# Davies and Levinson on the Musical Expression of Emotion: What's the Problem?

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*Stephen Davies and Jerrold Levinson have each offered accounts of how music can express emotions. Davies's 'Appearance Emotionalism' holds that music can be expressive of emotion due to a resemblance between its dynamic properties and those of human behaviour typical of people feeling that emotion, while Levinson's 'Hypothetical Emotionalism' contends that a piece is expressive when it can be heard as the expression of the emotion of a hypothetical agent or imagined persona. These have been framed as opposing positions but I show that, on one understanding of 'expressing' which they seem to share, each entails the other and so there is no real debate between them. However, Levinson's account can be read according to another—and arguably more philosophically interesting—understanding of 'expressing' whereas Davies's account cannot as easily be so read. I argue that this reading of Hypothetical Emotionalism can account for much of our talk about music in terms of emotions but must answer another question—viz., how composers or performers can express emotions through music—to explain this relation between music and emotion. I suggest that this question can be answered by drawing on R. G. Collingwood's theory of artistic expression.*

**Keywords:** Musical expression; Stephen Davies; appearance emotionalism; Jerrold Levinson; hypothetical emotionalism; R. G. Collingwood.

## 1. Introduction

It is common to speak of music in terms of emotions—to say that a song is sad, joyful, sombre, serene, etc.—and to describe pieces of music as expressing emotions, e.g., to characterize Beethoven's "Kreutzer

Sonata" as expressing agitation and pent-up energy, Vivaldi's "Spring" as expressing exuberant playfulness, and so forth. However, explaining just what is meant by such turns of phrase, and how a piece of music can be, say, sad, or how a performance of that piece can express sadness (or whatever other emotion), is a tricky business. On the one hand, musical compositions and performances are not subjects that can feel emotions, let alone externalize or express them; on the other, such talk does seem genuinely to describe a quality that we perceive or experience as somehow belonging to or being 'in' the music.

While many philosophers have endeavoured to explain how music and emotion are related and to account for talk of music expressing emotions,[1] this paper focuses on two prominent contemporary theories of musical expression: Stephen Davies's Appearance Emotionalism (AE) and Jerrold Levinson's Hypothetical Emotionalism (HE). Davies and Levinson have advanced their theories in multiple places,[2] but my focus will be on their 2006 papers "Artistic Expression and the Hard Case of Pure Music" and "Musical Expressiveness as Hearability-as-expression," respectively, since these contain the most fully worked-out and defended versions of their positions and since they explicitly frame their positions as standing in opposition to one another. This last point is important, as part of my aim is to question the view that these positions are opposing sides in a debate. I argue that, on a commonly held understanding of 'expression' that seems to be accepted by both Davies and Levinson, each position entails the other and so they are extensionally equivalent with matching truth conditions: that is, in order for one of these accounts of musical expression to be true, the other, I will argue, must also be true.

If I am right about these positions being compatible and even extensionally equivalent, one might wonder what philosophical problem is at stake in the purported debate. Although I argue that this compatibility obtains on one understanding of 'expression' and its distinction from, and relation to, what could be called 'expressiveness,' there is another understanding of expression according to which HE can plausibly be read. I argue that when HE is read in this way it no longer presupposes or is entailed by AE, making the two positions genuine alternatives. Moreover, this reading leads to HE being of greater philosophical interest and makes it better able than AE to account for nuances in our sometimes-ambiguous language surrounding expression in the arts. The real (or at least more philosophically interesting) problem in the debate on musical expression, I contend, involves the second sense of 'expression' and the philosophical problems that it raises—and which HE, but not AE, goes some way towards solving. These problems can be solved, I suggest, by looking to R. G. Collingwood's answer to a crucial question about this second sense of 'expression' and how it applies

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[1] See Matravers 2007, Matravers 2010, and Kania 2017: §3, for overviews.
[2] See especially Davies 1994, Davies 1999, Levinson 1990, and Levinson 1996.

in the case of music, where HE raises but does not itself answer this question.

My discussion and argument proceeds as follows. In section 2 I outline Davies's AE and Levinson's HE, along with arguments against each position and their responses. In section 3 I argue that AE and HE are not only compatible but equivalent on an understanding of 'expressiveness' and 'expression' that is plausibly at play in the arguments for both, but that a disagreement arises on another understanding of 'expression' with which HE is more compatible albeit incomplete until a further question is answered. Section 4 summarizes Collingwood's theory of expression and shows how it can answer this question, and thus how it can complement HE so as to better explain musical expression. I conclude by considering the strengths of HE when it is supplemented with the Collingwoodian notion of expression in its primary sense.

## 2. *Davies's and Levinson's accounts of musical expression*

In his review of philosophical discussions of musical expression, Derek Matravers identifies four related but distinct questions of interest: "1. What is it about [a piece of] music that causes us to hear it as expressive? 2. What does 'the music is sad' mean? 3. What is it to hear music as expressive?" and "4. What is the connection between the expressive qualities of music and its value?" (Matravers 2007: 374). Since Davies and Levinson do not address the fourth question in the papers I am discussing, I shall bracket it for now. In regards to the second question, one thing that 'the music is sad' cannot coherently mean is that an occurrent emotion or psychological state is attributed to the music itself, since pieces of music are not the kinds of things that can have or be in such states. It would seem that the statement is metaphorical (or perhaps 'elliptical,' or a literal 'secondary' use of emotion terms; see Davies 2006: 183 and Young 2014: 3–5) and really attributes a property to the music that is related in some way to sadness as a felt state, i.e., in its primary sense. The question becomes: what is this property and how is it related to ordinary human sadness?

