AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF TURKISH MAQAM MUSIC

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In this paper, my principle aim will be to put forward an Epistemological perspective of Turkish Maqam Music. Epistemology, i.e. the theory of knowledge, has predominantly been concerned with the 'knowledge that', i.e. 'knowing that p' in the history of Western Philosophy and I argue that this is a rather problematic attitude especially when knowledge concerning music, especially theory of traditional and non-western music are the objects of knowledge in question. My claim is that, when theory of traditional music and non-western classical and traditional music is considered, the propositional sort of knowledge, i.e 'knowledge that' is for the most part non-applicable and furthermore proves to be contingent and hence unable to supply the demand for a truthful or meaningful account of the music in question by the traditional accounts of knowledge such as Justified True Belief , Fallibilism, Falsificationism, and the like. Since my method and aim is to do an applied philosophy of Turkish Maqam Music in general and an applied Epistemology of Turkish Maqam Music in particular, throughout this paper, I will take into account the case of Turkish Maqam Music and elaborate its theoretical standards with regard to its methods of knowledge acquisition, cognitive status of its performers and its aptitude to propositional knowledge. I aim to put forward that , the theory of Turkish Maqam Music should be a theoretical study that is based on 'knowledge how' rather than 'knowledge that', in other words, on practical knowledge rather than propositional knowledge of its whatness.

Traditionally, epistemology is concerned with 'knowledge that' as its demarcated area of research. What can be known of, i.e. theorized about a subject matter is a true set of propositions which the agent believes and is justified in believing in them. In other words, the theory of a certain subject matter is that very set of true propositions, descriptive in character that explain matters of facts as they are, and account for them. Furthermore, since such activity exhibits a scientific language, that very language is by all means translatable to a logical language through sentences of formal logic and hence is verifiable through truth functions of its propositions. With the advent of Positivism at the end of nineteenth- beginning of twentieth century in the Western world, the theoretical activity resulted in a certain Scientism which demanded all areas of research -be it human sciences or natural sciences- be investigated by the methods of natural sciences and that a Standard scheme of 'knowing that p' be the manner of discourse that sets out to explain all matters of fact in all domains where research was to be made. The Rationalist approach, of which roots can be traced back to Cartesian methodology has since then been the prevalent relationship supposed to exist between the agent and that which he knows. To summarise, that is the method propounded by Descartes throughout 'Discourse on Method'[1] and have been more or less the standard method of scientific activity, which is: 'dividing a subject matter into its most basic constituents/units and analysing those units in order to form descriptive statements concerning its essence and function. In this regard, the cognitive state of the agent towards that which he knows, let us say 'x' is, propositional, he knows that 'x is such and such' and everytime his knowledge of x is called into question, he brings before him, in his mind, the relevant descriptive info, the proposition concerning x, as if 'striking a note in the keyboard of his imagination'[2]

1 Descartes, Rene. "Discourse on Method",
2 Wittgenstein, Ludwig. "Philosophical Investigations",

However, only a handful of epistemologists such as Gilbert Ryle, have put forward the need for an account of 'knowledge how' instead of 'knowledge that' each time it can be predicated of an agent that he is in possession of knowledge of 'x'. According to Gilbert Ryle in *Concept of the Mind*, throughout his essay called 'Knowledge that and knowledge how' [3] , his principal objection is against the idea of there being a theory in the mind of the agent each time it is predicated of him that he knows x or is able to perform x as a matter of his adequate knowledge of x. This is the myth of 'ghost in the machine' , which is the myth that an agent's action is the indication of there being a theoretical knowledge 'in' his mind, i.e. the agent being in a certain cognitive mode concerning x when he acts. Ryle's claim, in a quite Wittgensteinian line of argument, is that, there is no 'in' the mind, meaning a cognitive privacy of a certain statement occurring 'inside' the mind, subjectively, however, what the agent knows is all manifest in his action, accesible to all which would not be accessible even to the agent himself if it required an explanation rather than the action itself. According to Ryle, (i) 'knowledge how can't be reduced to knowledge that', (ii) 'knowledge how is prior to knowledge that', and (iii) it's our 'knowledge how, not our knowledge that' that makes what we do intelligent (Ryle 1984:26-60).

