

Humanism, Idealism and Rationalism¹

IDEAS

Each of the arts—architecture, sculpture, painting, poetry, drama, and music—is, of course, a distinct medium of expression. Each has its materials, whether of stone, bronze, pigments, words, or tones. Each has its skilled craftsmen who have disciplined themselves through years of study so they can mold their materials into meaningful forms. But every artist, whether architect, sculptor, painter, poet, dramatist, or musician, is also a child of a specific time and place, who in youthful years is influenced by the social, political, philosophical, and religious ideas of the period and who, in turn, on reaching maturity contributes creative leadership in a particular field.

No art exists apart from its fellows, and it is no accident that the Greeks thought of the arts as a family of sister Muses. Architecture, to complete itself, must rely on sculpture and painting for embellishments. Sculpture and painting, for their parts, must search for congenial architectural surroundings. Drama embraces poetry, song, and the dance in the setting of a theater.

This interdependence of the arts was all quite clear in ancient times, as Plutarch's quote of Simonides indicates: "Painting is silent poetry; poetry is painting that speaks." When the philosophers Plato and Aristotle examined the arts, they looked for common elements applicable to all. And they were just as keen in their search for unity here as they were for unity among all the other aspects of human experience.

Certain recurring themes appear in each of the arts of the Hellenic period as artists sought to bring their ideals to expression. Out of these themes emerges a trio of ideas-humanism, idealism, and rationalism—that recur continually in Athenian thought and action. These three ideas, both separately and in their interaction, provide the framework that surrounds the arts and encloses them in such a way that they come together into a significant unity.

Humanism

"Man," said Protagoras, "is the measure of all things." And, as Sophocles observed, "Many are the wonders of the world, and none so wonderful as man." This, in essence, is humanism. With the human being as yardstick, the Greeks conceived their gods and goddesses as idealized beings, immortal and free from physical infirmities but, like themselves, subject to human passions and ambitions. The gods, likewise, were personifications of human ideals: Zeus stood for masculine creative power, Hera for maternal womanliness, Athena for wisdom, Apollo for youthful brilliance, Aphrodite for feminine desirability. Because of their resemblance to the gods, the Greeks gained greatly in self-esteem. When gods were more human, as the saying goes, men and women were more divine.

The principal concern of the Greeks was with human beings—their social relationships, their place in the natural environment, and their stake in the universal scheme of things. In such a small city-state as Athens, civic duties fell upon

¹ From *Arts and Ideas* by Willaim Fleming, Holt Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1986. Pp. 47-55.

the individual. Every responsible person had to be concerned with politics, which Aristotle considered to be the highest social ethics. Participation in public affairs was based on the need to subordinate personal aspirations to the good of the whole state. A person endowed with great qualities of mind and body was honor-bound to exercise these gifts in the service of others. Aeschylus, Socrates, and Sophocles were men of action who served Athens on the battlefield as well as in public forums and theaters. One responsibility of a citizen was to foster the arts. Under Athenian democracy the state itself, meaning the people as a whole, became the principal patron of the arts.

Politically and socially, the life of the Athenians was balanced between aristocratic conservatism and liberal individualism, a balance maintained by the democratic institutions of their society. Their arts reflected a tension between this aristocratic tradition, which resisted change and emphasized austerity, restraint, and stylization in the arts, and the new dynamic liberalism, which put greater emphasis on emotion, the desire to cultivate ornateness, and a taste for naturalism. The genius of Phidias was his ability to achieve a golden mean between these opposites; the incomparable Parthenon was the result.

Humanism also expressed itself in kinship with nature. By personifying all things, animate and inanimate, the Greeks tried to come to terms with unpredictable natural phenomena and to explain the inexplicable. Their forests were populated with elusive nymphs and satyrs, their seas with energetic tritons, and their skies with capricious zephyrs. All were imaginative explanations and personifications of forces completely beyond their control.

These personifications, as well as the conception of the gods as idealized human beings, created a happy condition for the arts. By increasing their understanding of nature in all its aspects, the Hellenes also enhanced their own humanity. Even when the scientific philosophers sought to reduce the universe to basic matter—earth, air, fire, water—the body and soul were still identified with the basic stuff of the natural world. To create an imaginary world that is also a poetic image of the real world will always be one of the pursuits of the artist. And the Greeks thought of art as a mimesis—that is, an imitation or representation of nature. Since this also included human nature, it implied a recreation of life in the various mediums of art.

