

## The Politics of Taste: A place for art music in Rousseau's construction of the political community

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When we observe the importance Plato and Aristotle attributed to music in their political treatises, we are bound to be disappointed by the fact that the subject does not enjoy a similarly prominent place in the political theory of Rousseau, who, of all the great political writers of modern times, was certainly the most prepared to deal with it in a comparably grand manner. Plato and Aristotle left us illuminating analyses of the implications of musical education and enjoyment for the formation of the individual and national character, and of the ensuing duties of the State concerning the regulation of these activities, but they admittedly lacked the musical expertise to explore the subject 'from inside;' whereas Rousseau exemplified that rare coexistence of a deep political thinker and a musician well versed in the theoretical and practical aspects of the trade. So much more the pity we do not have from his pen an attempt to integrate the two fields at a higher theoretical level.

One could perhaps explain this omission pointing to the rather abstract character of Rousseau's political treatise, *Du contrat social*. Subtitled *Principes du droit politique*, it is concerned only with the most general questions related to the nature and foundations of political authority. It provides, as it were, the bare bones of the theoretical scaffolding necessary to solve the problem of how to make that authority legitimate. With the remarkable exception of the somewhat detailed discussion of civil religion, all regulations needed to make the system work in practice are left untouched, as tasks to be accomplished by the almost God-like discernment of the lawgiver. Rousseau is very clear about this constraint: when studying legislation he intends to discuss only 'lois fondamentales', which is to say, laws of a completely general nature that govern the relation of the whole political body to itself, leaving aside those laws inscribed 'ni sur le marbre ni sur l'airain, mais dans

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le cœurs des citoyens’, that is, ‘des mœurs, des coutumes, et surtout de l’opinion’.<sup>2</sup> These features — that Rousseau admits to be the most important elements in the constitution of the State, and which alone sustain the spirit of the institutions by imperceptibly substituting the force of habit for the force of authority — are indeed the ‘secret’ object of the lawgiver’s care, ‘tandis qu’il paraît se borner à des règlements particuliers qui ne sont que le cintre de la voûte, dont les mœurs, plus lentes à naître, forment enfin l’inébranlable clef.’<sup>3</sup> Thus, we do not find a discussion of music in the *Contract social* for the same reason we do not find there a discussion of how to regulate sex and marriage, or how and to what extent to educate the youth in the sciences and arts, although these are certainly relevant subjects from a political point of view.

Indeed, when we read Plato’s *Republic* and *Laws*, as well as Aristotle’s *Politics*, we are impressed by the central, almost dominant, place given to themes related to the formation of character, or *ethos* — pedagogical matters, as we would call them today. This explains why Rousseau could, in *Emile*, describe the *Republic* as ‘le plus beau traité d’éducation qu’on ait jamais fait’, and not as ‘un ouvrage de politique, comme le pensent ces qui ne jugent des livres que par leurs titres.’<sup>4</sup>

Plato’s treatment of music in the *Republic* concerns especially its role in education, a role that Plato takes to be of utmost importance:

Rearing in music is most sovereign, because rhythm and harmony most of all insinuate themselves into the inmost part of the soul and most vigorously lay hold of it in bringing grace with them; and they make a man graceful if he is correctly reared, if not, the opposite. Furthermore, it is sovereign because the man properly reared on rhythm and harmony would have the sharpest sense for what’s been left out and what isn’t a fine product of craft or of nature. And, due to his having the right kind of likes and dislikes he would praise the fine things; and, taking pleasure in them and receiving them in his soul, he would be reared in them and become a gentleman.<sup>5</sup>

This formation of the ‘right kind of likes and dislikes’ is attained through the exposition to the right proportions conveyed in harmony (that is, the commensurate numerical relations underlying the system of musical scales or modes) and in rhythm (the regular patterns of division of time, expressed in bodily movements). Such pedagogical and corrective role of harmony and rhythm is also described in *Timaeus*:

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2 Rousseau, *Du Contrat social* II, OC, iii.394.

