers better human beings in general.

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<sup>1</sup> *Intelligent Virtue*, 2013, 123, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

## I. PART

### I. Interpreter's role-responsibility

In Western classical music, masterpieces have a long and valuable history, which for many philosophers and musicologists is a value to be considered in performances (Harnoncourt, 1995, 29; Levinson, 2011, 239-408; Davies, 2003, 34). Making music often implies a professional ethical dilemma (Elliott & Silverman, 2015, 265). This is because there are cases in which a conductor has to decide how to reproduce certain parts of a score if to emphasise creativity or the conventions of tradition as a performance value. On the one hand, an expert audience expects performers to exercise their musical creativity (within the limits set by a score) (Elliott & Silverman, 2015, 265). On the other hand, being accepted into the world of musical practice requires developing a sense of responsibility for the values of that practice (Elliott & Silverman, 2015, 266). This sense of responsibility entails a disposition to be faithful to musical products (Elliott & Silverman, 2015, 266). For this reason, Morris Grossman claims that music involves an important tension between constraint and freedom that amounts to a “double obligation” to the music one performs and to oneself as a creative artist (Grossman, 1994, 257; Elliott & Silverman, 2015, 266).

Clearly, we should consider that as the History of Western Classical Music emerged through different ages, it developed through different conventions, as well as instruments and practices. We are of course aware that reproducing the musical past exactly as it was is an unachievable goal, and what one can realistically pursue is an approximation to that goal. In this light, performers, by means of their education and experience, possess the necessary elements to accommodate original performance practices, by employing, knowledge, imagination and judgment. On that basis, performers decide what to provide to the audience. In other terms, performing engages “people in making decision about their artistic responsibilities to a composition (and its praxis) and the procedures they intend to follow to fulfill their responsibilities” (Elliott & Silverman, 2015, 266).

In order to decide on what the right approach to a musical score is, performers must study the whole work and its history in order to get to know it from within and then draw their “conclusions” or judgment so as to convey to the audience the deepest and most meaningful sense and understanding of the work (Dodd, 2020, 113; O’Dea, 2000, 6). The effects of music arise through subtle interpretive possibilities of tonal properties and accents that – with the directives of the composer’s musical score and the tenets of performance traditions – ultimately give rise to the interpretation as intended by the performer.

It is important to notice that, especially with regard to the early music repertoire, for which the score gives us incomplete information, one must use a phronetic judgment in interpretation: in particular, one must flesh out the historical context of scores, because notation arises with conventions, to which it implicitly refers. For this reason, performers and their audiences should be aware of what they do not know and should acknowledge the extent to which they exercise their own judgments of taste. In fact, they “may be biased towards their own times when they resolve some epistemic uncertainties by playing one way rather than another” (Davies, 2001, 107).

In musical practice, performers always make decisions and give judgments as to how they should perform musical works since, as said, a musical score is never entirely defined. In other words,

“musical scores sketch, rather than fully determine how musical works are to be performed” (O’Dea, 2000,14; Davies, 2001,117; Boorman in Cook, Everist, 2010,409; Cook, 2021, 47). The ambiguities of scores make the interpretive-ethical decision process even more challenging ((Elliott & Silverman, 2015, 266). Within the limitations set by the schematic outlines of musical scores, an array of interpretive soundings is both plausible and permissible, but a performer should select the best solution (O’Dea, 2000,14). And, in this case, *best* is intended to be the best from the point of view of aesthetics and professional ethics. Musically, a score should be interpreted by reproducing it in compliance with the instructions it gives to the interpreter, but a complete answer is more complex. On the one hand, in principle a good interpretation should account for every element of the musical work – including those that remain implicit but were obvious to coeval interpreters, such as which instruments to use, what the original executive choices of performance were, the conventions regarding tempo, sound dynamics, and so forth. On the other hand, not everything which is specified in a score has the status of an instruction (Davies, 2007,106; Dodd, 2020, 17; Davies, 2001, 147). In fact, some of the information conveyed by the score only have the status of recommendations, wishes or suggestions that the composer gives the interpreter (Davies, 2003, 87). The performer, therefore, has the freedom to follow or not the composer’s recommendations and wishes. Therefore, this freedom does not compromise the accuracy or identity of the musical score.