Particularly congenial to this humanistic mode of thought was the art of sculpture. With the human body as the point of departure, such divinities as Athena and Apollo appeared as idealized images of perfect feminine and masculine beauty. Equally imaginative were such deviations from the human norm as the goat-footed Pan, the half-human, half-horse centaurs, and the many fanciful creatures and monsters that symbolized the forces of nature.

The Greeks were more thoroughly at home in the physical world than the later Christian peoples, who believed in a separation of flesh and spirit. The Greeks greatly admired the beauty and agility of the human body at the peak of its development. In addition to studies in literature and music, Greek youth was trained from childhood for competition in the Athenian and Olympic games. Since it was through the perfection of their bodies that human beings most resembled the

gods, the culture of the body was a spiritual as well as physical activity.

The nude male body in action at gymnasiums was a fact of daily experience,



Fig. 1. *Kritios Boy*. 480 B.C.E. Marble, height 34". Acropolis Museum, Athens.

and sculptors had ample opportunity to observe its proportions and musculature. The result is embodied in such well-known examples as the statues of athletes attributed to Polyclitus such as the *Doryphoros* and the *Discobolus* by Myron.

The *Kritios Boy* (Fig. 1), found on the acropolis, is one of the rare marble originals of this period. The slight turn of the head and the easy stance with the weight placed on one foot give the figure a supple grace and animation. As an instrument of expression, the male nude reached a high point in the 5th century B.C.E. The female form, however, had to wait for similar inspired treatment until the next century.

Any humanistic point of view assumes that life here and now is good and is meant to be enjoyed. This attitude is the opposite of medieval self-denial, which viewed the joys of this life as snares of the devil, believing that true good could be attained only in the unseen world beyond the grave. While the Greeks had no single belief about life after death, the usual one is found in the underworld scene of Homer's *Odyssey* when the spirit of the hero's mother explains that "when first the breath departs from the white bones, flutters the spirit away, and like to a dream it goes drifting." And the ghost of Achilles tells Odysseus that he would rather be the slave of the poorest living mortal than reign as king over the underworld. Greek *steles*, or gravestones, usually depicted the deceased in some characteristic worldly attitude—a warrior in battle, a hunter with his favorite horse or dog, or a lady choosing her jewelry for the day's adornment (Fig. 2).

The spiritual kingdom of the Greeks was definitely of this world. They produced no major religious prophets, had no divinely imposed creeds, no sacred scriptures as final authority on religious matters, no single organized priesthood. Such mottoes inscribed on the sacred stones of Delphi as "Know thyself" and "Nothing in excess" were suggestions that bore no resemblance to the thunderous "Thou shalt nots" of Moses' earlier Ten Commandments.

Knowledge of their gods came to the Greeks from Homer's epics and Hesiod's book of myths. The character and action of these gods, however, were subject to a wide variety of interpretations, as is clear from the commentaries of the 5th-century drama. This nonconformity indicated a broad tolerance that allowed free speculation on the nature of the universe. Indeed, the Greeks had to work hard to penetrate the divine mind and to interpret its meaning in human affairs. Ultimately, their ethical principles were embodied in four virtues—courage, meaning physical



Fig. 2. Grave stele of Hegeso c. 410-400 B.C.E. Marble, height 4' 11" National Museum, Athens.

and moral bravery; temperance, in the sense of nothing too much or, as Pericles put it, “our love of what is beautiful does not lead us to extravagance”; justice, which meant rendering to each person what was due; and wisdom, the pursuit of truth.

Humanism and the Arts. Just as the Greek religion sought to capture the godlike image in human form, so also did the arts try to bring the experience of space and time within human grasp. Indefinite space and infinite time meant little to the Greeks. The modern concept of a nation as a territorial or spatial unit, for instance, did not exist for them. Expansion of their city-state was not concerned with lines on a map but with a cultural unity of independent peoples sharing common language and ideals. The Greeks had little knowledge of or concern with an accurately dated historical past. This is seen in the imperfection of their calendar and in the fact that their historians Herodotus and Thucydides were really chroniclers of almost-contemporary events.