His account challenges the view that 'knowledge that' comes before 'knowledge how' and makes possible 'knowledge how'. This view he thinks is mistaken and he calls it the 'intellectualist legend'. Now, this intellectualist legend can be considered to be in line with the rationalist-positivist strand such that, first of all, to claim that 'knowledge that' comes before 'knowledge how' and makes possible 'knowledge how' and that 'knowledge how' is reducible to 'knowledge that' come down to claiming that: (i) when one acts, for example, say, plays chess, his ability to do so means that he first has acquired all the descriptive info, i.e. theoretical info about what chess is and at each move he calls to mind this info and without this, he would not be able to perform this act; (ii) each time an agent acts out of a know how, implicitly in this know how is a proposition, i.e. even when one rides a bicycle, his know how concerning what to do is a sort of proposition resembling 'it is the case that pushing the pedals respectively results in the turning of wheels which in turn make the bicycle go forward' etc.

Both of these claims are challenged by Ryle for the quite obvious reason that these claims are simply not true concerning both the performative and the descriptive acts. For one thing, countless examples can be given to the cases where the performers do not have any idea about the theory of what they are doing, nor its history or its rules however are perfectly able to perform them.

"According to the (intellectualist) legend, whenever an agent does anything intelligently, his act is preceded and steered by another internal act of considering a regulative proposition appropriate to his practical problem. But what makes him consider the one maxim which is appropriate rather than any of the thousands which are not? (…) Intelligently reflecting how to act is, among other things, considering what is pertinent and disregarding what is inappropriate.(…) the application of the criterion of appropriateness does not entail the occurrence of a process of considering this criterion. Next, supposing still that to act reasonably , I must first perpend the reason for so acting, how am I led to make a suitable application of the reason to the particular situation which my action is to meet? For,

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3 Ryle, Gilbert "Concept of the Mind", ch 2

the reason, or maxim, is inevitably a proposition of some generality. It cannot embody specifications to fit every detail of the particular state of affairs.(…) Intelligent, cannot be defined in terms of 'intellectual' or 'knowing how' in terms of 'knowing *that'*; thinking what I am doing' does not connote 'both thinking what to do and doing it' (…). My performance has a special procedure or manner, not special antecedents" (Ryle 1984:32).

Ryle's main point here is, even in the case of 'knowing that', i.e. in the case of theoretical knowledge, a certain 'know-how` about where and how the description in question fits the phenomenon 'in the world' is presupposed. This seemingly obvious statement is in fact harboring a bold claim about all scientific and theoretical activity, that practice *always* comes before theory, for any scientific claim with empirical content such as, say for example, the knowledge that 'standard meter is 100 cm'   or that 'meter is the standard unit of measurement that calculates surfacial length', a certain 'know how' of how to understand surfaces lengthwise and thus to use rulers in the appropriate way is presupposed. Hence, it is quite the contrary of the 'intellectualist' model where 'knowledge how' presupposes mastery of 'knowledge that'.

Gilbert Ryle's concern is purely confined to epistemology and the Philosophy of Mind that he intends to bring about a shift in the paradigm of knowledge which will have bearings on the understanding of the mind in the cognitivist discourse and he aims at demolishing the idea of the mind as an 'inner' sphere privately owned by the agent or is to be looked for in the brain as a tabula over which statements about matters of fact are to be read. His attempt, following the Wittgensteinian tradition, should be seen as a historical move much required as an anti-Cartesian vein doing away with certain myths of Rationalism throughout the discourse of western thought concerning man's identity and rational capacity and intelligence.