As Daniel Barenboim states, reading a musical score is an extremely complex and engaging process that does not bear immediate or definitive executive solutions (Barenboim, 2018,14). In fact, a musical score contains several plausible solutions with implicit and explicit instructions. Some solutions could be right from a notational point of view, but not from an ethical one (in particular when one totally ignores the implicit norms).-In order to establish which factors one should consider for obtaining an aesthetically and ethical satisfying musical performance, we have to consider the crucial decisions that performers have to make when they interpret a musical work. It is at this stage that a practitioner encounters musical challenges that lead them to exercise phronesis.

A fundamental task of a performer is to go beyond what is only schematically presented in the score in order to interpret it meaningfully. In regard to this, in the next section I will consider the role of interpretation as a deliberative practice or, as Aristotle states, a *praxis* governed by phronesis. This will bring me to the core of my argument, that is, the thesis that these executive decisions may only be rightly orientated if a performer is guided by phronesis.

Let me premise this point: phronesis and virtues in general are not something unrelated to musical practice, on the contrary, they are rooted in it. Indeed, the hint that phronesis is fostered by music-making goes back to the same Aristotle. In some passages of the *Politics*, Aristotle states that music fosters virtuous conduct since it is directed to virtue and requires the exercise of phronesis by the interpreter (Aristotle, NE book II, chap 5, 1339a 4, 247; Panti, 2008, 26-27-28; O’Dea, 1993a, 234).

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## **II. Musical Interpretation as Praxis Driven by Phronesis**

In the Aristotelian conception, *dianoia* is an activity of intelligence that concerns epistemic knowledge of *theoria*, *techne* and *praxis*. Theory is the knowledge of eternal truth, which exists to be contemplated for its own sake. This contemplation requires a process of “looking”, “seeing” or “studying” abstract objects. *Techne* is knowledge of the tangible, concrete needs of practical life. Hence, *techne* is the knowledge of 'making', 'producing' or 'creating' objects such as artefacts and useful goods. It refers to the skill and talent in producing practical products (Regelski, 1998, 24). For

Aristotle, the creative process that drives knowledge as *techne* is *poiesis*. Finally, *praxis* is acting, or action, guided by *phronesis*, which can be defined as ethical knowledge or ethical competence capable of guiding people to achieve right ends in decision-making processes, and enabling an agent's character to face specific, and frequently unique, situations. *Phronesis* is necessary in order to obtain "right results", judged in terms of goodness.

In contrast to the nature of *phronesis*, *techne* addresses only the instrumental knowledge needed to achieve useful ends. *Phronesis*, on the other hand, is an ability necessary to cultivate moral values and right human conduct, where the "good" is right in or for a given situation. *Praxis* not only requires knowledge of the proper means of achieving such rational good; it also involves the ethical discernment needed to make rational judgments concerning the goodness of such ends. Therefore, *praxis* involves judgments that are both rational and ethical, and lead to the right results for others or for oneself. So, while *techne* concerns the quality of products, the ethical dimension puts important obligations on the standard of respect, care, and excellence regarding selected actions.

*Praxis* requires the kind of knowledge necessary to make the practical judgements that are needed to discern and to conform action to rationally right results. Formulating judgments requires diagnosing and deciding in determined situations what people should do. Rather than providing agents with stock responses, *phronesis* works on a case-by-case basis involving high situational flexibility (Russell, 2011, 171).

This deliberative ethical process goes hand in hand with the process of interpretation by the performer since a musical score implies deep analysis and decisions regarding correct soundings, phrases, tonal properties, and the possible use of original instruments, as far as this is feasible. Therefore, in music performative agency could be defined not only as being musical, but also as being ethical. Interpretation is always a situational process, driven, like *praxis*, by *phronesis*. For instance, each time a musical score is performed by the same interpreters with the same instruments, there is always something different about their performance, such as the concert hall where it is to be performed, or other contingent factors (in this case the concert hall's acoustics may require adjustments to elements of the musical score; or performers can decide to add *rubato*, to change dynamics or pedaling, or to add a different *cadenza*). Furthermore, interpreters may want to conform to current ideas about performance practice for the repertoire concerned (Boorman in Cook and Everist (ed.) 2010, 406). These must be made with a *phronetic* musical judgment to be consistent with the ethical and aesthetic purpose of goodness. The next paragraph will investigate what this goodness consists of.