3 Rousseau, *Du Contrat social* II, OC, iii.394.

4 Rousseau, *Emile, ou de l’éducation* I, OC, iv.250.

<sup>5</sup> Plato, *Republic* III, translated by Allan Bloom (New York, London 1968) 401d–402a.

Harmony, which has motions akin to the revolutions of our soul, is not regarded by the intelligent votary of the Muses as given by them with a view to irrational pleasure, which is deemed to be the purpose of it in our day, but as meant to correct any discord which may have arisen in the courses of the soul, and to be our ally in bringing her into harmony and agreement with herself; and rhythm too was given by them for the same reason, on account of the irregular and graceless ways which prevail among mankind generally, and to help us against them.<sup>6</sup>

A more detailed treatment of the role of music in education is provided by Plato in the *Laws*, where he makes some observations strikingly close to what Rousseau will propose centuries later in his ‘morale sensitive’:

I maintain that the earliest sensations that a child feels in infancy are of pleasure and pain, and this is the route by which virtue and vice first enter the soul...I call ‘education’ the initial acquisition of virtue by the child when the feelings of pleasure and affection, pain and hatred that well up in his soul are channeled in the right courses before he can understand the reason why.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the acquisition of virtue, understood as a harmonious state of the soul conducive to a pleasurable feeling towards what is good, begins at a pre-rational stage. It is only later, when reason is attained, that one can realize that the habits implanted in the course of education are indeed in agreement with it. It is exactly because of the pre-rational nature of this process that music is able to attain its power, taking advantage of a distinctive trait of human beings:

virtually all young things find it impossible to keep their bodies still and their tongues quiet. They are always trying to move around and cry out; some jump and skip and do a kind of gleeful dance as they play with each other, while others produce all sorts of noises. And whereas animals have no sense of order and disorder in movement (‘rhythm’ and ‘harmony’, as we call it), we human beings have been made sensitive to both and can enjoy them.<sup>8</sup>

Musical rhythms and modes take their pattern from the natural rhythms and accents of human character<sup>9</sup> and are, in their turn, able to influence them. They must, therefore, be appropriate: a wrong handling of music could make the hearer and player liable to fall into evil habits.<sup>10</sup> Music is an ‘imitative’ art; what it imitates are states and affections of men’s souls. It does so by means of tunes, words and bodily movements associated with spiritual and bodily excellence, so that the proper attitude towards music — but by no means the

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<sup>6</sup> Plato, *The Dialogues*, translated into English by B. Jowett (New York, 1937), ii. 47c.

<sup>7</sup> Plato, *Laws*, translated by Trevor Saunders (Harmondsworth 1970), 653a ff..

<sup>8</sup> Plato, *Laws* 653d–654a.

<sup>9</sup> Plato, *Republic* 399a.

<sup>10</sup> Plato, *Laws* 655b–656a.

most widespread — is to get pleasure in the representations of virtuous characters, and discomfort in representations of bad or despicable ones.

So, it is right to say that the value of artistic manifestations is measured by the pleasure they convey, but this cannot be pleasure of anyone, only of better men: ‘The productions of the Muse are at their finest when they delight men of high caliber and adequate education — but particularly if they succeed in pleasing the single individual whose education and moral standards reach heights unattained by no one else.’<sup>11</sup> From this there follows a whole program of education: to prevent that the souls of children get used to feeling pleasure and displeasure at variance with what the experience of the best has agreed to be truly right.<sup>12</sup> Education is ‘a matter of correctly disciplined feelings of pleasure and pain,’ whose result should be that we come to ‘hate what we ought to hate and love what we ought to love’.<sup>13</sup> And music, as in singing and dancing, is a most important device for the obtaining of this result, acting really as ‘charm for the soul.’ What is formed through such habits is a man’s second nature, his ethos, the most important single resource of a political community.