Greek geometry was designed to measure static rather than moving bodies, and their visual arts emphasized the abiding qualities of poise and calm. Greek architecture humanized the experience of space by organizing it so that it was neither too complex nor too grand to be fully comprehended. The Parthenon’s success rests on its power to humanize the experience of space. Through its geometry, such visual facts as repeated patterns, spatial progressions, and distance intervals are made easy to see and to understand. The simplicity and clarity of Greek construction were always evident to the eye, and by defining the indefinite and imposing a sense of order on the chaos of space, the architects of Greece made their

conceptions of space both articulate and intelligible.

Just as architecture humanized the perception of space, so the arts of the dance, music, poetry, and drama humanized the experience of time. These arts fell within the broad meaning of music, and their humanistic connection was emphasized in the education of youth. For as Plato said, “rhythm and harmony find their way into the inward places of the soul, on which they mightily fasten, imparting grace, and making the soul of him who is rightly educated graceful.”

The triple unities of time, place, and action observed by the dramatists brought the flow of time within definite limits and are in striking contrast to the shifting scenes and continuous narrative styles of later periods. The essential humanism of Greek drama is found in its creation of distinctive human types; in its making of the chorus a collective human commentary on individual actions of gods and heroes; in its treatment of human actions in such a way that they rise above individual imitations to the level of universal principles; and, above all, in the creation of tragedy, in which the great individual is shown rising to the highest estate and then plunging to the lowest depths, thereby spanning the limits of human experience.

In sum, all the arts of Greece became the generating force by which Athenians consciously or unconsciously identified with their fellow citizens and with the entire rhythm of life about them. Through the arts, human experience is raised to its highest level; refined by their fires, the individual is able to see the world in the light of universal values.

Idealism

When artists face the practical problem of representation, there are two main courses. They can choose to represent objects either as they appear to the physical eye or as they appear to the mind's eye. In one case they would emphasize nature, in the other, imagination: the world of appearances as opposed to the world of essences; the real as opposed to the ideal. The avowed realist is more concerned with *concretion*—that is, with rendering the actual, tangible object with all its particular and peculiar characteristics. The idealist, on the other hand, accents *abstraction*, eliminating all extraneous accessories and concentrating on the essential qualities of things. A realist, in other words, tends to represent things as they are; an idealist, as they might or should be. Idealism as a creative viewpoint gives precedence to the idea or mental image, tries to transcend physical limitations, aspires toward a fulfillment that goes beyond actual observation, and seeks a concept closer to perfection.

Both courses were followed in the Hellenic style. One of Myron's most celebrated works was a bronze cow said to be so natural that it aroused amorous reactions in bulls, and calves tried to suckle her. Such a work would certainly have been in line, in the literal sense at least, with the Greek definition of art as the imitation of nature. The striving to represent the world of natural appearances is well exemplified in the astonishing likeness of a warrior, a 5th-century-B.C.E. Greek original bronze found in 1972 off the coast of southern Italy (Fig. 3). The naturalistic representation is fortified by the use of bone and glass for the eyes; copper for the eyelashes, lips, and nipples; and silver for the teeth. The distance from stylization to realism can be measured by comparing this

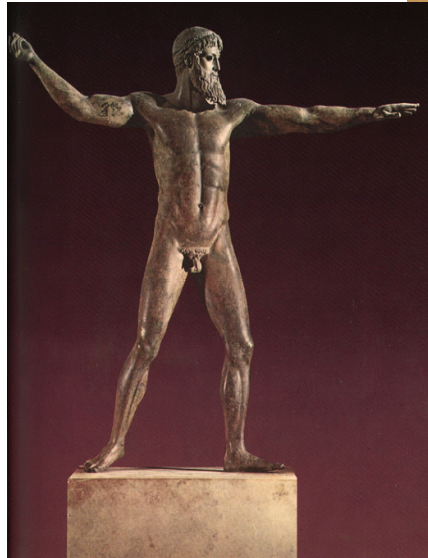


Fig. 5. *Zeus*. C. 460-450 B.C.E. Bronze, height 6' 10". National Museum, Athens.

bronze with the earlier *Kouros* (Fig. 4). On the other hand, the difference between realism and idealism can also be seen when this warrior is compared with the godlike form of Figure 5.

Plato's Ideal Forms.