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### **III. The Nature of Musical Phronesis and *Second Nature***

In the perspective of goodness, the capacity to go beyond the schematic rules and principles notated in the score and in performance tradition is the *judgment* through which the performer understands how these might be applied in concrete sound sensation (O'Dea, 2000, 31). This judgment implies perceptiveness, a deep sensitivity to the interpretive potential of intonation as well as an intelligent, discriminating grasp of the point and purpose of established, interpretive procedures. In other words, judgment is the ability that enables performers to recognize and select the interpretive significance of subtle features of sound sensation – to perceive, for example, their ability to illustrate

vividly the musical structures encoded in the score. Most importantly, it indicates the ability to hear and comprehend the interpretive significance of that musical score and its previously unexplored intonations. It specifies the capacity to renew imaginative exemplifications of musical excellence that live up to the standards achieved in the past, modifying and extending their accomplishments in the light of new creative and respectful insight.

These obligations, general conceptions and attachments structure the moral agents' way of seeing, enabling them to make decisions regarding the important features of the score in a given situation, with a view to achieving goodness. In Aristotelian words this is *perception* (O'Dea, 1993a, 234).

As we have seen, a musical score is never completely determined. As regards this point, Nicholas Cook states: "If notations really captured everything that matters in music, you might be able to set up notation-based rules to automate musical decision-making" (Cook, 2021, 47). For this reason, performers have to go beyond what is notated, filling out the implicit information with their own background. For instance, tone colors, even if they are specified in the score, require an aural evaluation that depends on repertoire, voices, instruments, style and the acoustic environment. For example, the dynamic marking *ff* in Mozart is different from that in Beethoven, even though they are notated in the same way, requiring a different intensity. A score does not make this difference of *fortissimo* explicit in different cases, but rather provides a broad notion of it.

Two crucial questions now arise: how does one come to acquire or develop this disciplined way of seeing or intuiting? And even more importantly: how does one come to be devoted or committed to the values embodied in the score? On this, Aristotle is very clear: one does so through doing (NE, 1103b, 23). More specifically one does so through monitored doing-through being shown how, and thereafter through guided practice coming to be able oneself, to assess situations and see what is called for; and through being schooled to take pleasure in the process, figuring out and thereafter acting in accordance with one's insightful perception of what is required (NE 1179b, 197-1179a, 199).

With practice and repetition of certain principles in concrete circumstances, performers become used to assessing situations and seeing what is called for. Only in this way does Aristotelian naturalism claim that those principles become *second nature*, that is to say, nature shaped by the virtues and acquired through moral education (conversely, *first nature* is biological and physical), (O'Dea, 1993, 236; De Caro, 2020, 72; Campodonico et al., 2017, 60). In this overview, phronesis is not something one acquires all at once, but rather, it is something one perfects through practice, which hones and refines expertise

Aristotle holds that making something second nature is, among other things, learning to enjoy doing it (O'Dea, 1993a, 236; Annas, 2013, 68). One learns to enjoy behaving in a manner that is ethically correct through behaving in a manner that is ethically correct. Therefore, musical enjoyment is intrinsically linked to virtuous character (O'Dea, 1993, 242; Annas, 2013, 69). In the Aristotelian conception, practicing right actions leads the agent to know what a right action is in particular circumstances and then to develop a certain character as a self-construction. Virtues are dispositions not only to act in particular ways, but also to feel in particular ways. To act virtuously is to act from *inclination* formed by the cultivation of virtues (MacIntyre, 2007, 149). Hence, investigation is needed into what is implied by self-construction in music depending on phronesis.

People with practical wisdom are individuals who have acquired a specific kind of background, able to understand what music demands. Moreover, phronetic agents face concrete practical situations with a plurality of general conceptions and obligations i.e. general rules and principles. Phronetic

agents are passionately and intellectually committed to all of these rules, deriving from them ongoing guidelines for action and pointers as to what to look for in particular situations.

Generally, musicians have a specific expertise in dealing with different repertoires. Nevertheless, they are tempted to adapt the dynamics to their interpretive wishes. As regards this aspect, it is well known that the famous Canadian pianist Glenn Gould used to change the dynamics of masterpieces in his performances, such as tempo and tone colors. For instance, if we listen to the first movement of *Piano Sonata No. 23 F minor Op. 57* by Beethoven, commonly called the *Appassionata*, we understand that he does not respect the original indication of the composer, which is *Allegro assai*, whereas Gould played *Lento*. In this case, as a result of self-expression, Gould stresses certain segments of the *Appassionata*, rather than following the specifications of Beethoven. Therefore, he does not promote an accurate aural understanding or interpretation of the *Appassionata*, but an *appropriation* of it, i.e. a vehicle for the performer's personal agenda (Walls, 2002, 18). An attitude toward a musical score such as Gould's is not directed by phronesis, but by his desire to express his artistic self. In his career he used certain musical scores as a means for self-expression (Dodd, 2020, 110). "We cannot listen to Gould's Mozart recordings without thinking that they would have been better had he been more able to restrain himself from treating them as a direct extension of his own musical personality (Dodd, 2020, 109)".