Aristotle’s conception of education in the Eighth Book of the *Politics* follows closely that of his teacher Plato. He agrees that the chief and foremost concern of the legislator must be the education of the young, and that one important aim of this education is the production of a character suited to the constitution of the state. Music, for him, has a paramount importance in this activity, much for the same reason it had for Plato:

Since music belongs to the category of pleasures, and since goodness consists in feeling delight where one should, and loving and hating aright, we may clearly draw some conclusions. First, there is no lesson we are so much concerned to acquire, as that of forming right judgements on, and finding delight in, fine characters and good actions. Next, musical times [rhythms] and tunes provide us with images of states of character [...] which come closer to their actual nature than anything else can do. This is a fact which is clear from our own experience; to listen to these images is to undergo a real change of the soul. Now to acquire a habit of feeling pain or taking delight in an image is something closely allied to feeling pain or taking delight in the actual reality.<sup>14</sup>

Music of the right sort can make men better because it helps to produce pleasurable feelings in connection with good characters and actions. And the power of music to do this

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<sup>11</sup> Plato, *Laws* 659a

<sup>12</sup> Plato, *Laws* 659d.

<sup>13</sup> Plato, *Laws* 653b.

<sup>14</sup> Aristotle, *The Politics*, edited and translated by Ernest Baker (Oxford, 1969), 1340a.

(and, conversely, its power to pervert) is much greater than that of other forms of artistic representation, like painting and sculpture, since colors and shapes, for Aristotle, can act only as mere indications of states of character, not — like musical melodies and rhythms — as true representations of them.<sup>15</sup> In an important sense, Aristotle's attribution of ethical import to music goes beyond what Plato envisaged, since he supposes that character can be shaped even by purely instrumental music, without the help of a sung or declaimed text.

Aristotle's most original contribution, however, lies in his identification of other purposes of music beyond the strictly ethical and pedagogical ones considered by Plato. We may group broadly these purposes under the common title of 'enjoyment,' meaning that music may be taught and practiced with a view to pleasure in itself, irrespective of its further consequences for the moral betterment of men. There are two distinct forms of enjoyment to be considered here. Music can be enjoyed as pure diversion, a relaxation intended to compensate the discomforts of labour and occupation.<sup>16</sup> And this involves also an important element of usefulness, in that it acts as a powerful instrument for the release of emotions — a process which Aristotle famously called 'purging' (catharsis), and explored more thoroughly in the *Poetics*, when he analysed the tragedy. What is more remarkable, however, and more characteristically linked with his conception of the ultimate end of human life, is Aristotle's suggestion that music has as its main purpose to provide a sort of 'cultivated leisure.' Leisure, for Aristotle, is a higher sort of activity than work or occupation because it is not directed, like these, to attain an end external to the activity, but constitutes an end in itself.<sup>17</sup> Finding proper modes of activity that will fill our leisure is, therefore, an important question for the determination of what is the best life for man. Such activities cannot be, like play and other diversions, a mere compensation for work or occupation, because in these cases the pleasure is only derivative, resulting from a relief from such exertions<sup>18</sup>. What is needed is something that has intrinsic pleasure, and produces intrinsic happiness:

Happiness of that order does not belong to those who are engaged in occupation: it belongs to those that have leisure. Those who are engaged in occupation are so engaged with a view to some end which they regard as still unattained. But felicity [*eudaimonia*] is a present end, and all men think of it as accompanied by pleasure and not by pain. It is true that all are not agreed about the nature

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<sup>15</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* 1340a.

<sup>16</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* 1339b.

<sup>17</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* 1337b.

<sup>18</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* 1338a.

of the pleasure that accompanies felicity. Different persons estimate its nature differently, according to their own personality and disposition. But the highest pleasure, derived from the noblest sources, will be that of the man of greatest goodness.<sup>19</sup>

The highest pleasure for man, as we learn from the last book of the *Nichomachean ethics*, must be associated to the activity of the highest part of man's soul, which is the intellect, and perfect happiness is therefore a contemplative, not a practical, activity.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly to this, the highest use of music would be to provide a kind of rational enjoyment that is proper for the cultivated man, and brings life to its ultimate completion.<sup>21</sup>

Plato's and Aristotle's views on the relation of music to politics and education open two ways to justify the political relevance of the cultivation of musical taste. First, music is supposed to be of consequence for the formation and strengthening of the ethos or character of a people, because the love for the beautiful in artistic matters is supposed to be connected in some deep ways with the love for the beautiful in matters of morals and manners. Second, music seems to be — irrespective of its moral usefulness—an intrinsically good thing that provides a sort of enjoyment of the highest intellectual kind and is, therefore, part of the good life, or happiness that befits man as a rational being. Moral and intellectual betterment of the citizens are taken to be of concern to politics and legislation; and both purposes are, moreover, thought to be compatible.

