MUSIC AND THE EMOTIONS

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For Michael

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PREFACE

Rameau opened his *Treatise on Harmony* by defining music as the science of sounds. But when music is regarded as one of the fine arts it is more accurate to define it not as the science, but as the art of sounds. And if this definition is understood in the sense in which it is intended, it draws into its net just the subject it is meant to capture. For music is essentially the art of uninterpreted sounds. It is not the art of sounds understood as signs with non-auditory meanings and composed in accordance with syntactic rules: it is not the art of speech. And it is not the art of sounds arranged in such a way that something not composed of sounds is to be heard in them: it is not the auditory analogue of the art of pictorial representation. It is the art of sounds that are not given a non-auditory interpretation.

Music is based upon the human capacity to hear sequences of bare sounds in various ways: to hear a rhythm in a series of sounds; to hear two simultaneous rhythms in a series of sounds; to hear a series of sounds as a melody; to hear one melody as a variation of another; to hear sets of sounds as chords; to hear a later chord as resolving an earlier chord; and so on. And these modes of hearing sounds do not possess thought-contents: to hear a rhythm, a melody, a chord, a cadence is in each case to be aware of a form of sounds or a form in sound, and each form can be perceived without anything else being present to or grasped or thought of by the mind than sounds that are experienced in that form. Accordingly, the fundamental appeal of a musical work is as a structure of sounds that is its own *raison d'être:* the experience in which the work is appreciated—the experience that realises its value as music—is both non-propositional and non-representational, and if the work is valued as music, what is valued cannot be separated from the composition of sounds itself. The experience of

music is *au fond* purely auditory: it consists of interconnected modes of hearing mere sounds. And the value of music is inherent in the forms of sound that compose the music: it cannot be abstracted from the sounds in which it is located and considered without reference to them. It is for these reasons that it is fruitless to attempt to produce a sense of the value of a musical work in anyone who is unmusical. The significance of any musical work can be revealed only to initiates.

But although musical value is specifically musical, in the sense that the value of a musical work can be appreciated only by those capable of experiencing it with understanding; and although music is characteristic, ally, and in essence, an abstract art, in that music as an art-form is not based upon music's capacity to represent or to refer to items in the physical world; it would be mistaken to conclude that the experience and value of music must be essentially unrelated to the non-musical world. For some musical phenomena exist not only in music, and our familiarity with their non-musical instances can play an important role both in shaping and colouring our experience of music—as when our response is affected by a correspondence between a musical rhythm and the rhythm of a bodily process, or when music succeeds in suggesting a non-musical phenomenon by imitating its rhythm. And it is possible for phenomena specific to music to be related in a musically significant manner to non-musical phenomena—as when a melody is expressive of a state of mind, an attitude, a feeling or an emotion, and the melody is imbued with the significance of that state of mind. At least, this is how the character of music presents itself to a superficial consideration: the truth or falsity of this appearance can be decided only by a more penetrating examination of the subject.

And this introduces the theme of my book. For in the book I investigate the relationship between music and the emotions. However, many kinds of connection between music and the emotions are irrelevant to my concern. For my interest is the nature and significance of music as an art-form and my concern, accordingly, is to isolate those connections, if any, between music and the emotions that are involved in the understanding and appreciation of music and in the proper estimate of musical value and the value of music relative to other values—the values of the other art-forms and the various kinds of non-artistic value. This book is intended as a preliminary step towards the attainment of that end.

The book consists of a set of studies in the philosophy of music: itexpounds and assesses certain theories about the relationship between the art of music and the emotions. But it has not been my aim to supply a comprehensive history of the subject. For my interest is philosophical, not

historical. I am concerned to understand the artistically significant connections between music and the emotions, not merely to catalogue and relate to one another the numerous different conceptions of these connections that others have put forward. My treatment of the topic is therefore highly selective: the theories I have chosen to examine are still influential; they include what I consider to be the most substantial contributions to the subject; they cover much of the ground that must be worked over; and in general there is something that can be learnt from them about musical experience and value. And my examination is distinctly philosophical: what is at issue is the adequacy of the theories to their subject-matter and the quality of the arguments by which they are supported, and it is from this point of view that they have been evaluated. But although the book is a work of philosophy I have been concerned to write it in such a way that it is as accessible as is possible to the reader who does not have a grounding in philosophy. What *is* presupposed is an acquaintance with music, against which the abstract nature of the argument can be tested; and also a concern to clarify the nature of one's attachment to music—for without this the time and effort required to read the book will be wasted.