In contrast, with a phronetic approach certain variations must be produced within performance practice or within a permissible range by the composer. A variation of *tempo*, like that carried out by Gould, compromises the integrity of a musical score. The creativity of artists plays a crucial role in enhancing the general sense of the score and even more what the composer specified as obligatory indications. According to this view of making music, practitioners should question the idea of "creative leeway" (Bartels, 2019, 43), which means that the interpretation of a musical piece comes into being throughout the process of working on it. This could be called an aesthetic praxis which focuses on individual judgment concerning the question of what is good (Bartels, 2019, 43).

The Aristotelian conception of phronesis as guidance of interpretation is preferable to what we might call the personalistic one, because it avoids the temptation to ground moral guidance in artistic personality. This cannot be right guidance because in Western classical music we want to listen to musical works as their composers intended them. Therefore, work performances, as Julian Dodd rightly states, must not be autonomous events, but *work-focused*. In this way, they are valued for their own sake (Dodd, 2020: 4). With the Aristotelian background, a phronetic performer finds her musical agency on respect towards musical works instead of her artistic personality.

Overall, reflecting on what second nature consists of leads me to underline that exercising phronesis in musical interpretation demands a personal commitment. Although exercising a phronetic judgment cannot guarantee the achievement of excellence, interpretation cannot ignore it, since it improves the quality of the music and the character of the musicians. An agent chooses to act in order to achieve right ends. These require a personal commitment that could be called *devotion*. Specifically, this engagement is part of the identity of the agent, who thereby constructs a virtuous character, whose profession becomes a vocation. As regards music, this notion of devotion has been expressed by Daniel Barenboim, for whom musical interpretation is not a matter of musical personality but devotion and sincerity (Barenboim, 2018, 13). In this perspective, good performances of musical works are those in which the performer *disappears* i.e. when it is the work itself that emerges through the medium of the interpreter (Maddocks, 2017; Dodd, 2020, 110).

The second part of this article considers phronesis in the long-term of a career as global guide for the musician. It will become clear that music is a self-construction insofar as the musician's character is shaped by musical practice, which has much in common with Aristotelian virtue ethics.

## II PART

### I. Phronetic character in the path: pursuing a musical career as a vocation

The role of the professional musician, or one who is training themselves to be one, embodies the concepts of Aristotelian virtue ethics, in that it naturally offers a model of a virtuous life for others and for oneself. How so?

If we analyse the careers of musical performers, and a fortiori those of the greatest among them, we notice that they are based on an enormous amount of study, daily practice and discipline: in this sense, it can be said that this profession requires a true vocation that permeates the whole existence. In the case of great performers, in fact, there is no detachment between what one does for a profession and what one is, as their whole being is directed towards a goal. The career of a performer or aspiring performer is a continuous performance, it requires years of practice and this entails sacrifice, great dedication and a character suited to the task. The study of a professional musician is not limited in time, but is continuous just as his quest for excellence is continuous and constant. Performing a score in a concert hall is the result of everything required of a professional musician, namely a lifetime's work. Professional practice is demanding and implies devotion as well as talent and motivation.

Therefore, being a musician requires, in addition to talent, a certain disposition of mind and great passion, typical of a long-term commitment, i.e. a vocation.

Vocation, following the Julia Annas' definition, "is a global way of thinking about my life: I come to see that I have various goals that I aim at, and that in the one life I have, and which I am already living, these goals need to be structured in a unifying way in order for me to achieve them" (Annas, 2011a, 123). More interestingly, she notices that "this attitude is often found in artists, religious people and politicians: "this way of thinking of one's life can be found, but only in a very few people, usually those who from an early age have a vocation for art, or politics, or spirituality" (Annas, 2011a, 123). These individuals embody an ethical model according to which all actions are directed and integrated by virtue of the ultimate and good goal of one's life. Of course, in Annas's conception, vocation is understood as a path directed towards a good purpose. One could not apply this kind of concept to a subject that is immoral, although it has a rooted tendency towards an end. That is, it is necessary that this end is good in order to have a certain vocation so conceived. A ruthless criminal or a terrorist who builds his life to achieve certain ends has the inclination to evil and therefore not a vocation in the terms of Annas's theory.