Davies and Levinson agree that an acceptable answer must centre on a property of the music rather than the composer, performer, or listener, and one that is heard or apprehended directly *in* the music rather than one that is inferred based on other of the music's properties,[3]

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[3] Levinson calls these conditions the "externality requirement" and the "immediacy requirement", respectively (see Levinson 1996: 91–2). Davies's insistence that expressiveness is an "objective" property of some pieces of music (Davies 2006: 182) corresponds to Levinson's externality requirement—although, importantly, Davies clarifies that 'objective' need not mean "independent-of-human-experience", as he plausibly takes expressiveness to be a response-dependent property. Davies also criticizes accounts of expressiveness that involve "a mediated process of abstract symbolization or indirect representation" as failing to explain "the phenomenal

which rules out accounts that explain music's relation to emotion in terms of the arousal of emotion in listeners or the communication of a musician's occurrent emotion. This is not to deny that music *can* arouse emotions or manifest what a composer or performer feels but that these phenomena exhaust music's connection to emotion, from which it follows that expressiveness is a distinct—though possibly related—phenomenon. This seems right, since one can recognize that a piece of music is sad, angry, calm, etc. without feeling this way oneself, and a composer or musician can write or play an expressive piece without needing to feel the emotion it expresses when composing or performing it; as James Young notes, "Mozart … was distressed when writing some of his sunniest music" (Young 2014: 6).

Davies and Levinson also agree in limiting their discussion to so-called 'pure' music—i.e., instrumental music without an accompanying text such as lyrics, program notes, or a descriptive title that could evoke or suggest certain emotions such as "Ode to Joy" or "Morning Mood"—and to exclude purely conventional associations, since any expressiveness in these cases would not necessarily come from the music itself but the interaction of the instrumental music with the lyrics, text, or conventions (cf. Matravers 2007: 373–74). How, then, do their accounts of musical expressiveness differ?

### 2.1 *Appearance Emotionalism (AE)*

Davies explains the relation between a piece of music and the emotion of which it is expressive as one of resemblance, with properties of the music resembling expressive human behaviour, i.e., behaviours typical of people who feel that emotion. In this Davies follows Peter Kivy (1989), who understands expressiveness as a matter of resembling, or sharing what he called a 'contour' with, the way someone who feels a certain emotion will typically look or sound, or perhaps with the phenomenological character of that emotion.[4] For example, the faces of basset hounds and St. Bernards have a sad look due to their resemblance to facial expressions typical of sad humans—large eyes, a drooping mouth, slack muscles, etc.—, and weeping willow trees are said to be reminiscent or expressive of sadness in virtue of the resemblance between the drooping, downward turn of their branches and the slump or droop in posture of sad people, or perhaps the feelings of heaviness and being weighed down that are part of the phenomenology of sadness. Whereas Kivy and other resemblance theorists look to facial or vocal expressions or the phenomenology typical of those feeling an emotion, Davies concentrates on the dynamic character of human behaviours such as "gait, attitude, air, carriage, posture, and comportment"

vivacity with which we experience expressiveness in music" (Davies 2006: 184), where this corresponds to Levinson's immediacy requirement.

[4] For the view that expressiveness is a matter of resemblance to the phenomenological structure or felt character of an emotion, see Budd 1995.

(Davies 2006: 182). For example, people who feel sad typically walk with a heavy gait and move slowly, slump or droop in their posture, have a downcast gaze, etc., where these behaviours are constitutive of someone having 'a sad look,' whether or not they feel sad 'on the inside.' Finding the notion of an emotion having a fixed phenomenological profile to be implausible or imprecise, Davies focuses on these features since he takes them to most closely resemble an element of music, viz., its "temporally unfolding dynamic structure" (Davies 2006: 181), insofar as both involve a perception of movement, and since he sees the cross-modal resemblance between seeing—or perhaps kinaesthetically feeling—a certain sort of bodily movement and hearing the dynamic structure of music to be stronger than the resemblance between, e.g., the way an object such as a face looks and the way a song sounds.[5]

Davies's position, which he calls Appearance Emotionalism, can be stated in formal terms as: *(AE) a piece of music P is expressive of an emotion E if and only if the dynamic structure of P perceptually resembles the dynamic structure of the types of behaviour characteristic of a person who feels E.* For a piece of music to be expressive of sadness, then, is for its dynamic audible properties to resemble the "sad figure" cut by "someone who is stooped over, dragging, faltering, subdued, and slow in his movements," e.g., by the piece being "slow, quiet, with heavy or thick harmonic bass textures, with underlying patterns of unresolved tension, with dark timbres, and a recurrently downward impetus" (Davies 2006: 182). Likewise, a piece with a quick tempo, a lightness of tone or timbre, rising notes or a structural pattern that gives a sense of upward movement, harmonic resolution, etc., would be expressive of a positive emotion such as joy insofar as its dynamic structure resembled that of the behaviour characteristic of joyful people, such as an ease and lack of hesitation, lifting one's gaze upwards, dancing, skipping, or walking with a bounce in one's step, feeling free or uplifted, etc.

Davies's argument in favour of AE primarily takes the form of replies to objections, where these replies help to clarify aspects of AE so as to avoid confusions and to show how AE can account for certain aspects commonly attributed to music that might be thought to pose a challenge, such as the worry that AE would restrict the range of emotions of which music can be expressive in a way that would fail to capture the expressive nuance and subtlety that is often claimed of music.[6] The closest Davies comes to giving a positive argument in support of AE is noting that it "provides … for the phenomenal vivacity with which we experience expressiveness in music" (Davies 2006: 184), i.e., our sense of directly apprehending an emotional quality *in* the mu-

[5] While he doesn't deny that music can resemble expressive human vocalizations, he argues that the resemblance here is also mainly to do with the dynamic structure of vocal sounds, i.e., their "articulation, pitch, intensity, and periodicity of phrase lengths and shapes," rather than their timbre or inflection (Davies 2006: 181).

[6] These objections and replies are found in Davies 2006: 182–87, with the worry about the restricted range of expression being discussed on 185.

sic as we hear it, in ways that other accounts do not. James Young has recently provided further support for AE by citing empirical evidence that people experience certain dynamic structures or 'contours' of movement as being shared by instrumental music and human bodily motion, with these structures being commonly associated in each case, and often cross-culturally, with the same general emotion types (Young 2014: 19–24).