The structure of the book is simple. First, I investigate the topic of the emotions and I propose a model of the essence of an emotion. It is clear that this model would need considerable refinement in a complete treatment of the subject; and it makes use of the problematic idea of pleasure and pain as experiential aspects of modes of thought. Furthermore, the topic of the emotions is not exhausted by an account of the essence of an emotion: much the greater part of the subject remains to be explored. But I believe that the model is suitable for its purpose: it helps to correct certain misconceptions about the nature of an emotion, and it serves, I hope, to focus attention upon what an emotion is. However, I have not wanted my examination of the question whether there is an artistically significant relation between music and the emotions to stand or fall with the model's adequacy and, accordingly, I have attempted, so far as is possible, to keep the argument of each of the succeeding chapters free from reliance upon the model.

In these succeeding chapters, which I have tried to make largely independent of one another, I examine a number of theories about the relation between music and the emotions. Now philosophies of music can be divided into two camps. On the one side, there are those theories that maintain that the value of music as an art-form and the different musical values of different musical works must be explained by reference to

music's relationship with something outside music and in which we have an independent interest. And by far the most common extramusical phenomenon with which the value of music has been thought to be bound up is emotion. For emotion is something of great extramusical concern to us; it is undeniable that music has the power to move us to emotion; and in the case of certain musical works—those we experience as being expressive of emotion—we hear an emotional quality in the music itself. Hence, emotion is a natural candidate for the role presupposed by theories in this camp: the role of that which exists outside music and which determines the value of music according to the relation in which music stands to it. In the opposite camp are those theories that claim that the essential value of music as an art-form is purely musical: the importance of music as an art-form does not lie in any function it performs that involves a reference to anything non-musical; the musical value of each musical work is independent of any connection between the work and anything external to music; and, consequently, it is always unnecessary to experience a musical work as related to anything extramusical in order to understand the work and to appreciate its value as music. And, accordingly, the value of music is essentially unrelated to the emotions.

I begin the examination of my chosen theories of music by considering a set of theories drawn from the second camp: each theory attempts, in one way or in all ways, to dissociate music as an art-form from the emotions, and their arguments complement each other. The evaluation of these theories occupies the second, third and fourth chapters. I then turn to a number of theories from the first camp: each of these theories maintains that there is an essential connection between the art of music—or, at least, certain significant musical works—and the emotions. The evaluation of these theories occupies the fifth, sixth and seventh chapters. Finally, I consider a theory that has a foot in each camp without, perhaps, being a member of either. And the result of the examination is that each of the theories—the representatives of the first camp as well as those of the second camp, and also the go-between—is found wanting: no theory does justice to the phenomenon of music.

Nevertheless, some of the theories are more insightful than others, and throughout the book I am concerned to specify and to establish certain requirements that any viable theory of music must satisfy. This does not add up to a comprehensive theory of music or to a complete account of the artistically significant relations between music and the emotions. And I do not have such a theory or such an account. My book is therefore not offered as a solution to all the problems with which it deals. But the markers it lays

down, and the clearing of the ground it attempts, will, I hope, encourage efforts to make further progress.

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I
THE EMOTIONS

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1 The emotions can be considered either episodically or dispositionally. As an episode, an emotion is an occurrence: it is something felt, experienced or undergone at a certain time—as when someone blushes with embarrassment, is petrified with fear, finds a situation amusing or feels pity for another's misfortune. Understood dispositionally, an emotion involves a tendency to undergo the emotion when certain thoughts are present to the mind: under these conditions episodes of the emotion are likely to occur—as when someone is envious of another's talent and experiences envy when he thinks of that person's success, or is afraid of somebody and feels fear when he finds himself in that person's company. It is true that an emotion in the dispositional sense involves more than this tendency to undergo the emotion; but the tendency is essential to it. Hence, the idea of emotion as an episode—the experience or undergoing of emotion—is basic and it is this conception of emotion we need to understand.

2 There are at least three questions that can be asked about the nature of the emotions:
(i) What is emotion? (What is necessary, and what is sufficient, for an occurrence to be an instance of emotion? What separates the experience of emotion from the experience of other kinds of mental event?)
(ii) How are the different emotions distinguished from each other? (How are they individuated?)
(iii) How are the different emotions to be defined? (How are they constituted?)

Let us consider the following list of emotions: embarrassment, envy, fear, grief, pride, remorse, shame. Perhaps the best procedure would be to

try to answer for these emotions the third question first. If we can see what each of these emotions is, we can see what differentiates them—and so answer for these emotions the second question—and also what, if anything, they have in common which is not shared with anything that is not an emotion—and so answer the first question, if what is distinctive of these emotions is distinctive of all emotions and all states of mind in which emotion is experienced. If, on the other hand, we find reason to believe that the emotions are not susceptible of definition, this reason is likely to put us in a better position to answer one or both of the other questions. But there are three considerations it is important to bear in mind if this procedure is adopted. Firstly, the adoption of this procedure does not rest on the assumption that each emotion has a name. The fact is that some emotions do have names and no questions are begged by starting from those that do. Secondly, the procedure does not assume that each emotion term, or each of those on the list, stands for a single emotion. Whether an emotion term stands for one or for more than one emotion depends in part upon the answer to the second question—the principle for individuating the emotions—and we are not yet in a position to say what this is or what might be a suitable criterion for the individuation of the emotions. Thirdly, the procedure does not assume that everything that is true of each of the emotions on the list is true of every emotion and contains the essence of emotion. What we regard as the emotions might not form a tightly unified class: some emotions on the list might not be characteristic, and some emotions not on the list might be anomalous.