Musicians have a clear idea of what their life is heading towards, because to become a conductor, an opera singer, a pianist or a violinist among the many possible examples, one needs to study from a very young age, constantly and for many years. Sometimes, in extreme cases, this can lead to existential crises. Think of a virtuoso pianist who has studied since he was five years old to reach a certain degree of excellence; at the age of twenty-four finds himself with an existential crisis to deal with, frustration and a nervous breakdown, because he has not won any place in the competition Busoni to which he had aspired since childhood (Dineen, 2009; Krampe and Ericsson, 2005). In certain cases, spasmodic concentration towards the goal to which one is striving, when accompanied by altered emotional states due to high stress, can pose a threat to personal equilibrium unless the pursuit towards the goal is balanced within a set of virtues (as we shall see below). When studying music, progress is not like a “gunshot”, to use a Hegelian expression: to be a professional musician is not something one can improvise. Level of competence, then, is not something that can be improvised or for which it is sufficient to study occasionally for a few years. This, of course, is not easy, not even for very talented artists; natural predisposition, in fact, only helps in the acquisition and exercise of the technique.

Professional music practice, however, requires more than just technical skill, as we have seen in the previous section. A musician needs to build his character in order to achieve excellence in his or her playing.

In virtue ethics, role responsibility is intertwined with the character of the individual who embodies this responsibility. Specifically, a musician needs habituation, pleasure, the modulation of his or her emotions (to overcome the tension of performing in public or in prestigious competitions), motivation, but above all repetition: repetition makes masters!

Repetition appears to be a key notion both in virtue ethics and in musical practice. Just as to become a skilled performer one needs to repeat thousands of times the same piece or passage, in the same way to become virtuous one must repeat many times a virtuous action.

Repetitively practicing (with pleasure) right actions leads the agent to know what the right action would be in a particular circumstance, inasmuch as developing a virtuous character is a matter of consistent self-construction. To the same extent, by constantly trying to be phronetic, performers may become used to assessing situations and seeing what is called for. This is why, (O’Dea 1993), musicians might have a great natural advantage in becoming ethically virtuous, since repetition is constitutive of the musical dimension. However, this repetition is not mere repetition but intelligent habit that always expresses the intention of a certain action.

This insight is grounded in some passages of Aristotle’s *Politics* regarding music, as we have seen. This moral dimension of music can be found today in Music Education (O’Dea, 2000; 1993a; 1994; Regelski, 1998). This model of virtuous living has a strong practical component about the way we learn to become virtuous. One does so through doing, as we have seen in the previous section.

This inspired an analogy taken from contemporary virtue ethics that virtues are like skills. A central point of this assimilation is that the moral knowledge of the virtuous agent is analogous to the practical knowledge an expert has when he or she possesses a particular skill. Acquiring a skill is a process of learning practical expertise (i.e. the knowledge of how to do something, e.g. build a bridge or learn to swim) and the virtuous agent’s practical expertise is the knowledge of how to act well. This thesis - already common in the Greek world - has gained prominence in contemporary philosophy, especially in (moral) virtue ethics and in the epistemology of (intellectual) virtues. In both fields, however, this thesis takes different forms, which Matt Stichter classifies as weak,

moderate and strong (Stichter, 2018, 58). I consider here the strong version according to which virtues are indeed conceived as a type of skill. Even so conceived, however, virtues retain their specificity

According to Annas, for instance, virtues are a type of skill that presupposes the ability to explain one's reasons for acting, but many skills are not of this type (Annas, 2011a). Moreover, virtues are specifically moral skills. Annas takes up this Aristotelian theme: "we cannot understand what virtue is without understanding how we acquire it" (Annas, 2011a, 21). In her view, the connection between ability and virtue is even stronger: a person with a specific complex expertise in some field, for example a musician, has an advantage in cultivating the moral virtues, because he or she already has a particular propensity for acquiring skills and can also inspire others to live a virtuous life.

Of course, not all skills are virtues: for example, tying shoelaces is an acquired skill, but it is evidently too simple to be analogous to virtue (Annas, 2011a, 16). Rather, it is the high-level experts in certain fields - those who have the greatest "competence" - who are comparable to virtuous people, since the virtuous person consistently maintains the highest level of moral behavior.