The case for idealism is argued in Plato's dialogues. He assumes a world of eternal verities and transcendental truths but recognizes that perfect truth, beauty, and goodness can exist only in the world of forms and ideas. Phenomena observed in the visible world are but reflections of these invisible forms. By way of illustration, parallelism is a concept, and two exactly parallel lines will, in theory,



Fig. 3. *Warrior*. 5th Century B.C.E Museo Nazionale, Reggio Calabria, Italy



Fig. 4. Statue of a kouros (youth), ca. 590–580 B.C.E. height 6'4". Metropolitan Museum, New York.

never meet. It is impossible, however, to find anything approaching true parallelism in nature, and no matter how carefully a draftsman draws them, two lines will always be unparallel to a slight degree and, hence, will meet somewhere this side of infinity. But this does

not destroy the concept of parallelism, which still exists in the ideal world.

Plato's *Republic*, to cite another example, is an intellectual exercise in projecting an ideal state. No one knew better than Plato that such a society did not exist in fact and probably never would. But this did not lessen the value of the activity. The important thing was to set up goals that would approach his utopian ideal more closely than did any existing situation. "Would a painter be any the worse," he asks, "because, after having delineated with consummate art an ideal of a perfectly beautiful man, he was unable to show that any such man could ever have existed? ... And is our theory a worse theory because we are unable to prove the possibility of a city being ordered in the manner described?"

Plato's idealistic theory, however, leads him into a rather strange position regarding the activities of artists. When, for instance, they fashion a building, a statue, or a

painting, they are imitating, or representing, specific things that, in turn, are imitations of the ideal forms, and hence their products are thrice removed from the truth. The clear implication is, of course, that art should try to get away from the accidental and accent the essential, to avoid the transitory and seek the permanent.

Aristotle, on the other hand, distinguished between various approaches in art. In his *Poetics*, he observes that "we must represent men either as better than in real life, or as worse, or as they are. It is the same in painting. Polygnotus depicted men as nobler than they are, Pauson as less noble, Dionysius drew them true to life. . . . So again in language, whether prose or verse unaccompanied by music. Homer, for example, makes men better than they are; Cleophon as they are; Hegemon the Thasian, the inventor of parodies, . . . worse than they are." Aristotle applied the same standard to drama, pointing out that "Comedy aims at representing men as worse, Tragedy as better than in actual life." In the visual arts, the distinction, then, is between making an idealized image, a realistic image, or a caricature. Aristotle clearly implies that idealism as expressed in Homer's heroic poetry, Polygnotus' noble paintings, and Sophocles' moving tragedies constitutes the highest form of art.

Idealism and the Arts. At its high point in the latter half of the 5th century B.C.E., the Hellenic style was dominated by the idealistic theory. The Greek temple was designed as an idealized dwelling place for a perfect being. By its logical interrelationship of lines, planes, and masses, it achieves something of

permanence and stability in the face of the transitory and random state of nature.

In portraying an athlete, a statesman, or a deity, the Hellenic sculptor concentrated on typical or general qualities rather than on the unique or particular. This was in line with the Greek idea of personality, *which it* was felt was better expressed in the dominating traits than in individual oddities.

In sculpture, as well as in all the other arts, the object was to rise above transitory sensations to capture the permanent, the essential, the complete. Thus the sculptor avoided representing the human being in infancy or old age, since immaturity and postmaturity implied incompleteness or imperfection and hence were incompatible with the concept of ideal types. The range of representations extends from athletes in their late teens through images of Hermes, Apollo, and Athena, who are conceived in their early maturity, to Zeus, father of the gods, who appears as the fully developed patriarch in all the power of mature manhood. It must also be remembered that few of the Hellenic sculptor's subjects were intended to represent human beings as such. The majority were fashioned to represent gods, who, if cast in human form, must have bodies of transcendent beauty.

In some way, even the intangible tones of music participated also in the ideal world by way of the mathematical relationships on which they are based. A melody, then, might have something more permanent than its fleeting nature would indicate.

One of the main functions of the drama was to create ideal types, and, while the typical was always opposed to the particular, somehow the one arose from the other. The interpretation of this interplay was assigned to the chorus, and the drama

as a whole shared with the other arts the power of revealing how the permanent could be derived from the impermanent—how the formula could be extracted from the process of forming; how a permanent quality could be distilled from universal flux; how the type could be found in the many specific cases; and how the *archetype*, or highest type, could arise from the types.