3 Perhaps it will be helpful at this point to lay out the various positions that might be adopted towards the nature of the experience of each specific kind of emotion. At least four positions can be distinguished: three of the positions agree that the emotions cannot be defined, but differ in the reasons they advance for this conclusion; one position maintains that the emotions are susceptible of definition,

(i) The first position claims that the experience of each emotion is a simple experience in the same sense as that in which the experience of a particular hue is a simple experience: it has no distinguishable components or aspects, and is for that reason not susceptible of analysis. It is not composed of ingredients or facets whose combination or fusion constitutes it. The different emotions can no more be defined in simpler terms than the different colours can be. Accordingly, the emotions aredifferentiated from each other in the kind of way that colours are differentiated from each

other, and the relation of particular emotion to emotion itself is similar to the relation of particular colour to colour itself.

(ii) The second position maintains that the experience of each emotion is a compound experience, but it is not fully resoluble into its components. Each variety of emotion has a distinctive feature which cannot be analysed into the features of its constituent elements. An emotion is a composite, a blend, but its character is not the sum of the characters of its elements: it has a feature which is not possessed by any of its ingredients—as any minor second has a character which is not possessed by either of the notes that compose it and yet which is not merely the union of their unmerged characters. An emotion is not a combination of its constituents but a fusion of them: when an emotion is experienced the experience is not merely the combined experience of what is experienced when each component or aspect of that emotion is independently experienced. An emotion cannot be resolved without remainder into relations between its components: it is not a set of phenomena combined in some independently specifiable way. Hence, a person cannot know what an emotion is—what it is to experience that emotion—merely by being familiar with each separable element or ingredient of that emotion and knowing that these are combined in the emotion in such-and-such a manner. And hence, the emotions are distinguished by the special quality of the product of the fusion of their constituents and also by their different constituents (if, as this position is likely to hold, emotions with exactly the same constituents cannot be of different kinds).

(iii) The third position claims that the experience of each emotion is composite and it is resoluble without remainder into its components and the way in which they are combined. Accordingly, each emotion is susceptible of definition, and a person can know what the experience of any emotion is like if he understands the definition of the emotion: if he is familiar with the emotion's constituents and understands how they compose the emotion. Furthermore, the emotions are distinguished by their different constituents (if two emotions cannot combine the same constituents in different ways).

(iv) The fourth position rejects an assumption implicit in the other three positions. For it maintains for each emotion that the experience of that emotion does not possess an essence: there is no property common and specific to experiences of the same emotion (except, trivially, theproperty of being instances of that emotion). Hence, instances of an emotion are united in some other way than by their possession of a distinctive property. And experiences of two different emotions are distinguished by their different relations with other experiences of the two kinds of emotion.

4 Now these rival positions, which have been expressed in an abstract form, can be brought into sharper focus if we adopt the procedure suggested earlier and attempt to define the emotions on the list. Perhaps the most plausible definitions of the emotions are those that follow the lines laid down in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*.[1] Let us consider the following definitions, each of which is put forward as an account of at least one of the kinds of episode to which the term applies:

(i) Embarrassment is discomfort at the thought that some action or condition might make others think less well of one.

(ii) Envy is pain at the thought of an advantage enjoyed by another,

(iii) Fear is distress at the thought of danger to oneself or someone or something one cares about.

(iv) Grief is acute distress at the thought of the death of someone who is dear to one.

(v) Pride is satisfaction at the thought of an achievement, or the possession of a desirable quality, by oneself or someone or something one identifies with.

(vi) Remorse is distress at the thought that one has acted wrongly,

(vii) Shame is discomfort at the thought of the possession of a defect, or the falling short of an ideal, by oneself or someone one identifies with.

One feature of these definitions is that each emotion is defined in such a way as to involve a particular kind of thought: it has this thought as a constituent. Now it is certainly true of each of these emotions that it has a thought as a constituent and, consequently, the first position—the thesis that the experience of each emotion is a simple experience—is mistaken. A concept of a particular thought is part of the concept of each of these emotions: someone experiences one of these emotions only if he is of a certain opinion, or views things in a certain way, or thinks that a certain proposition is true, or a certain thought occurs to him.