However, these myths of rationalism and positivism has had important impacts on musicological studies as well in shaping theories of music as well as the methodology in shaping their theoretical and educational structure. As interdisciplinary researchers working on musicology and ethnomusicology, it is to the benefit of research in these areas to do a study of applied philosophy to see in which way the intellectualist myths inherited from Rationalism and Positivism has influenced theories of music and to try and see whether theoretical perspectives such as Ryle's of treating a dogma with a conceptual therapy of inherent misconceptions can help us in re-shaping these theories of music and re-structuring their methodology and education in due respect. My argument is that, once we are tempted to see that both the education and the knowledge concerning Turkish Maqam music, for its performer, has always-historically and phenomenologically-been a 'know how' rather than a 'know that', then we will be tempted to fundamentally re-shape our expectation from a theory of Turkish Maqam Music and our methodology concerning its pedagogical aspects.

Maqams in Turkish (Ottoman) Music can be defined as certain melody paths based on the combination, separation, interchangeability and intersection of certain tetra-chords and penta-chords through which the melodical journeys (*seyir*) customary in the tradition are supposed to take place. In the discourse of maqams, one should take great care to avoid doing rigid comparisons between maqams and scales and use the terminology of tonal music and scales to define that which is happening in the 'existential outlook' of a maqam. First of all, although there are many cases in which the melodical journey (*seyir*) of a maqam happens to fit perfectly or resemble a

scale in tonal music, such as the similarity between the G minor scale and Nihavend Maqam, for example, scales generally fall short of explaining all the complexities that occur throughout the seyir of a maqam and more often than not, using a scale-ridden perspective to analyse a maqam is misleading because the fluidity and simultaneous existence of interchangeable tetra or penta-chords and their gateways to inherent modulations get to be disconsidered or underestimated. I am not a specialist of Jazz music or modal music in general and an inquiry into whether the kinship of neighbouring tonalities with regard to their resemblance in their accidentals in Jazz music serve as gateways to modulation just as it does in maqam music with the simultaneously existing or neighbouring tetra or penta-chords is an inquiry worth considering however for the time being, it goes beyond the scope, consideration and purposes of this paper and remains for a future elaboration.

The point of interest for us here is the fluid and dynamic structure of a maqam and its *seyir*, that allows itself only in a limited sense to be represented 'as such' in a formal language of sorts. It is not a scale, of which a descriptive picture can be supplied easily in a formal language, its modulational possibilities at each moment simply surpass a descriptive proposition and make theories sort of impractical and in most cases inappropriate. The dynamic fluidity and hence indecisive nature of its referential apparatus is not only limited to the simulatenous existence of tetra-chords and penta-chords. Its frets (*perde*) are equally as dynamic and fluid and in a state of motion as the other dynamic units of a given maqam. Even if we were to supply relational, distance-based, numeric values such as in Byzantine music instead of giving names to frets-which has been the predominant tradition in Turkish music since the earliest theoretical studies by Takiyuddin's systematic school- we would still be puzzled about which numeric value to give and how to 'name it' basically when we were faced with such changing (getting bigger or smaller) distances, within the repertory of the same maqam or sometimes even throughout the same song, that are once closer to and then further away from each other without necessarily being able to account for the reason of such a change. The reason, has to do with, the tradition, basically, and at this point even a third dimension of episteme, namely that of 'knowledge by acquaintance' comes into the Picture. The explanation would simply be 'my ear knows that sound'. Knows? Knows how and when to produce that sound? Yes, but further than that, the acquisition of that knowledge has been through being acquainted with that sound and hence, one who knows the sound by acquaintance, knows that it is 'this' and not 'that'. It is like knowing the face of your neighbour Mr. Oztas and being able to pick him thus out of those which are not Mr. Oztas. It is that kind of knowledge that we use when we are acquainted with the required and divergent E flats in various songs and Türküs in Hüzzam maqam for example. Now at this point, how much sense does it make to ask of a theory to provide a descriptive proposition about these idiosyncrasies occurring which are downright the defining paradigm of the characteristics of maqam music? Why endorse a logical positivist point of view about the function of music notation in maqam music and treat musical notation as if it is the formal language that describes all possible sound combinations –as if devicing a truth functional table for music- ever to occur throughout a piece? The reason why Turkish maqam music can not succesfully be 'totally and absolutely' described with musical notation is not to be seen as a failure in the notation system, and hence as a reason to seek for a 'better' one with an improved capacity of representation, however this very difficulty