In the extreme sense, the ideal and real worlds represent perfect order and blind chaos. Since the one was unattainable and the other intolerable, it was necessary to find a middle ground somewhere. Glimpses of truth, beauty, and goodness could be caught occasionally, and these intimations should help people to steer a course from the actual to the ideal. By exercising the faculties of reason, judgment, and moral sense, human beings can subdue the chaotic conditions of their existence and bring closer into view the seemingly far-off perfection.

The Socratic theory of education, expressed in the balance between gymnastic for the body and music for the soul, was designed as a curriculum leading toward this end. The Greek temple, the nobly proportioned sculptural figures, the hero of epic and tragedy, and the orderly relationships of the melodic intervals in music are all embodiments of this ideal. Politician, priest, philosopher, poet, artist, and teacher all shared a common responsibility in trying to bring the ideal closer to realization. As Socrates said, "Let our artists rather be those who are gifted to discern the true nature of the beautiful and graceful; then will our youth dwell in a land of health, amid fair sights and sounds, and receive the good in everything; and beauty, the effluence of fair works, shall flow into the eye and ear, like a health-giving breeze from a purer region, and



Fig. 6. Pantheon, Rome C.E. 120.
Height of portico 59'.

insensibly draw the soul from earliest years into likeness and sympathy with the beauty of reason.”

Rationalism
Rational and irrational forces exist within every society as well as within every

person. The question remains whether the state or individual tries to solve problems by reason or emotion. “Things are numbers,” Pythagoras is supposed to have said, and by this statement to have affirmed that something solid, permanent, and orderly underlies the shifting appearances of things. A few generations later, Anaxagoras went a step further by stating that “mind has power over all things that have life.” Socrates continued the argument and kindled in his followers a burning love of truth, not because truth was useful for worldly success but because truth is an ideal to be pursued for its own sake. The good life in the heyday of Greek civilization embraced not only the ethical principles of courage, temperance, and justice, but also wisdom, a virtue achieved by the free exercise of one’s rational faculties.

In the Hebraic and Christian traditions, original sin lay in breaking the moral law, but to the Greeks, the greatest error was a lack of knowledge. The tragedy of Oedipus in Sophocles’ drama *Oedipus the King* is his ignorance that does not permit him to know he is murdering his father, marrying

his mother, and begetting children who are also his own siblings. His downfall therefore comes through his ignorance, and his fate is the price he has to pay. The entire Greek philosophical tradition concurred in the assumption that, without knowledge and the free exercise of the faculty of reason, there is no ultimate happiness for humanity.

By thinking for themselves in the spirit of free intellectual inquiry, the Greeks to a great extent succeeded in formulating reasonable rules for the conduct of life and its creative forces. This faith in reason also imparted to the arts an inner logic of their own, since when a craftsman’s hands are guided by an alert mind, the work can penetrate the surface play of the senses and plunge to deeper levels of universal experience. For all later periods, this balance between the opposites of reason and emotion, form and content, reality and appearance becomes the basis for any classical style. For such subsequent classical movements as the Renaissance and 19th century neoclassicism, the guiding principle is symmetry, proportion, and unity based on the interrelationship of parts with one another and with the whole.

Harmonic Proportions. Pythagoras’ momentous discovery that such a seemingly inanimate thing as a vibrating string could respond to exact mathematical ratios permeated all later philosophical thought. The Greeks felt it was the key that might unlock the secrets of the universe. In Plato’s *Timaeus* God created the world according to the Pythagorean proportions, making successive divisions as he placed the seven heavenly bodies known to the Greeks in space. As the planets described their orbits they were thought to create cosmic music in the manner of the division of the octave into the seven tones

of the diatonic scale. This doctrine continued into the Middle Ages and Renaissance right through the writings of Galileo and Kepler, who maintained that the planets created a music of the spheres in a kind of sonic counterpoint to the laws of planetary motion. Next, according to Plato, God created the human soul as the mirror image of this universal soul and endowed human beings with the rational-intellective faculty so that they could then aspire to immortality “by learning the harmonies and revolutions of the universe.”