Against AE, Levinson raises the objection that talk of a resemblance between the aural appearance of a piece of music and the visual appearance of some type of human behaviour is too vague to ground a theory of expressiveness, since everything may be said to resemble, or be similar to, everything else to some degree. "The issue," he contends, "then becomes one of *how* similar such an appearance must be to one presented by human behaviour in order to constitute" the music's expressiveness of the emotion associated with that behaviour (Levinson 2006: 197). This objection is weak, since it is not clear why AE must specify a precise degree of resemblance that must be met, or at least not one that could be assessed independently of listeners' responses to music. It might appear circular to say that the music must be *similar enough* to some human behaviour to the degree that it is reminiscent of, or heard as, this behaviour; however, since this property is agreed to be response-dependent, the fact that it can only be established in reference to a listener's experience should not be seen as a problem.

There is a stronger objection to be made, however, based on a distinction Levinson makes between something being expressive of an emotion and something merely having "*an emotional quality*, in virtue of suggesting an emotion through its appearance" (Levinson 2006: 201). Since, as Levinson also notes, the notion of expressiveness depends on the concept of expression, and expression is generally agreed to be primarily a matter of a person or agent's 'inner states' being made manifest through outward appearances (Levinson 2006: 192),[7] the worry is that AE might only give a theory of what it is for music to *suggest* emotions and not of how music can be expressive of them, since a theory of the latter must make some reference to the primary sense of expression. This is where Levinson's theory comes in.

## 2.2 *Hypothetical Emotionalism (HE)*

Insisting that talk of something expressing or being expressive *of* an emotion is parasitic on the primary sense of 'expression,' according to which only psychological states can be expressed and hence only psychological agents can literally be said to express them, Levinson argues that in order for someone to experience a piece of music *itself* as expressive it is not enough that one registers a resemblance between properties of the music and properties of expressive behaviour. Rather, one

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[7] Levinson cites Tormey 1971, Vermazen 1986, and Ridley 2003 in support.

must hear the music *as if* it were itself an expression in the primary sense; in other words, the music needs to be *heard as* an expressive act. Levinson further argues that hearing a piece of music as an expressive act involves imagining an agent or persona to whom one can attribute the act. This agent or persona need not be thought to actually exist but only be imagined as hypothetical; hence Levinson calls his position Hypothetical Emotionalism, or the Hearability-as-Expression view.

Levinson states this formally as: *(HE)* "*a passage of music P is expressive of an emotion E if and only if P, in context, is readily heard, by a listener experienced in the genre in question, as an expression of E*" (Levinson 2006: 193), where elsewhere he phrases this last clause as "*as (or as if it were) a sui generis[8] personal expression of [E] by some (imaginatively indeterminate) individual*" (Levinson 1990: 338). The requirement that a hypothetical persona or "imaginatively indeterminate individual" be imagined when hearing a piece of music as expressive is, for Levinson, a matter of logical entailment. If expression just is the externalization of an 'internal' psychological state via intentional 'external' behaviour, e.g., gesture, then to experience a piece of music as expressive—e.g., as an expression of sadness—can only mean to experience it as a gesture that externalizes a feeling—e.g., sadness—where the notions of behaviour or gesture and an 'inner' state presuppose an agent whose state it is and who is gesturing or behaving.[9]

One advantage of HE over AE is that it is better able to account for music's capacity to express complex, cognitively-laden emotions such as hope or embarrassment along with simple emotions such as sadness or joy, where AE would seem to restrict music's expressive range to emotions of the latter sort.[10] The strongest objection, however, is that even if it is possible to imagine a persona engaging in expressive behaviour and to hear the music *as* this expression, some or most people do not in fact engage in this imaginative activity when registering music as expressive (see Davies 2006: 190). In response, Levinson maintains that the imaginary persona needs only to be imagined "in a backgrounded manner" and is "almost entirely indefinite, a sort of minimal person, characterized only by the emotion we hear it to be expressing and the musical gesture through which it does so" (Levinson 2006: 193–94),

[8] In his 2006 paper, Levinson sets aside the '*sui generis*' claim in response to worries from Matravers (1998) about the coherence of the notion of a *sui generis* mode of expression; see Levinson 2006: 194.

[9] The persona theory of expression, or something quite like it, is also found in Cochrane 2010a (see especially pp. 203–4), Cochrane 2010b, Karl & Robinson 1997, Robinson 1994, Robinson 2005 (see especially p. 320), and, with a variation, Walton 1994. Notably, it can be found in the work of music theorist Edward Cone prior to its appearance in the work of philosophers of music (see Cone 1974).

[10] A defender of AE could insist that music can only *objectively* be expressive of such simple emotions, with more complex expressions requiring more subjective input or projection from the listener. However, see Levinson 1990 for an extended example of how a piece of music can express the cognitively complex emotion (or emotion-like psychological state) of hope. See also Karl and Robinson 1997.

and hence need not manifest in any overt or complex imaginary activity on the part of listeners such as imagining a character engaged in a narrative (cf. Davies 2006: 190). Rather, all that is needed is for one to hear passages of the music *as gestures*, i.e., to hear the music not just as movement but *as action*, where this implies an agent. For example, hearing notes that rise in pitch and increase in tempo as a 'flourish' expressing joy doesn't require one to envision, e.g., a character jumping into the air, but only involves hearing the musical movement as *someone*'s act of flourishing, with this 'someone' not needing to be any more detailed than the idea of some-flourisher-in-general.

Moreover, because it is "backgrounded," not all listeners need be overtly aware of their hearing the music as the gesture of someone gesturing: it is enough that they consciously hear it as a gesture. An even stronger reply to this worry is available to Levinson, which is to note that HE, as defined, does not require every listener to actually imagine a persona when listening to a piece of music in order for it to be expressive but only requires that the piece be "readily heard as" the expression of such a persona. In other words, all that is required is that the musical movement be *disposed* to be heard as the intentional movement or gesture of a hypothetical agent, i.e., that the music be *conducive to* being a 'soundtrack,' so to speak, for an imagined character's expressive behaviour, with this not needing be realized in the experience of every listener who finds the piece expressive.[11]

## 3. *What's the problem?*

Since both AE and HE can be defended against objections that have been raised against them, and since both are *prima facie* plausible (or at least HE is when understood in terms of the minimal 'backgrounded' persona that Levinson takes it to require, as opposed to some more elaborate imaginative activity), we might agree with Matravers in thinking that we "have reached a[n] impasse" in the debate (Matravers 2007: 378–79). One reason for this, I suggest, is that Davies and Levinson's accounts offer answers to two different, though connected, questions: in terms of the four questions that Matravers notes can be asked about musical expression, AE is most naturally seen as primarily answering the first question, viz. "What is it about [a piece of] music that *causes* us to hear it as expressive?", with HE primarily answering the third, viz.