In light of this, we can now identify with precision Rousseau's stance in the matter. His *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* is a stern denial of this alleged compatibility. For Rousseau, there is a tension between these purposes: the thesis he puts forward in that work is that the progress experienced by humanity in the arts and sciences was accompanied by a correspondent decline in virtue and moral values. It is not necessary to review here the arguments of that well-known text, only to indicate some tenets that go against Aristotle's optimistic considerations presented above. In the first place, the cultivated leisure praised by Aristotle as the rounding off of an aristocratic way of life translates in Rousseau's vocabulary as mere idleness of the rich and privileged that affords them the free time they mostly misuse in the pursuit of one futile pleasure after another. As a consequence, a host of artificial and superfluous needs have to be met, draining a large part of social resources that could be better employed elsewhere. Secondly, nothing could be more uncongenial to

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<sup>19</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* 1338a.

<sup>20</sup> Aristotle, *The Ethics*, translated by J. A. K. Thomson (Harmondsworth 1976), 1177a ff.

<sup>21</sup> Aristotle, *Politics* 1338a.

Rousseau's views than Aristotle's intellectualist approach to the purpose of human life and its proper pleasures, at the expense of the true and natural emotions and sentiments that could move us closer to other human beings and make us sympathize with their needs and sufferings.

So, in Rousseau's view, the adoption of sophisticated taste and politeness removed men from their original and rustic manners, with the result that they are no longer inspired by courage and love for their country and fellow men. Born of idleness and misdirected curiosity, and fueled by luxury and ostentation, the immense intellectual and artistic achievements of humanity failed to create more benevolence and liberty, and generated instead a state of corruption, contempt and enslavement unheard of in the history of humanity.

It is a difficult task to accommodate a defense of good taste and expert musicianship against the severe criticism of the refinement of arts presented in the *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*, which at first sight seems to preclude any moral and political justification for what we call art music in the context of the rustic and down-to-earth virtues demanded by the communities Rousseau praises. But on a closer reading, the first discourse appears as rather unclear about what is cause and what is effect in the relations between the progress of the arts, the increase of indolence and luxury, and the decline of morals. In its final pages Rousseau presents a thesis that is curiously at odds with all that came before, conceding that it is not the sciences and arts themselves that are to be blamed, but the fact that they have been appropriated by untalented people unworthy of approaching them. Men like Bacon, Descartes and Newton — those 'preceptors' of the human race — are beyond reproach:

S'il faut permettre à quelques hommes de se livrer à l'étude des sciences et des arts, ce n'est qu'à ceux qui se sentiront la force de marcher seuls sur leurs traces, et de les devancer. C'est à ce petit nombre qu'il appartient d'élever des monuments à la gloire du esprit humain [...] Pour nous, hommes vulgaires, à qui le Ciel n'a point départi de si grands talents et qu'il ne destine pas à tant de gloire, restons dans notre obscurité.<sup>22</sup>

Rousseau made the same point again in 1755 in his response to the famous letter written to him by Voltaire, *à propos* the *Discours sur l'origine de l'inégalité*: 'Convenez-en, monsieur; s'il est bon que de grands génies instruisent les hommes, il faut que le vulgaire reçoive leur instructions: si chacun se mêle d'en donner, qui les voudra recevoir?'

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<sup>22</sup> Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* II, OC, iii.29-30.