So with God as the master builder composing the universe by musical and geometrical laws, it followed that architecture and sculpture as the framework of human activity must also mirror the cosmic order. At Agrigentum in Sicily the largest of all Doric temples was dedicated to the Olympian Zeus. Since Zeus was the lord of the skies, the two porches have seven columns each (an allusion to the seven planets) while the lateral columns number fourteen in the octaval proportion of 1: 2. Near Athens on the island of Aegina a temple to a local goddess, Aphaia, is also in the Doric order and has six columns on the ends and twelve on the sides, again 1: 2. By the mid-5th century on the mainland, however, the proportions shifted to 1: 2 plus 1, possibly for greater elegance and less rigid mathematical regularity. This is seen in the temple of Zeus at Olympia and the Hephaestum in Athens with 6: 13 each, and the Parthenon with 8:17. Later, in Rome, it will be seen that the geometry of the Pantheon is based on similar harmonic proportions (Fig. 6).

The sculptor Polyclitus thought along the same lines when he formulated a rational theory of the proportions of the

human body. It was based on a modular system in which all parts become multiples or fractions of a basic common measure. His long-lost book was known to the Roman architect Vitruvius, who pointed out that since the head would be one eighth of the total height of an idealized figure, the human body itself fitted into the octave relationship of the musical intervals.

Vitruvius, for his own part, showed how the human body fits into the two most perfect geometrical forms, the circle and square. The drawing shown as Figure 7 (next page) is by Leonardo da Vinci after the theories of Vitruvius. Both hark back to Plato’s *Timaeus*, where the cosmic soul is the macrocosm of the universe and the human soul the microcosm. This idea reverberated along the corridors of time, and as the poet Dryden later wrote:

From harmony to heavenly harmony
This universal frame began;
From harmony to harmony Thro’ all the
compass of the notes it ran, The
diapason ** closing full in man.

Rationalism and the Arts. Hellenic artists were as much concerned as were Plato and Aristotle with the pursuit of an ideal order, which they felt could be grasped by the mind through the medium of the senses. Greek architecture, in retrospect, turns out to be a high point in the rational solution to building problems. The post-and-lintel system of construction, as far as it goes, is eminently reasonable and completely comprehensible. All structural members fulfill their logical purpose. Nothing is hidden or mysterious. The orderly principle of repetition on which Greek temple designs are based is as

** Octave

logical in its way as one of Euclid's geometry propositions or Plato's dialogues. It accomplishes for the eye what Plato tries to achieve for the mind.

The tight unity of the Greek temple met the Greek requirement that a work of art be complete in itself. Its carefully controlled but flexible relationships of verticals and horizontals, solids and voids, structural principles and decorative embellishments give it a relentless internal consistency. And the harmonic proportions of the Parthenon reflect the Greek image of a harmoniously proportioned universe quite as much as a logical system.

Sculpture likewise avoided the pitfalls of rigid mathematics and succeeded in working out principles adapted to its specific needs. When Polyclitus said "the beautiful comes about, little by little, through many numbers," he was stating a rational theory of art in which the parts and whole of a work could be expressed in mathematical proportions. But he also allowed for flexible application of the rule, depending on the pose or line of vision. By such a reconciliation of the opposites of order and freedom, he reveals the kinship of sculptors with their philosophical and political colleagues who were trying to do the same for other aspects of Athenian life.

Rational and irrational elements were present in both the form and content of Greek drama, just as they were in the architecture of the time. In the Parthenon, the structurally regular triglyphs were interspersed with panels showing centaurs and other mythological creatures. The theme of these sculptures was the struggle between the Greeks as champions of enlightenment and the forces of darkness and barbarism. In the drama, the rational Apollonian dialogue existed alongside the inspired Dionysian chorus. However, even