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[11] These responses also takes care of the objection that HE puts no constraint on the details of what multiple listeners, or the same listener on multiple occasions, imagine(s) when listening to a piece of music, which is thought to pose a problem for the convergence of different people's expressive judgments of the same piece of music (Davies 2006: 190; cf. Kania 2017: §3.1). If such detailed imaginings are not required by HE for one to register a piece of music as expressive of some emotion, the worry evaporates. While different listeners *could* engage in such diverse imaginings, HE would require the imagined personas, gestures, and narrative all to involve hearing the piece as the expression of the same sort of emotion, i.e., the emotion of which it is disposed to be heard as the expression.

"What is it *to hear music as* expressive?" (Matravers 2007: 374, my emphases). And we might think, along with Collingwood, that two statements (or theories, etc.) can only conflict if they are meant to answer the same question (see Collingwood 1939: 33) and hence that there is no actual debate to be had between Davies's and Levinson's positions.

There is a risk, however, of dismissing the debate too quickly, since both positions have something to say on both of the aforementioned questions. Even if AE holds that a resemblance between certain properties of music and certain properties of expressive human behaviour *causes* us to hear it as expressive, this implies an answer to the third question—viz., that to hear music as expressive just is to perceive this resemblance—where this might still conflict with HE's answer to this question. Likewise, even if HE holds that what it is to hear music as expressive is to hear it imaginatively as the expression of a hypothetical agent in a minimal sense, an answer to the first question is implied here too—viz., that a disposition of the music to be readily heard in this way is what causes us to hear it as expressive—where this might still conflict with AE's answer to *this* question. However, I contend that the answers AE and HE give to both questions are compatible and that, on one reading of 'expression', the positions are in fact equivalent; thus, if both theories do involve this sense of 'expression', there is no real debate between them.

### 3.1 *Are AE and HE equivalent?*

It is worth noting that Levinson is generally sympathetic to much of what AE claims; as Andrew Kania notes, Levinson "agrees that there is an important resemblance between the contour of music expressive of an emotion and the contour of typical behavioural expressions of that emotion" (Kania 2017: §3.1; cf. Levinson 2006: 196). While accepting the "basic thrust" of AE, Levinson's main reason for rejecting it as an adequate explanation of musical expressiveness is his worry about the notion of a resemblance between two things that do not appear "precisely" alike but are only held to be similar in appearance (Levinson 2006: 196–97). However, it is not clear why a piece of music and some expressive human movement must be precisely the same in appearance for AE to work. With Levinson's "major qualms" (Levinson 2006: 206) thus diffused, what remains is Levinson's agreement with the central condition of AE.

The compatibility of HE and AE is not only a matter of Levinson accepting that expressive music will, in its dynamic properties, generally resemble or share a contour with the dynamic properties of the kind of human behaviour that would typically be expressive of the same emotion. This resemblance is *entailed by* HE's central condition, since resembling human behaviour that is expressive of some emotion is a necessary condition for a piece of music to be readily hearable-as an agent's expression of that emotion. Consider: if a piece of music is

disposed to be heard by attentive listeners as if it were an expression in the primary sense, i.e., as a persona's gesture that expresses that persona's feeling, this will involve it disposing the listener to imagine such a gesture. If so, the piece (or the properties of the piece that so dispose it) must be perceptually similar to the relevantly analogous properties of the gesture, where this gesture is an instance of the sort of characteristically expressive human behaviour that Davies makes central to AE. That this is so can be seen when Levinson writes that, on his view, expressive music is "heard as doing something … analogous to human gesturing and vocalizing *and expressive movement, in all its forms*" (Levinson 1996: 115, my emphasis).[12] This is even more explicit in Levinson's earlier claim that "qualitative similarities and structural resemblances between the sound of a passage and standard behaviours for expressing α will typically play the largest role in *bringing about …* hearability [as an expression of α]" (Levinson 1990: 339).

That AE is a necessary condition of HE might suggest that AE offers a more fundamental explanation of musical expressiveness. However, in a similar move, Levinson argues that resemblance theories such as AE presuppose and depend on some form of 'hearability-as'. "There is," he writes, "simply no independent conception of and no access to what Davies calls musical emotion-characteristics-in-appearance *apart from* satisfaction of the hearability-in-the-music-of-an-expressing-of-emotion condition vis-à-vis attuned listeners" (Levinson 2006: 197). That is to say, one can perceive—rather than, e.g., infer—an objective resemblance between a piece of music and human behaviour *only if* there is something about the music that makes it conducive to imagining this behaviour carried out by someone or other.[13] And this holds whether or not a particular listener does in fact imagine this—although it is hard to conceive what it would be for someone to *perceive* the resemblance without in some way imagining the actions that make up the behaviour to which one perceives a resemblance.

If this is correct, then AE will entail HE. That is, *if* the dynamic structure of P perceptually resembles the dynamic structure of the sort of behaviour characteristic of a person who feels E, *then* P is readily heard (in the proper context, by a suitably receptive listener, etc.) as, or as if it were, an expression of E by some imagined or hypothetical persona. But if I am also correct about HE entailing AE, it will also work the other way around: that is, *if* P is readily heard (in the proper context, by a suitably receptive listener, etc.) as, or as if it were, an expression of E by some imagined or hypothetical persona, *then* the dynamic structure of P perceptually resembles the dynamic structure

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[12] Cf. Young 2014: 9, where he writes that "a work can be perceived as the expression of an emotion *only if* it resembles the expression of emotion" (my emphasis).