Les boiteux, dit Montaigne, sont mal propres aux exercices du corps, et aux exercices de l'esprit les âmes boiteuses.<sup>23</sup> A revealing passage in this letter shows again the same ambivalence towards the question whether the taste for literature and arts is a cause or an effect of the bad moral constitution of men:

Le goût des lettres et des arts naît chez un peuple d'un vice intérieur qu'il augmente; et s'il est vrai que tous les progrès humains sont pernicieux à l'espèce, ceux de l'esprit et des connaissances qui augmentent notre orgueil et multiplient nos égarements, accélèrent bientôt nos malheurs. Mais il vient un temps où le mal est tel que les causes mêmes qui l'ont fait naître sont nécessaires pour l'empêcher d'augmenter; c'est le fer qu'il faut laisser dans la plaie, de peur que le blessé n'expire en l'arrachant.<sup>24</sup>

There is, however, a difficult question that must be answered before we proceed to evaluate Rousseau's attitude towards the proposal of the ancient political writers that it is a duty of government and of the legislators to improve the taste of the members of the political community. The question is: what exactly does Rousseau understand by 'good taste?' Possible answers are not always consistent with each other. Sometimes 'good taste' sounds as a derogatory term, meaning fashionable taste, taste that has been 'improved' by the empire of opinion and sanctified in the *salons*. Founded in prejudices and conventions, it is opposed to a more natural taste, which responds more closely to the order and beauty found in nature. If we, nevertheless, want to call this natural taste 'good,' then we must say that good taste belongs more properly to the rustic man than to the cultivated one. As judges of taste, however, we cannot recall to our minds that original uninformed state, and must appreciate works of art through the thick layers of conventions that became for us a 'second nature'.<sup>25</sup> In that case, we have still another sense of 'good taste', which Rousseau famously defined in *Émile* as 'la faculté de juger de ce qui plaît ou déplaît au plus grand nombre'.<sup>26</sup> He promptly added that this is not to say that tasteful people are the majority, but that the majority of voices tend to the correct judgment of each object, although very few will judge uniformly all objects exactly as the majority does. This 'general taste' (a sort of aesthetic counterpart of the 'general will' of the *Contract social*), though itself a product

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<sup>23</sup> Rousseau, *Réponse à Voltaire*, OC, iii.227.

<sup>24</sup> Rousseau, *Réponse à Voltaire*, OC, iii.227.

<sup>25</sup> Rousseau, *Emile* II, OC, iv.407-408.

<sup>26</sup> Rousseau, *Emile* IV, OC, iv.671.



of convention, can, however, be corrupted by opinion and suffocated by fashion, as it is redirected not to ‘what pleases’, but to ‘what distinguishes.’<sup>27</sup>

Now it seems possible to understand the nature of Rousseau’s attack on the misappropriation of the arts by those unworthy of them. The following passage of the *First Discourse* expresses well how Rousseau sees the power and influence of the cliques of opinion, and the plight of the artist caught by their tentacles:

Tout artiste veut être applaudi. Les éloges de ses contemporains sont la partie la plus précieuse de sa récompense. Que fera-t-il donc pour les obtenir, s’il a la malheur de d’être né chez un peuple et dans des temps où les savants devenus à la mode ont mis une jeunesse frivole en état de donner le ton; où les hommes ont sacrifié le goût aux tyrans de leur liberté, où l’un des sexes n’osant approuver que ce qui est proportionné à la pusillanimité de l’autre, on laisse tomber des chefs-d’œuvres de poésie dramatique, et des prodiges d’harmonie<sup>28</sup> sont rebutés? Ce qu’il fera, Messieurs? Il rabaissera son génie au niveau de son siècle, et aimera mieux composer des ouvrages communs qu’on admire pendant sa vie, que des merveilles qu’on n’admirerait que longtemps après sa mort. Dites-nous, célèbre Arouet, combien vous avez sacrifié de beautés mâles et fortes à notre fausse délicatesse, et combien l’esprit de la galanterie si fertile en petites choses vous en a coûté de grandes?<sup>29</sup>