in representing the peculiarities and dynamics of Turkish maqam music with notation should be seen as an actually meaningful 'difficulty' which points to the fact that in this music, dynamics of the inherent melodical movements cancel the possibility of musical notation being an absolutely 'representational' model, however, it forms part of the know how along with other guidelines to the know how of its performance that will allow the musician to perform it 'correctly'. And after all, there is by no means a relativistic approach on the part of the musicians concerning the performance of Turkish Maqam Music. It is actually a process that, the musical truthfulness of the performance is checked and corrected by other participants of the musical performance when an error is committed by one. In other words, it does not lack criteria of correctness and more often than not, this criteria is quite strictly applied and that is basically why this music could preserve its sound horizon in a more or less untouched manner throughout the centuries. It is a pretty common scene among Turkish Maqam Musicians that during a Mesk, an elderly or more experienced member among the musicians would correct others by saying to the others, mostly correcting the musical notation –if there is one- 'this sharp you see here needs to be played sharper' or 'this flat here needs to be played flatter, etc'. Such corrections sound almost mysterious to the inexperienced eye-wittness of the situation, since it seems like a mystery how that person gets to know 'how sharp' that sharp in question needs to be played. Only after a long period of having played maqam music, one gets to understand that when a cesni (melodical ornament) as an alteration of the one currently being played is made, due to the required sound horizon of the maqam or cesni being modulated to, specific alterations of how that note in the given context should sound, might occur. Hence, the seemingly mysterious gesture of the elderly musician does have a so-called 'know-how-theoretical' ground that only those who have 'been there doing that', in other words, in the context, in the Mesk learning its know-how through personal initiation can make sense of and understand. Apart from that, I can not possibly imagine any theory that would explain this phenomenon. The only theory that I have heard being spoken of, which sets out to explain 'the logic of how to modulate in a maqam during improvisation', which is yet another important aspect of maqam music performance, is the supposed existence of pivotal notes that make modulation possible. Although he does not call it himself as 'a theory' and only deviced it as a method to make his students understand the know-how of modulation, I have been quite impressed by the concept of 'horizontal harmony' once spelled out by Sokratis Sinopoulos throughout a maqam improvisation seminar. His opinion was that there existed not a vertical but a horizontal harmony in Ottoman Maqam Music, such that when we want to modulate to a certain note, a certain fret, the fret a fifth above it can help us strike the fret we want to modulate to since the function of playing the fret a fifth below it is to pull this note with a gravity so to speak, in a diachronical way, so as to create a necesity for a temporary cadence (asma kalis) on the desired fret. Hence, according to Sinopoulos, the fret fifth above the fret that we want to make an *asma kalış* on, functions as the pivotal note that renders the modulation or the cadence to it possible. (He does not use the term 'pivotal' either, as has been said, his purpose had been purely to make his pupils understand this phenomenon throughout a *Meşk*). For the time being, this only remains as a hypothesis which is musicologically interesting to research about, however, in practice when a Maqam musician is asked about the rules of modulation in a certain maqam or pivotal notes to modulate from and where they are to be found, his reaction would be to advise that person

to "play all the repertory composed in this maqam and develop a feeling for it saying that such things can not be explained but rather felt and done". Moreover, when we predicate of ourselves or another maqam musician, that "he knows, say, Hicaz Maqam" we will not be talking about the set of propositions and definitions of Hicaz that he manages to 'keep in his mind', however of his competency in performing that Maqam respecting its unwritten rules dictated by the tradition that are to be manifest in his seyir and his competency in applying the melodical colours predominantly belonging to the customary performance of that Maqam.