[13] Cf. Davies 1999: 283, where he writes "I think that we can and must *hear music as like human action already* at the stage of hearing it as presenting expressive aspects" (my emphasis).

of the sort of behaviour characteristic of a person who feels E. And if both are correct it means that each position entails the other, making them (at least extensionally) equivalent, sharing the same truth conditions: the dynamic structure of P perceptually resembles the dynamic structure of the sort of behaviour characteristic of a person who feels E *if and only if* P is readily heard (in the proper context and by a suitably receptive listener, etc.) as, or as if it were, an expression of E by some imagined or hypothetical persona. Even if we do not accept that the two positions do not conflict because they answer different questions, the (apparently different) answer that each position gives to the same question will entail the truth of the other position, so they cannot conflict for this reason. The sense that the debate between these positions is at an irresolvable impasse is, I suggest, due to there being no actual debate to be had—at least not if AE and HE are understood according to the conception of expression in its primary sense with which Davies and Levinson are likely operating (more on which below).

Levinson pre-emptively objects to this argument when, after claiming that hearability-as-expression is often based on qualitative and structural resemblances between music and typically expressive behaviour (Levinson 1990: 339, quoted above), he writes that "it would be a mistake … to simply regard such hearability as *equivalent* to the behaviour" it resembles (Ibid., original emphasis). He gives two reasons for this. One is that it would not account for other things on which he claims hearability can also be based, e.g. conventional associations. The other is that it would overlook instances where hearability is based on a resemblance "to certain natural phenomena that have long been found expressive" (Ibid., emphasis removed) rather than to human behaviour. However, neither reason successfully counts against the sort of hearability that Levinson posits and expressive human behaviour being (extensionally) equivalent. With regard to the first, expressiveness based on conventional associations will not be 'objective' enough as a property of the music to meet Levinson's externality requirement since the convention a listener might associate with the sound of the music stands outside the music itself, whereas it is part of HE that the disposition to be heard as an expression of a certain emotion is an objective response-dependent property *of the music* alone.[14] With regard to the second, if hearability-as-expression sometimes involves resemblance to a natural phenomenon rather than to human behaviour, it's not clear that the expressiveness attributed to this phenomenon would not *itself* be an instance of AE, i.e., due to a resemblance between the natural phenomenon and characteristically expressive human behaviour. Since neither reason holds good, the pre-emptive objection fails to count against my argument above for the equivalence of AE and HE.

[14] Cf. Davies 2006: 179–80, for a dismissal of conventional associations as explaining the kind of expressiveness that is in question for both AE and HE, i.e., expressiveness as an objective property of 'pure music'.

## 3.2 *Expression, emoting, and betrayal*

Even if AE and HE were combined to explain musical expressiveness in terms of a property or set of properties a piece of music can have in virtue of which it both resembles and is disposed to be heard as expressive human behaviour, this explanation would be incomplete. This is because both accounts 'pass the buck' insofar as their explanations of expressiveness appeal to the concept of expression in its primary sense. For AE, the expressiveness of a piece of music is explained in terms of the expressiveness of the human behaviour which it resembles—e.g., that it has 'a sad look', etc.—, where this is in turn explained by its being the sort of behaviour that typically counts as an expression of the feelings of the one who is so behaving: e.g., being stooped over and walking with a slow, heavy, dragging gait is *expressive* of sadness because moving this way typically *expresses* sadness in the primary sense. For HE, the appeal to expression is more direct: the music's express*iveness* is explained by its being readily heard as an act of express*ion*. But what is missing from each account is an explanation of what it is to *express* an emotion through gestures, actions, etc.

While neither AE nor HE includes a worked-out theory of expression in the primary sense, both views presuppose one. Levinson is more explicit on this, writing that to express an emotion is to reveal or make manifest an 'inner' emotional state through 'outer' signs such as "countenance, posture, bearing, demeanor, actions, gestures, and modifications of voice" (Levinson 2006: 193). Davies appears to be working with the same conception when he writes of a person's behaviour "giv[ing] direct, primary expression to the person's felt emotion" rather than merely producing an expressive appearance (Davies 2006: 183). While this might seem to be a commonsensical understanding of expression, it is too broad and thus risks conflating distinct phenomena that may often go by the name 'expression' in ordinary discourse but which need to be disambiguated if we want to gain a clear and precise understanding of expression in its primary sense, i.e., in the sense that is relevant for the current discussion. Moreover, and more importantly, whether or not AE and HE are in fact equivalent depends on their being read according to a sense of 'expression' that, I argue, should *not* be taken to be its primary sense, or at least not the sense that is primary for *artistic* expression.

The worry is that understanding expression broadly as the externalization, via behaviour, of a psychological state would include behaviour or actions that unintentionally or unconsciously manifest what someone is feeling, e.g., fidgeting as a sign of restlessness or anxiety. Indeed, this applies to some of Davies's central examples of characteristically expressive behaviour: skipping as an expression of joy often occurs spontaneously rather than deliberately, and a slumped posture and slow, heavy tread are typically unconscious and not purposely adopted by sad people. It clarifies things if, following Roger Scruton, we

distinguish these types of outward manifestation as *evincing* rather than expressing emotion[15]—or perhaps it would be more precise to speak of *betraying* emotion, as Collingwood does (see Collingwood 1938: 121–23).

One might think it that this distinction is sufficient for clarity, and that the potential for conflating expression with a similar activity could be avoided by defining expression, in its primary sense, as the *intentional* or *deliberate* manifestation of a psychological or emotional state in some outward form, e.g., through gesture or behaviour. However, this would not yet solve the problem since we can also distinguish deliberately evincing an emotion from expressing it, where we can call deliberate evincing '*emoting*' to distinguish it from a non-deliberate evincing or '*betrayal*' of emotion. This distinction between expressing and emoting is made clear by Collingwood[16] in his example of an actress who "when she is acting a pathetic scene … work[s] herself up to such an extent as to weep real tears" (Collingwood 1938: 122). He notes that merely exhibiting symptoms of grief, albeit deliberately, is not sufficient for *expressing* grief if the actress does not also "make it clear to herself and her audience what the tears are about," since expression in the primary sense means "to explore [one's] own emotions: to discover emotions in [oneself] of which [one] was unaware, and, by permitting the audience to witness the discovery, enable them to make a similar discovery about themselves" (Collingwood 1938: 122).