If authentic taste (which cannot be but good), forged during centuries by the climate and geography of a particular country, by the language and manners of a particular people, by the government, religion and institutions of a particular society, is, in any way, an asset of that country, people and society, how could it be preserved and defended against whimsical and emasculating standards imposed by the fashionable cliques that thrive on expenses and idleness? Summing up Rousseau’s masterly essay on such ‘politics of taste’ published as his *Lettre à d’Alembert*, the proper attitude (much as in the case of the education of Emile) is a negative one: the best that can be done is to avoid contact with potentially damaging influences. In that *Lettre*, whose covert addressees were the authorities of Geneva, Rousseau makes a powerful case for the continuity of the Calvinist ban regarding the construction of a theatre in that city, against the wishes of d’Alembert (and hiding in the background, Voltaire). He examines thoroughly all predictable consequences — moral, political and economical — of the opening of a theatre in Geneva and overthrows one by one all arguments presented by d’Alembert in support of that proposal. Most of the anger

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<sup>27</sup> Rousseau, *Emile* IV, OC, iv.672.

<sup>28</sup> “L’harmonie est la musique instrumentale ou chorale; on sait que les français d’alors ne la goûtaient guère.” Note by Jean Varloot in the Gallimard Folio edition of the *Discours* (Paris, 1987), p. 334. It’s remarkable that Rousseau chose as an example of neglected great art a musical genre he supposedly did not appreciate much.

<sup>29</sup> Rousseau, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* II, OC, iii.21.

and urgency that Rousseau's letter communicates to the reader come from his firm conviction that this was a step that, once taken, could never be reversed, and that once a people gets corrupted, there are no means to bring them back to a sane state.

The *Lettre à d'Alembert* is one of the most profound texts ever written on the relations between politics and artistic creation. Although it concentrates on theatrical matters, one could extract from it, by analogy, many observations concerning our particular subject, musical taste and musical performances. I shall leave this vast subject untouched, and just notice that Rousseau is absolutely sceptical, in that work, about the alleged powers of theatre (and, we might add, of music) to provide any kind of moral improvement in men. Performances, dramatic or musical, are primarily directed to please — so they must comply with accepted tastes, and never try to modify or 'improve' these tastes, at the expense of becoming boring and unpleasant, and alienating the very public that makes their existence possible.

But, if performances do not have a capacity for moral improvement, they certainly are able to put a whole society out of moral balance and bring it to ruin. Is the theatre good or bad? It depends on who is going to see it. In Paris it is good, if only because it seemed impossible to Rousseau that that city could become more corrupt than it already was. But in Geneva, or in other villages where moral standards were still high (at least in Rousseau's imagination), it would probably destroy forms of life and social relationships that had been in place for centuries.

Is music of a high artistic level good or bad for a political community? Again, it depends on the nature of the community: opera houses, concert halls, virtuoso players and singers are perfectly adequate for large European metropolises; they would, on the other hand, disrupt the musical practices of more traditional societies. One must be careful, however, when discussing Rousseau, not to identify artistic music with cosmopolitan music, as much as 'good taste' must not be identified with 'cosmopolitan taste.' For Rousseau, rustic societies can be 'artistic' and show 'good taste' as much as the most cultivated centres. In the *Lettre*, he remembers his experiences as a young man in a village of farmers on a mountain near Neuchâtel:

Tous savent un peu dessiner, peindre, chiffrer; la plupart jouent de la flûte, plusieurs ont un peu de musique et chantent juste. Ces arts ne les sont point enseignées par des maîtres, mais leur passent, pour ainsi dire, par tradition [...] Un de leurs plus fréquents amusemens est de chanter avec leurs

femmes et leurs enfans les psaumes à quatre parties; et l'on est tout étonné d'entendre sortir de ces cabanes champêtres l'harmonie forte et mâle de Goudimel,<sup>30</sup> depuis si longtemps oubliée de nos savants artistes.<sup>31</sup>

This reference to the 'harmonie forte et mâle de Goudimel' is a telling echo of the 'beautés mâles et fortes' which Rousseau had formerly accused Voltaire of having sacrificed to a lowered standard of taste. Since they had no motive for such a debasement, the *Montagnons* of Neuchâtel kept intact a valuable musical heritage that was theirs on account of their cultural and religious origins, and, in so doing, they preserved good taste.

