

A Good Guardian of mousike. Music, Law and Change in Plato's Republic

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In the fourth book of the Republic (424c4-6) Plato posits a relationship – as tight as it is obscure – between innovation in music and the changing of laws. Although the passage is often quoted as evidence of Plato's misoneism in the musical field, its meaning and its role in the context to which it belongs have not yet been discussed in full. The article presents a detailed analysis of the passage, within the framework of Plato's treatment of education in Resp. 2-3, its relation to legislation and his view of political change in the dialogue. It is argued that the notion of guarding, an essential concept in the political and social project of Kallipolis, is key to getting to the core of the link between music and law set out at Resp. 424c4-6.

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1. Introduction

At Resp. 424c4-6 the most challenging observation on the relationship between music and law in Plato's work appears. Apparently quoting Damon, the renowned politician and musician of the Periclean Athens, Socrates comments that «the *tropoi* of music are never changed without the greatest political laws»¹. At first blush, the statement is puzzling: even if Plato's concern with music for political purposes is well known, Resp. 424c4-6 establishes a close, if not inextricable, relationship between music and politics, by suggesting that change in music always goes hand in hand with change

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¹ οὐδαμοῦ γὰρ κινουῦνται μουσικῆς τρόποι ἄνευ πολιτικῶν νόμων τῶν μεγίστων, ὡς φησί τε Δάμων καὶ ἐγὼ πείθομαι. The *Republic* is quoted from the new OCT edition (2003); translations are from Chris Emlyn-Jones, William Preddy, *Plato. Republic, Books 1-5*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge (Mass.) 2013, unless otherwise indicated. In this case, I have given a literal translation of Resp. 424c4-6, since the meanings of its crucial notions will be points at issue in this essay. On the attribution of the statement to Damon, which I will not discuss in this article, see Robert W. Wallace, *Reconstructing Damon. Music, Wisdom Teaching, and Politics in Perikles' Athens*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2015, esp. pp. 53, 147-8, 181; the author demonstrates that there is weak evidence to credit Damon with more than the sentence explicitly attributed to him in the text: what precedes and follows Resp. 424c4-6 exclusively expresses Plato's own view of the link between music and politics.