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Music, Metaphor, and Aesthetic Concepts

ABSTRACT

The aesthetic realist interprets many descriptions of music as metaphorical descriptions of aesthetic properties of music. I argue that aesthetic realism requires that nonaesthetic words are used to express both aesthetic and nonaesthetic concepts. But having distinguished the concepts, some plausible account must be given of their relation. A causal account of the relation between the possession of aesthetic and nonaesthetic concepts provides this, since the concepts are distinct but connected. I explore and defend this account. I consider the conditions of aesthetic concept possession and also the appropriation of nonaesthetic words in aesthetic descriptions.

Aesthetic realism, applied to the art of music, is at least the idea that music has aesthetic properties, which are in some sense 'mind-independent,' and that in experiencing music and talking about it, we think of music as having such aesthetic properties. Furthermore, music does not just have aesthetic properties, it is designed to have them; I shall also put this to one side in this article. A more controversial idea would be that the sounds that constitute music have mind-independent aesthetic properties, and in experiencing music and talking about it we ascribe aesthetic properties to sounds. But I will ignore this further controversial thesis about the sounds that constitute music.

What I want to focus on here are aesthetic concepts. An important part of aesthetic realism is the idea that aesthetic concepts pick out aesthetic properties. In the case of music, the aesthetic realist maintains that the aesthetic concepts that figure in aesthetic experiences and judgments in many cases pick out aesthetic properties of music (and perhaps of the sounds that constitute it). Sometimes we get it wrong. But when we get it right, we deploy aesthetic concepts to represent the aesthetic properties that the music has. However, it has been argued—notably by Roger Scruton—that there are problems with the aesthetic realist's understanding of the relation between aesthetic concepts and nonaesthetic concepts.[1] These problems are thought to be generated by the use of metaphors in the description of music and musical experience. Here I address some issues that this raises, in response to some points made by Malcolm Budd, and we will see that aesthetic realism needs to be developed in a certain direction. I develop and defend aesthetic realism rather than argue against nonrealist views.

I. REALISM AND THE CAUSAL ACCOUNT

I.A

Let us begin with the fact that it is common to describe music in terms of emotion, motion, and height. What we may call the Aesthetic Metaphor Thesis is the thesis that such descriptions are almost always metaphorical—no real emotion, motion, or height is described or implied; instead we are describing music metaphorically, using words that do not literally apply to it. That is, although we describe music using words for emotion, motion, or height, this is not because real emotions, motions, or heights are there in the music or because the music stands in some relation to real emotions, motions, or heights. Of course, *sometimes* by

describing sounds as 'high' or 'low' we might mean that it was literally high up in a mountain or literally low down in a valley, but this is unusual (it explains the qualification "almost always" above). This thesis extends to a great many other kinds of descriptions of music, which are also metaphorical, or at least do not deploy only the primary literal meanings of words. For example, when we describe music as 'delicate,' this is not because it is delicate in the way that an eggshell is delicate. It is not liable to break. Almost all descriptions of music, whether of ordinary listeners or professional critics, contain many metaphors.

I offer no theory of metaphor in this article. Whatever the correct theory is, there can be no general *criterion* of metaphor; identifying metaphorical uses will depend on the literal word in question. For our purposes, it will suffice that the primary literal meanings of words like 'angry' are not in play when talking about music for the following reasons: sounds cannot be angry *about* anything; sounds do not have feelings, and the anger of sounds is not made rational in the distinctive ways that ordinary anger is made rational. All these reasons apply equally to the description of clouds as 'angry.' It is no more plausible that 'anger' applies literally to music than to clouds. So describing music as 'angry' is metaphorical.

I shall not be concerned to argue against 'literalist' views that deny the metaphoricality of aesthetic descriptions in terms of emotion, motion, height, or delicacy; I have pursued this mission extensively elsewhere.[2] In this article, I assume that that battle is won. By 'literalism' I mean the view that the literal meanings of words like 'delicate' or 'angry' apply to music in the same sense in which they apply to eggshells or people.[3]

We also give literal aesthetic descriptions of music when we describe it as 'beautiful' or 'elegant,' but my focus in this article will be on nonliteral aesthetic descriptions.