Since we had formerly discussed at great length Ryle's objection to the Intellectualist legend, we have seen that one of his main interests was in challenging the view that acquistion of knowledge occurs through acquiring a set of true propositions, i.e theoretical statements about a subject matter. His claim was that, knowledge acquisition occurs primarily through the acquisition of a know-how, in other words the acquisition of a skill to perform that in a specific manner which is intimated to the learner through repetition and correction and hence elimination of error by practical guidance. When we consider the main education system of Turkish Maqam Music throughout the centuries, which is the *Meşk* system, i.e. 'the teaching of music repertoire to the student by the lecturer-performer through many repetitions of parts or whole of each piece and making the student acquire the piece and its performance in his memory'[4], it will be seen that Mesk system is the system of education where knowledge acquisition occurs fundamentally through know-how, in other words through a repeated sequence of rule following which presupposes participation and results in acquired performative skills rather than a propositional scheme about the outlook of that which is to be known, namely, Turkish Maqam Music. Someone who learns Turkish Maqam Music without ever having been in a Mesk where error and correction are rendered possible and who learns it from books and notation will be prone to committing many errors that basically distort the performance and undermine the possibility of even considering his performance as representative of the given maqam.

Conclusion

The contemporary debate concerning the theoretical needs of Turkish Maqam Music and the contempt due to the partial dysfunction of the current theories at hand such as Arel-Ezgi-Uzdilek theory which faces charges of 'not being fit' to represent Turkish Maqam Music theoretically makes it a worthwhile study to attempt to do an applied Epistemology of Turkish Maqam Music, situating it within the context of modern discourse of theory of Knowledge. Such a perspective as an epistemological case study of Turkish Maqam Music proves to bring about interesting results for the disciplines of contemporary epistemology, ethnomusicology and musicology. When we analyse Turkish Maqam Music with regard to the cognitive state of its performer, to its methodology and system of education, to the presuppositions of the acquisition of its knowledge, to the way its knowledge unfolds, we will be tempted to reform our conception of what the mode of knowing consists in and consider Know-how as forming fundamentally part of, if not entirely being the subject matter of Epistemology. Likewise, when we consider what we understand from a 'theory' regarding how it functions and what it serves and thus what can be expected of theoretical study through the perspective of dominant schools of thought that shaped

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4 I am indebted to Prof. Nermin Kaygusuz for this defintion of *Meşk* system.

theory of knowledge and scientific activity and theory formation in the age of modernity and post-modernity such as Rationalism, Logical-Positivism, Positivism and the like, we will have to reconsider our certain key expectations from how a Theory of Turkish Maqam Music is supposed to function. One of the main results of such a shift in the paradigm of how a Theory functions to explicate this music is, to withdraw from viewing musical notation and music theory as that which represents Turkish Music in formal language. The relation that exists is not of correspondence or representation, it is more to be viewed as a helpful guideline to the acquisition of know-how of the *seyir* of Maqams. Hence, any theory that is supposed to explicate Turkish Maqam Music can only do so through putting forward the specifications of its practical application and performance. That is exactly what is actually being done at the Conservatoires of Turkish Music today when educational texts are considered, they are full of statements such as "This maqam likes this *çeşni*" because the knowledge considering the maqams is nothing else than the acquisition of a practical skill that leads to competency in performing them.

Therefore, the only plausible theoretical perspective considering the knowledge of Turkish Maqam Music is to state that knowledge of a maqam is manifest in the performance of a musician as a result of the acquisition of the feeling and character of each Maqam's seyir features by the musician through the know-how gained through Mesk where correction during the error-and-trial method is supplied. A theory of Turkish Maqam Music without the necessary Mesk participation with masters of the tradition will prove to be misleading and incomplete. A functioning theory of maqams should therefore map out their traditional Know-how, not a set of propositions 'about' them.

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