(In the next section I defend this account of expression in its primary sense, at least with regard to artistic expression. For now, note that one does not need to accept this definition to agree that there is a difference between, e.g., acting that merely presents, deliberately, the outward symptoms of an emotion—i.e., emoting—and *expressive* acting, which need not involve much of a display of symptoms, or at least not of those symptoms that are characteristically associated with *evincing* this emotion, in order to convey or make clear a character's emotional state to the audience in a way that also conveys something *about* the state or the character.[17])

Even if we do not yet have a worked-out and defended account of the primary sense of expression, once we distinguish expressing an emotion from both emoting (i.e., deliberately evincing an emotion) and betraying an emotion (i.e., unintentionally evincing it), it becomes clear

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[15] See Scruton 1974: 214–16, especially his insistence that "the aesthetic concept of expression cannot be identified with the non-aesthetic concept of natural expression (or evincing). A gesture is a natural expression of some feeling if it is a *symptom* of that feeling, *and a symptom need not be expressive*" (214, my emphasis).

[16] Cf. Green 2016, who similarly distinguishes between what he calls expressing, representing, and showing.

[17] For an example of the distinction between acting that expresses and acting that emotes, compare the performance of Stellan Skarsgård in the Norwegian film *Insomnia* (dir. Erik Skjoldbjærg, 1997) with Al Pacino's performance, in the same role, in the American remake of the same name (dir. Christopher Nolan, 2002).

that AE conflates expressing an emotion with *betraying* one, since the characteristically expressive behaviours it takes expressive music to resemble are examples of evincing an emotion, which are held to be characteristically expressive because such behaviours are typical of people who are betraying that emotion. This is why these behaviours would be chosen to be deliberately enacted by one who wanted to *emote*, e.g., sadness or joy, or why a composer or performer might choose to play music that resembled these behaviours in its dynamic character so as to *evince* that emotion through music, resulting in 'emotive music' rather than a musical expression, properly so called, of the emotion in question. It also becomes clear that HE is equivalent to AE only if HE shares this understanding of expression in its primary sense, i.e., if it takes the expression that an expressive piece of music is readily heard-as to be the imagined emoting or betraying of an emotion by a hypothetical persona. This is not an implausible way to read HE as Levinson presents it: Matravers, for one, takes Levinson to hold that "we experience [expressive] music as the intentional communication of an emotion by virtue of its manifesting signs associated with the *betrayal* of that emotion" (Matravers 2011: 11, my emphasis).

HE can be read in another way, however, and one that is consistent with some of the ways Levinson describes expressive music. This is to take HE to require us to hear a piece of music *as if it were* the expression, in the primary sense, of an emotion, rather than hearing it as resembling or imaginable-as such an expression. In other words, on this reading the music is heard as, or as if it were, itself a (musical) gesture on the part of a persona who is imagined to be making the music to express—and not merely to evince—what he or she feels. Levinson articulates this view most clearly when he takes "[a]nother stab" at formulating HE in one of his earlier papers on the topic, writing: "Music that expresses α is music that strikes us as how a person experiencing α would behaviourally express his or her α *if* persons naturally behaved 'in music'—i.e., if the physical gestures and resulting sounds involved in playing musical instruments were a natural (unlearned, unmediated) manifestation of human emotions" (Levinson 1990: 338fn5). Admittedly, this could still be read in terms of emoting or betrayal—e.g., by imagining a world in which people's bodies naturally (i.e., automatically or non-deliberately) sometimes made musical noises due to their feeling a certain emotion, similar to how our faces naturally turn red on some occasions when we feel anger or embarrassment.[18] However, we need not imagine anything so extreme in order to realize the basic point behind this idea, which is the notion of expressing emotion directly by making music, and perhaps through gestures that are involved in producing certain sounds on certain instruments—e.g., the way one

[18] Cf. Walton 1994: 56, and Budd 1995: 132, for the interesting suggestion that we might hear expressive music "as a novel bodily means of sound production" (Levinson 2006: 194).

needs to strike a drum or cymbal in order to produce a certain sound—with these gestures being heard 'in' the music.

Needless to say, when HE is read in this way it no longer entails AE but is a distinct position, since it no longer involves imagining a persona's movements that share a dynamic contour with both the music and the emotion of which it is expressive. As well as being of greater philosophical interest, this reading of HE also gives us a more plausible account of musical expression than one based on resemblance to behaviours such as gait, posture, and the rest. This is because, at the level of generality that is involved in registering a resemblance between dynamic contours, there would seem to be no way to distinguish behaviour that expresses an emotion from emotive behaviour or behaviour that betrays an emotion when discerning which behaviour the contour of a given piece resembles. Unfortunately, Levinson appears not to have pursued this idea as far as he might have due to its initially being presented in relation to his claim of music having a *sui generis* form of expression, where he backed off from this idea in the face of criticisms that were raised against it. These criticisms do not count against the idea of expressing oneself through making music, since this need not be taken as *sui generis* in the objectionable sense of being a wholly unique mode of expression, and so this initial idea of Levinson's is worth taking up again and exploring further.

Reading HE in this way gives us an explanation of musical expressiveness in terms of a disposition that some pieces have to be readily heard as the kind of music someone might make if they were expressing an emotion by making music (in that genre, with those instruments, etc.), with the imaginary persona being the hypothetical composer or performer of the music we are hearing—where this persona will coincide with the actual composer or performer in cases where a piece of music (i) actually was an expression of the composer or performer's emotion, and (ii) was heard as expressive of that emotion by a listener. Basing expressiveness on this understanding of expression in its primary sense, and moreover on the notion of expressing an emotion by making music, clarifies that the *real* philosophical problem concerning musical expressiveness lies in explaining what it is to express an emotion in and through music, as opposed to emoting or evincing an emotion by means of music. Solving this problem requires us to have some account of artistic expression in general and to know how this would apply to music as a medium, and it is here that looking to Collingwood's account of expression can help.