Another feature of the definitions is that for each emotion the thought it involves is different from the thought involved in any other emotion. These emotions are differentiated from each other by the thoughts included in them: each emotion involves a thought specific to it: thespecification of the thought is sufficient to distinguish the emotion from all others. But although this is true of the emotions on the list it is not universally true of the emotions. Different emotions can involve exactly the same thought—as both pity and *Schadenfreude* involve the thought of someone's misfortune or discomfiture.

A third feature of the definitions is that each emotion is defined in such a way as to involve not only a particular kind of thought but a positive or

negative reaction to the content of the thought: a form of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, pleasure or pain, agreeableness or disagreeableness, delight or distress. It is because pity and *Schadenfreude* involve different reactions to the same thought—the one reaction is distress, the other is pleasure—that they are different emotions.

These definitions construe each emotion as a form of pain or pleasure which is experienced on account of a certain kind of thought. Hence, a general account of the emotions based on this pattern defines the emotions as the various forms in which kinds of thought can be experienced with kinds of pleasure or pain. Accordingly, two episodes of emotion can differ with respect to the kinds of thought they involve, or in the nature of the pleasurable or painful reaction to the thought, or in both respects. Two episodes will be instances of the same kind of emotion only if they involve the same thought and the same form of pleasure or pain. But the limits of a particular kind of emotion will be drawn more or less narrowly according as the thought the emotion involves is required to be more or less specific. Hence, an emotion term will be said to stand for only one kind of emotion if a liberal criterion for individuating kinds of emotion by reference to kinds of thought is adopted; if a stricter criterion is preferred the term will be said to stand for more than one kind of emotion. And so an emotion term can be said to apply to a number of different kinds of emotion or to a single kind of which these are species: if 'fear' is standardly applied not only to episodes that involve the thought of possible harm but to episodes that do not, there is one kind of emotion that is defined by reference to the thought that unites these different kinds of episode and a more specific kind that is defined by reference to the thought of possible harm.

But is the style of definition illustrated by these accounts—which renders an emotion as a thought experienced with pain or pleasure—acceptable in the particular cases considered and also in general? I shall consider two grounds on which it might be rejected: the conditions laid down by definitions in this style for an episode to be an instance of a certain kind of emotion might be thought to be insufficient or theymight be thought to be unnecessary. And if they are thought to be unnecessary, exception might be taken either to the alleged necessity of a specific form of pleasure or pain or to the alleged necessity of a constituent thought. I shall begin with the objection to the supposed necessity of the conditions but I shall put on one side for the moment the objection that some kinds of emotion do not involve particular kinds of thought.

5 The objection to the introduction of an aspect of pleasure or pain into the

idea of each emotion can take two forms. The first maintains that the pleasant or unpleasant tone of each kind of emotion is variable: whether a certain emotion is experienced with pleasure or with pain is not dependent solely upon the nature of the emotion but upon the character and situation of the subject of the emotion. But the plausibility of this form of the objection is based upon a conflation of the pleasurable or unpleasurable aspect of an emotion either with a person's attitude towards his experience of the emotion or with the effect of the emotion on the person. The fact that someone experiences a certain thought with pleasure can distress him and, conversely, the fact that he experiences a certain thought with pain can please him: someone can be displeased that he experiences pride or he can derive pleasure from being sad. But this does not imply that his experience of pride can lack a pleasant aspect or his sadness be wholly pleasurable. And although emotions which are in themselves unpleasurable can have pleasurable effects (as Freud insisted),[2] they do not thereby lose their painful aspect.

The second form of the objection to the introduction of an aspect of pleasure or pain into each emotion maintains that for some emotions the thoughts integral to them do not need to be experienced with some particular form of pleasure or pain if they are to be instances of those emotions. Now the significance of this form of the objection is not solely a matter of whether it is justified. For if there are only a few emotions for which an aspect of pleasure or pain does not enter their definitions, the importance of the fact that there are such emotions depends on the extent to which these emotions possess features in common with the other emotions. But the style of definition we are considering credits emotions with just two essential aspects, an aspect of thought and an aspect of pleasure or pain. Hence, unless the emotions defined in this way are only partially defined, there is nothing that one of these emotions and an emotion which-does not essentially possess a pleasure-pain aspect could share as part of their nature except the property of having a thought as a constituent. And if this should be so the emotions would fall apart into two kinds of state: thoughts experienced with pleasure or pain, and thoughts not so experienced but which possess some other distinctive property (perhaps a disjunctive property). And the style of definition we are considering would be applicable to much the larger of the two sub-classes. If, however, this style of definition is always or generally incomplete—if it only succeeds in defining the emotions partially—then it is possible that the emotions—both those that do and those that do not essentially involve an aspect of pleasure or pain—might be bound together by further properties. If the definitions in