I.B

Realists and nonrealists have different interpretations and explanations of the Aesthetic Metaphor Thesis. According to the particular aesthetic realist view that I defend when we describe music in terms of emotion, motion, height, or delicacy, these are metaphorical descriptions of aesthetic properties of music. Such metaphorically described aesthetic properties are what are sometimes called 'substantive' or 'thick' aesthetic

properties, because descriptions of them go beyond a thin description of a thing as 'beautiful,' 'ugly,' or having 'aesthetic merit' or 'aesthetic demerit.'[4] Examples of other substantive properties are daintiness, dumpiness, elegance, and balance. Some substantive descriptions are metaphorical (such as 'balanced') and some (such as 'elegant') are not. But for the aesthetic realist, the point of substantive descriptions is to describe a thing's substantive aesthetic properties.[5]

Given the Aesthetic Metaphor Thesis, the aesthetic realist makes a fundamental distinction between aesthetic and nonaesthetic *concepts* of sadness or delicacy. This is because beliefs about substantive aesthetic properties of music are constituted in part by aesthetic concepts that represent or stand for those properties. But nonaesthetic concepts of sadness or delicacy represent or stand for ordinary nonaesthetic properties, such as the sadness of people or the delicacy of eggshells. So the aesthetic and nonaesthetic concepts of sadness and delicacy are different. It is crucial that this is not a claim about *word* meaning; word meaning is the same in aesthetic and nonaesthetic descriptions, whereas the *concepts* deployed are different.

We may distinguish what a *word* (or sentence) means from what a *person* means by using a word (or sentence). When Romeo says, "Juliet is the sun," the *word* 'sun' means the same as it does in "The sun is shining on the trees," but there is a sense in which the *person* Romeo means something different by using the same word. Similarly, the *words* 'sad' or 'delicate' mean the same in and out of musical descriptions even though there is a sense in which what a person means by using the word with the same meaning is different. This is because the concepts that figure in people's thoughts and experiences when they describe music as 'sad' or 'delicate' are quite different from the concepts that figure in their thoughts and experiences when they describe people as 'sad' and eggshells as 'delicate.'[6]

Some philosophers of language have denied the possibility of thought that is not expressed in language. When this is not outright behaviorism at its most implausible, it is the unobjectionable claim that much thought content is affected by language and that many kinds of sophisticated thoughts are only possible because of language. However, it remains an open question whether there are some kinds of thoughts the linguistic expression of which is problematic. It is not particularly

controversial that there are many sensations and emotions that we can think about even though they are hard to describe. It is this kind of intellectual space that an aesthetic realist can occupy.

I.C

Once we make a firm distinction between aesthetic and nonaesthetic concepts, there is then a question about what the connection between them is. This can be cast as a question about concept possession: what, for the realist, is the connection between being able to think of and hear music as possessing the substantive aesthetic property of sadness, which we describe metaphorically using the emotion word 'sad,' and being able to think of the ordinary emotion of sadness, which the term ordinarily refers to? Let us use subscripts to indicate whether we are talking about an aesthetic feature that is metaphorically described or an ordinary nonaesthetic feature. For example, the sadness$_A$ of music and the sadness$_{NA}$ of a person might both be described by the English word 'sad.' The two properties are very different, at least for an aesthetic realist. But there is a natural worry: is there no connection? Surely there is some connection. If so, what is it? The realist needs to address this question.

One idea is that although aesthetic and nonaesthetic concepts of delicacy or sadness are distinct, possessing the aesthetic concept is *causally* dependent on possessing the nonaesthetic concept.[7] What prompts this causal claim is the need to distinguish the two concepts without saying that they are completely unconnected. Where there is a causal relation, distinct things are nevertheless tied together. (Perhaps the concept of appearing delicate$_{NA}$ is an intermediary.) Such a causal view is a natural and perhaps inevitable consequence of aesthetic realism. For what other tie between distinct things could there be?