## 4. *How Collingwood can help solve the 'real problem' of musical expression*

One difficulty for any appeal to Collingwood's theory of art is that it has been frequently misconstrued in such a way as to make it seem

implausible, to the point where this misconstrual has come to be accepted by many, if not the majority, of philosophers of art. As such, it is worth showing that Collingwood's theory is more plausible than this misreading allows so as not to turn off readers who might suspect that supplementing HE with Collingwood's theory of expression might weaken the resulting account in terms of its plausibility and its explanatory value for actual instances of musical expression.[19] The misreading takes Collingwood to hold that artworks are mental objects existing solely within the minds of artists and audiences, with the tangible object or event that is commonly called the work—e.g., a physical painting or sculpture, a dancer's bodily movements through space, or in the case of music the sounds produced by instruments when played—being only contingently related to the real work of art as the means by which this work can be transmitted from the artist's mind to the minds of audience members. Admittedly, some of Collingwood's statements make it sound like this is what he is saying, especially when read outside their full context. However, Aaron Ridley and others have shown that despite these passages that seem to support the misconstrual, Collingwood does not hold this 'ideal theory,'[20] and that when he makes an apparently damning remark, e.g., that a musical work "is [a] tune in the composer's head," where "[t]he noises made by the performers, and heard by the audience, are not the music at all; they are only means by which the audience, if they listen intelligently … can reconstruct for themselves the imaginary tune that existed in the composer's head" (Collingwood 1938: 139), he is not talking about a mental as opposed to a physical object but rather is making the point that a set of sounds is not music unless these sounds are heard together as forming a tune or pattern.

What, then, is Collingwood's theory of artistic expression if not the 'ideal theory' it is so often mistaken for? In brief, he takes expression to be the articulation of the felt or qualitative dimension of an experience, where this articulation is necessarily carried out in a medium—e.g., in paint, stone, gesture, sound, language, etc.—through a non-technical process in which the artist comes to discover the end she is working towards (i.e., the completed artwork) in the process of creating it, rather than beginning with a clear conception of the work and then figuring out the means to realize it. This articulation can also be understood as a clarification of the artist's pre-conscious feelings that brings them

[19] This suspicion would be unfounded in any case since, as an anonymous reviewer noted, the metaphysics of Collingwood's theory of art, which is the part of his theory that is commonly misconstrued so as to make it seem implausible, can be separated from his account of expression. Even so, it seems worth taking a paragraph to note how this common reading is mistaken in order to avoid possible distraction or suspicion on the part of readers who are only familiar with Collingwood through this misconstrual.

[20] See Ridley 1997 for his refutation of the 'ideal theory' reading, as well as D. Davies 2008 and Wiltshire 2018 for further defences of Collingwood's theory that are compatible with a non-idealist reading. For the most influential presentation of the idealist interpretation of Collingwood (i.e., the misconstrual), see Wollheim 1972.

to conscious awareness, making them comprehensible, or graspable in thought, for the artist and her audience alike.

The process of expression begins with an indeterminate feeling at what Collingwood calls the 'psychical' level of experience. This is something like a pre-conscious, embodied registering of sensations and affects occurring at the fringes of awareness, with sensations and their affective charges together being what Collingwood calls 'feelings'. At this point, precisely *what* one feels remains indeterminate; as Collingwood writes, "When a man is said to express emotion … [at] first, he is conscious of having an emotion, but not conscious of what this emotion is. All he is conscious of is a perturbation or excitement, which he feels going on within him, but of whose nature he is ignorant. While in this state, all he can say about his emotion is: 'I feel … I don't know what I feel'" (Collingwood 1938: 109). *Expressing* this feeling involves first directing one's attention to it, which in Collingwood's terms 'raises it to consciousness'— or, we could say, shifts the focus of our attention so that the feeling is no longer on the 'fringe' of our awareness but closer to the centre. This allows one to apprehend and fix the psychical feeling before one's mind, which makes the feeling more determinate and available for thought and reflection, although at this stage the feeling is not yet clarified.

Once the feeling has begun to be consciously grasped, the artist can start to get clear on what, precisely, she feels by articulating this feeling in a medium and turning it into an 'emotion for consciousness.' The emotion is articulated when the initially pre-conscious and indeterminate 'psychical' feelings are given form in the chosen medium; we might say that the emotion is now embodied in the perceptible form, with perceiving the final form being identical with consciously apprehending the clarified emotion (cf. Sias and Bar-On 2016). Because this is a non-technical process with the artist not yet being fully aware of the nature of her emotion, she must proceed, as Ridley (2003: 222) notes, by feeling her way along, continuing to attend to the qualitative aspects of her experience as she engages and interacts with her medium. Collingwood gives an example of a painter stepping back to observe his work as it develops and making adjustments and revisions in response to what he sees, thinking as he goes "I am not satisfied with that line; let us try it this way … and this way … and this way … there! that will do!" (Collingwood 1938: 281). Likewise, a writer in the process of composing a poem will try out certain words and phrases, varying their order or substituting certain words with others, changing their punctuation and spacing, etc. until she arrives at the precise form that she apprehends as being 'just right.'

With the basic elements of Collingwood's account of expression now outlined,[21] we are able to explain what it would be to express, rather than just to evince, an emotion in and through music. This would be

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[21] See Ridley 2003: 222–25 for another summary of the basics of Collingwood's theory, which Ridley contrasts with transmission and resemblance-based theories of expression, presenting it as 'expression proper.'

a matter of articulating an initially vague feeling—the qualitative or affective aspect of an experience—by producing or combining sounds in such a way so as to give this feeling audible form and thereby make it available for a listener's awareness as a determinate emotion. While there would be no single way for this articulation to proceed, two examples will clarify the sort of activity this might involve in practice.

(1)    A musician has long been fascinated by a particular piece, sensing that the composition has greater aesthetic potential than he has so far been able to realize in his performances of it, although he cannot yet say precisely in what this potential consists. Rehearsing this piece for yet another performance, he experiments with different ways of playing it, making slight adjustments in certain passages. Through trying out a number of these variations, guided by instinct and a feeling that he will know what he is looking to achieve when he hears it, he starts to develop a better idea of this intuited potential by getting a feel for which variations seem on the right track and which do not. Eventually, through trial and error, he becomes aware of just what the potential was that he sensed in the piece, where his becoming aware of this is identical with his first playing the piece in a particular way and recognizing it as being what he was looking for: this new performance successfully expresses how he feels about the piece.