Given the general difficulty of achieving competence, one of the most important factors in determining whether someone can achieve an adequate level of performance is their motivation. Competence cannot be achieved without serious commitment at high levels, because the level of competence decreases over time. Maintaining competence requires the same kind of intentional effort that was required to obtain it (Krampe and Charness, 2006, 723-742). Thus, competences are not skills that one could have regardless of whether one is motivated to act with skills. On the contrary, skills imply "the need to learn and drive to aspire" (Annas, 2011, 16). The possession of virtues is considered a matter of degree, and thus for anyone there is always the possibility of improvement (Annas, 2011a). Similarly, once competence with respect to a skill has been achieved, self-monitoring is necessary to maintain a skill as an expert. One advantage of virtue as skill theories is precisely this: they see self-improvement, necessary to achieve competence, as an obligation. A good performer not only shows a sense of making music, but also a commitment in the practice. To repeat:

- i) repetition and habit (which comes from making music) are relevant both in musical practice and in virtue ethics;
- ii) virtues should be conceived as skills both in music and in virtue ethics;
- iii) conscious musicians can utilise their predisposition to be virtuous not only in music, but also in ordinary life, by transferring their expertise and plasticity in ethics.

## **II. Motivation and long-term commitment in musical practice proved by some scientific studies**

Typically, a professional musician started the study of their chosen instrument at a young age. It is known that certain high-level skills that take a decade to master are acquired from early age, when

the brain is more plastic and quicker to learn. The early years are when we spend more time on actual technique, on knowing what it takes to become a pianist.

Under the guidance of an experienced teacher, a learner moves his/her first movements on the keyboard based on reading notes in the score. First, we learn scales, then arpeggios, and so on. The learner at the beginning has to control every little movement. Then as he improves, his fingers move across the keyboard with less conscious control.

A number of studies have revealed that (adult) supervision during practice is important for novice musicians (Davidson et al., 1996; Lehmann, 1997) because feedback from the supervisor is crucial to the novice's development.

The learner and the piano teacher must constantly monitor progress in the acquisition of technique and score reading. As these two things improve one can devote more time to the expressive characteristics of a piece of music and play pieces of increasing complexity with more automatized self-control. Overall, the musical training of professionals is a demanding activity. The function of the changes within the practice has been investigated by Ericsson et al., (1993; 2005), who first introduced the concept of *deliberate practice*. The deliberate practice is a set of structured activities that experts consider important to improve performances; it is difficult, therefore it can be maintained for only limited amounts of time a day to avoid the risk of physical and mental burnout. Nevertheless, in order to maintain the practice, novices and experts have to be consistent.

At the University of Music in Berlin, Ericsson et al. (1993) surveyed violin students of different course levels that varied in the required instrumental competence. The students were interviewed retrospectively about their practice and skill development. The researchers found a link between duration of practice and underlying motivations (Evans et al., 2012). A long-term commitment appears to play a key role in predicting engagement and practice. McPherson and Evans (2014) found that commitment to playing an instrument has significant effects on performance already after three years of practice. Progress increases motivation to become a professional musician and to overcome difficulties that can cause frustration. These results support and corroborate on an empirical level Annas's thesis on the skills/virtues in general, at least on the main points: motivation, consistency, commitment in the practice, enjoyment and the desire to improve.

## **Conclusion**

In the first part of this talk, I showed that musical interpretive practice is not straightforward since scores are vague by nature and the phronetic interpreter should use this margin of expressive freedom responsibly. The act of interpreting can be considered as a form of praxis in Aristotelian terms. In this light, the account of virtue ethics proves highly appropriate in accounting for the professional practice of musicians.

In the second part, I argued that the professional practice of musicians can be defined as a vocation in Aristotelian terms, having many traits in common with the virtuous way of thinking about life. Moreover, conceiving virtues as skills is very expedient in the musical field: musicians can exploit their natural predisposition to be skilled not only in music but also in life thanks to the moral education they have received – that is, practicing music shapes in a moral direction one's second nature. In fact, musical performers must not only be concerned with achieving excellent performances but also with the way they approach training, their career, and how they interact with the audience and other performers; in other words, they have to cultivate a certain way of being.

Score compliance and the habit of playing with others fit into a broader blueprint that sees the musician committed to cultivating not only musical skills but also moral ones. Therefore, by harnessing their skills, musicians may become ethical role-models for themselves and other people, musicians or not.

Certainly, the analysis of the ethical component of the performer's musical vocation by appealing to virtue ethics can help make musicians aware of the specificity and value of their training and their professionalism. This is another indication of the usefulness of virtue ethics in illuminating areas of life that are outside the reach of ethical theories like consequentialism and deontology.

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