Rousseau's politics of taste is a conservative politics, aimed chiefly to avoid disruptive contacts. But it is also a politics of differences, in that it admits several varieties of 'good taste,' the common measure of which is the authentic enjoyment in the experience of a certain long-established cultural heritage. Its opposite is the purely conventional and voluble taste, dictated by opinion, and directed not to what pleases but to 'what distinguishes'. Contrary to Plato and Aristotle, Rousseau does not believe that the cultivation of taste in itself can have any moral consequences: he is quite positive, in *Emile*, that taste applies only to things that are morally indifferent, or at most valuable as entertainment.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, as he asks near the end of the *Lettre à d'Alembert*: 'Et qu'est-ce au fond que ce goût si vanté? L'art de se connaître en petites choses. En vérité, quand on en a une aussi grande à conserver que la liberté, tout le reste est bien puéril.'<sup>33</sup> This harsh judgment is repeated in *Emile*, but receives there a welcome complement:

mais puisque c'est d'un tissu de petites choses que dépend l'agrément de la vie, de tels soins ne sont rien moins qu'indifférents; c'est par eux que nous apprenons à la remplir des biens mis à notre portée dans toute la vérité qu'ils peuvent avoir pour nous. Je n'entend point ici les biens moraux qui tiennent à la bonne disposition de l'ame, mais seulement ce qui est de sensualité, de volupté réelle, mis à part les préjugés et l'opinion.<sup>34</sup>

In fact, Jean-Jacques's chief objective when he teaches Emile to feel and love beauty in all its varieties, is nothing but 'd'y fixer ses affections et ses goûts, d'empêcher que ses

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<sup>30</sup> Claude Goudimel, Huguenot composer born in Besançon in 1514, was presumably killed in the pogroms of the St Bartholomew's Night in August 1572. He wrote vocal polyphonic music of some complexity, for 4 and 6 voices, and it is interesting to see Rousseau once more giving an example of music of a kind which was not much to his taste.

<sup>31</sup> Rousseau, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, OC, v.55.

<sup>32</sup> Rousseau, *Emile* IV, OC, iv.671.

<sup>33</sup> Rousseau, *Lettre à d'Alembert*, OC, v.109.

<sup>34</sup> Rousseau, *Emile* IV, OC, iv.677.

appetits naturels ne s'altèrent, et qu'il ne cherche un jour dans sa richesse les moyens d'être heureux qu'il doit trouver plus près de lui'.<sup>35</sup> This, if any, is the sole moral import Rousseau can find in a proper cultivation of taste: once more, it is a negative import, valuable for what it prevents, not for what it provides.

Leaving morals aside and considering only the pleasurable side of music, it is clear that the small goods that it puts at our disposal may become rather important when the higher paths of civic virtue and liberty eventually appear as a non-option in a desperately corrupt world. 'Puisqu'on peut avoir un si grand plaisir pendant deux heures, je conçois que la vie peut être bonne à quelque chose,' Rousseau is reported to have exclaimed in his late years after seeing a representation of *Orphée*.<sup>36</sup> Even if we cannot accept anymore Aristotle's intellectualist concept of the 'good life,' to which the rational fruition of music would furnish a crowning achievement, the ability to enjoy music with authentic pleasure (and not just because it accords with perverting and debasing trends imposed on the public by the heralds of fashion or, as in our sad days, by the music industry moguls) is definitely an asset of human life, and can therefore be understood as tributary to a kind of 'good life' conceived, in Rousseauian fashion, as an expansion of our vital experiences and enhancement of our sentiment of existence.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Rousseau, *Emile* IV, *OC*, iv.677.

<sup>36</sup> Quoted by La Harpe, cf. *OC*, v.ccxii.

<sup>37</sup> See Laurence Cooper's *Rousseau, Nature, and the Problem of the Good Life* (Pennsylvania St. U. P., 1999). My paper was already written when I began to read his book, and I barely hint here at his proposed reconstruction of the notion of the good life in the context of Rousseau's thought. I came to believe that Cooper's insights provide important elements for the treatment of some topics that I intended to approach in this paper — like the attempt to disclose in Rousseau something more than a purely utilitarian justification of music as fuel for civic and religious festivities — but must leave for another occasion.