(2)    A composer who is setting out to write a new piece without feeling particularly inspired is playing around on her piano when a certain arrangement of notes that she happened to play strike her as sounding particularly evocative—but *of what* she cannot say. As she explores ways of developing and elaborating upon this musical phrase, riffing on and modifying it so that it ends up being very different from the notes she initially played while retaining, and amplifying, the initial feeling that struck her, she becomes aware that the song she is writing expresses elements of her mood that morning, making it more clear to her how she had been feeling when she sat down to compose.

With this explanation of what it would be to express an emotion by making music, we can also say what it would be to hear a piece of music as doing this and thereby complete the non-resemblance-based understanding of HE discussed above. A piece of music is expressive of an emotion, on this account, if and only if it is readily heard by qualified listeners as (or as if it were) the result of a process of articulating an initially indistinct sensation or affect that gives it a determinate perceptible (audible) form in an arrangement of sounds in which it is embodied. Note that this does not require a piece *to be* an expression in order for it to be expressive, only that it be readily heard *as* one, i.e., that it is conducive to being imagined as the (musical) expression of a hypothetical persona. This could be a matter of imagining a composer

or performer expressing a feeling through writing or performing the piece in question in just the way it is heard, and imagining an emotional state of the composer's or performer's that corresponds to and is articulated by the piece the listener hears. This could also be a matter of a piece being conducive to being heard in fresh ways on multiple occasions, so that a listener is able to imagine that the new elements and dimensions of the piece that she 'discovers' upon a repeat listening correspond to newly clarified aspects of the feeling that a hypothetical persona is articulating for the first time via the music, perhaps identifying this persona with herself and imagining that she is articulating her own feelings through the music as she hears these new elements in it.

One worry that arises for this explanation is that it risks making the ability to register music as expressive rare, since being a 'qualified listener' would seem to require that one be familiar with music from the standpoint of a composer or performer in order to be aware of the expressive possibilities offered by the medium. Including the 'qualified listener' requirement in the definition means that some listeners might not be positioned to experience a piece of music as expressive, being limited to music merely arousing emotion or reminding them of one by evincing it in the way AE posits, although I do not think we need to worry that it would restrict the former ability to musicians and musicologists. Even if not everyone has experience with composing music or playing an instrument, nearly everyone has direct personal experience making sounds and being aware of what it feels like to make them, and moreover what it feels like to hear them as one is making them,[22] where this is plausibly sufficient to allow us to have *some* sense of what it might feel like for us to make some other sound, e.g., one on an instrument that we do not actually play, and so what we might be expressing by making that sound. This is compatible, of course, with the view that the more experienced one is in playing, composing, or studying music the more likely one will be to have a *better* sense of the expressiveness of a piece, which I think is also plausible.

Another worry about this explanation is that it is still too vague, since it does not tell us exactly what the expression of various emotions through music will involve in a way that would allow us to recognize musical expressions for what they are when we hear them, where one might think that AE succeeds in doing this by telling us that sad music typically will sound slow, heavy, downbeat, descending, etc. This objection is, I think, mistaken, since it assumes both that the emotions that artworks express are general types—i.e., what Collingwood calls "thing[s] of a certain kind"—instead of being particular feelings that are uniquely expressed by a particular work—i.e., what he calls "certain thing[s]" (Collingwood 1938: 114)—and that just what will be

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[22] Cf. Collingwood's point that every speaker is also conscious of him- or herself as speaking, and so is both a speaker and the first member of his or her audience (Collingwood 1938: 247–51).

involved in expressing an emotion can be known and specified in advance of its expression. This is to treat artistic expression on the model of what Collingwood calls 'craft' rather than as art, where artworks and their expressiveness are not determinable in this way since expression just is the process of clarifying what is not yet clear.

Moreover, the fact that AE *can* specify in advance what a song that is expressive of sadness, joy, etc. will *typically* sound like shows that it assumes a craft-based or technical conception of art, whereas on Collingwood's account there is nothing that it characteristically sounds, or looks, like for a artwork to *express*, as opposed to evince, an emotion. I take the plausibility of this conclusion to be another point in favour of Collingwood's account of expression, as well as a point in favour of HE as an explanation of musical expressiveness since it can be read as compatible with Collingwood's account in a way that AE cannot.

## 5. *Conclusion*

I have argued above for three main points: (i) that AE and HE are compatible and extensionally equivalent theories of musical expressiveness when read according to the understanding of the primary sense of expression with which Davies and Levinson are most readily taken to be operating, and that as such there is no genuine debate to be had between them; (ii) that HE can be read in another way according to which it is not equivalent to AE and is more philosophically interesting, although incomplete; and (iii) that Collingwood's theory of expression can be used to complete HE by explaining what expressing an emotion in and through music would involve.

One virtue of looking to Collingwood for an explanation of expression in its primary sense is that his account—when *not* misconstrued as the 'ideal theory'—takes artworks to embody the emotions they express in perceptual form,[23] and so is compatible with Levinson's externality and immediacy requirements for expressiveness. Another is that HE, read in terms of hearability-as-expression-*in-music* and according to Collingwood's account of expression, can meet many of the objections commonly brought against both expression and resemblance theories of expressiveness. Some of these are discussed above; two that are not are those that Kania (2017: §3.1) identifies as the main problems for expression theories of musical expression. First, HE on this reading allows that a composer or performer might not themselves feel an emotion that the music they make is expressive of, since not every expressive piece of music needs actually to be a musical expression but needs

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[23] When a work is one of the rare few that Collingwood *does* allow could be created entirely 'in the artist's head'— such as a short poem or tune that the artist does not need to write down, speak, or play in order to fully work out—it will still have a form that is imagined as quasi-perceptible (e.g., the artist imagining hearing it played, seeing the words on the page, etc.) and so in principle could be externalized and made publicly available to others.

only be readily heard *as if* it were one. Second, it allows for a composer to fail to express her emotions in a piece she writes since it does not tie a piece's expressiveness to what an artist is actually feeling, but only to its hearability as the kind of music that someone who *was* feeling this *might* plausibly make to express it. This suggests that a successful musical express*ion* must also be express*ive* in the sense of being readily heard by listeners as the expression that it in fact is, which is a philosophically interesting and, I think, plausible element of artistic expression—but one that should be explored in a future paper.[24]

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