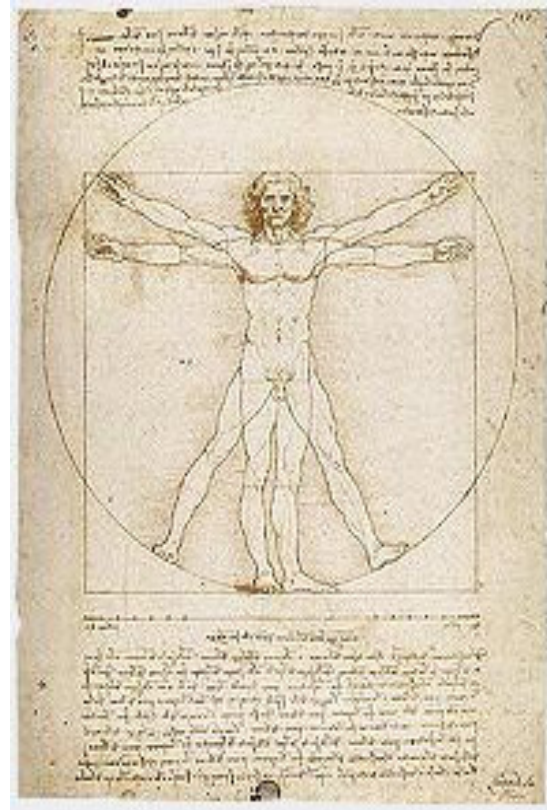


Fig. 7. Leonardo da Vinci. *Study of Human Proportions according to Vitruvius*. C.E. 1485-90. Pen and in. 13½ X 9¾". Galleria dell'Accademia, Venice.

in the latter, the intricate metrical schemes and the complex arrangements of the parts partake of rationalism and convey the dramatic content in a highly ordered composition. In the dialogue of a Greek tragedy, the action of the episodes must by rule lead inevitably and inexorably toward the predestined end, just as the lines and groupings of the figures must do in a composition like that of the cella frieze or east pediment of the Parthenon.

In the union of mythological and rational elements, tragedy could mediate between intuition and rule, the irrational and rational, the Dionysian and Apollonian principles. Above all, it achieves a coherence that meets Aristotle's critical

standard of “a single action, one that is a complete whole in itself with a beginning, middle, and end, so as to enable the work to produce its proper pleasure with all the organic unity of a living creature.”

Just as the harmony of the Parthenon depended on the module taken from the Doric columns, so Polyclitus derived his proportions for the human body from the mathematical relationship of its parts. In similar fashion, melodic lines in music were based on the subdivisions of the perfect intervals derived from the mathematical ratios of the fourth, fifth, and octave. So also the choral sections of the Greek drama were constructed of intricate metrical units that added up to the larger parts on which the unity of the drama depended. In none of these cases, however, was a cold distillation the desired effect. In the architecture of the Hellenic style, in the statues of Polyclitus, in the dramas of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, and in the dialogues of Plato, the rational approach was used principally as a dynamic process to suggest ways for solving a variety of human and aesthetic problems.

It was also the Greeks who first realized that music, like the drama and other arts, was a mean between the divine madness of an inspired musician, such as Orpheus, and the solid mathematical basis on which the art rested acoustically. The element of inspiration had to be tempered by an orderly theoretical system that could demonstrate mathematically the arrangement of its melodic intervals and metrical proportions.

Finally, it should always be remembered that the chief deity of Athens was the goddess of knowledge and wisdom. Even such a cult religion as that of Dionysus, through the Orphic and Pythagorean reforms, tended constantly toward

increased rationalism and abstract thought. While Athena, Dionysus, and Apollo were all born out of a myth, their destinies found a common culmination in the supreme rationalism of Socrates and Plato, who eventually concluded that philosophy was the highest music.

THE HELLENIC HERITAGE

“We are all Greeks.” So said Shelley in the preface to his play *Hellas*. “Our laws, our literature, our religion, our arts, have their roots in Greece.” Merely the mention of such key words as mythology, *philosophy*, *democracy* points immediately to their Greek source. So also do the familiar forms of architecture, sculpture, painting, poetry, drama, and music have their taproots in the age-old soil of Hellas, the land where the Hellenic style was nurtured and brought to fruition.

Such, then, was the remarkable configuration of historical, social, and artistic events that led to this unique flowering of culture. Although circumstances conspired to bring about a decline of political power, Athens was destined to remain the teacher of Greece, Rome, and all later peoples of Western civilization. And the words of Euripides still ring down the corridors of time:

Happy of old were the sons of Erechtheus,
Sprung from the blessed gods, and dwelling
In Athens’ holy and untroubled land.
Their food is glorious wisdom, they work
With springing step in the crystal air.
Here, so they say, golden Harmony first
Saw the light, the child of the Muses nine.