Malcolm Budd has pressed two interesting kinds of criticisms of such a causal view; one kind focuses on concepts, the other on metaphorical language use.[8] He objects, first, that the causal view can provide no explanation of, and indeed is incompatible with, the fact that we cannot possess the aesthetic concept without possessing the nonaesthetic concept. Second, Budd objects that the causal account falls short in what it says about metaphorical description—in particular, the causal account does not explain why we

apply words for nonaesthetic properties in order to describe aesthetic properties, and the causal account does not explain how the literal meanings of nonaesthetic words guide their metaphorical application in aesthetic descriptions. (Budd also objected to the idea that aesthetic properties *must* be described metaphorically, which I call the 'Essential Metaphor Thesis.' It is not clear that this view is essential to aesthetic realism, although I believe it to be independently plausible. I critically discuss Budd's criticisms of that thesis elsewhere.[9] It raises different issues.)

I shall not reply to these objections merely in order to provide a defense against Budd's points. Instead, I use the opportunity to provide a fuller account of aesthetic concept possession and metaphorical description, from the realist point of view, which has the consequence that the objections are neutralized. My primary aim is to enrich realism, not deflect difficulties. In what follows, I first deal with aesthetic and nonaesthetic concepts (in Section II), and then I turn to the use of nonaesthetic words in metaphorical aesthetic descriptions (in Section III).

II. THE RELATION BETWEEN AESTHETIC AND NONAESTHETIC CONCEPTS

II.A

According to the causal account, possession of the nonaesthetic concept of delicacy (= 'delicacy$_{NA}$') is a partial cause of possession of the aesthetic concept of delicacy (= 'delicacy$_A$'). But that seems to open up the possibility of possessing the aesthetic concept without the nonaesthetic concept. As Budd writes:

Not only does Zangwill fail to explain why it is that one cannot grasp the aesthetic concept without possessing the non-aesthetic concept, but no plausible line of thought seems available, certainly not one based on a conceptual connection between the contents of the two concepts (since there is not supposed to be one).[10]

The charge is that we need an account that entails that we cannot come to possess the aesthetic concept of delicacy (= 'delicacy$_A$') unless we possess the nonaesthetic concept of delicacy (= 'delicacy$_{NA}$'). The realist's causal account seems to be incompatible with that impossibility. If two things are distinct existences and are causally

related, then one can exist without the other. So if aesthetic and nonaesthetic concepts are distinct existences that are causally related, then the realist's causal claim seems to be *incompatible* with the fact that a person cannot possess the aesthetic concept without also possessing the nonaesthetic concept.

II.B

One suggestion would be that although the concepts are different, so there are no meaning equivalences, there is nevertheless a one-way analytic entailment relation holding between propositions containing the two concepts. But the relation between aesthetic and nonaesthetic concepts that are expressed with the same word does not seem to be of this sort. For many aesthetically delicate sculptures are surprisingly sturdy in a physical sense, and many physically delicate sculptures are not at all aesthetically delicate. So propositions about delicacy$_A$ do not analytically entail, and are not analytically entailed by, propositions about delicacy$_{NA}$, which means that this suggestion cannot help the realist.

Another suggestion would be to strengthen the causal claim so that the relation between possessing aesthetic and nonaesthetic concepts is a part–whole relation. Where part–whole relations hold, there is no identity between two things, and yet there are necessary ties. A tree is not identical with its trunk, and yet there are necessary conditional relations between what happens to the trunk and what happens to the tree. If you move the trunk, you move the tree. Such a relation might hold between possession of the two concepts. Perhaps possession of the concept of delicacy$_{NA}$ is part of what it is to possess the concept of delicacy$_A$. Such a part–whole view would sustain the claim that we cannot possess the concept of delicacy$_A$ unless we possess the concept of delicacy$_{NA}$, even though they are not identical. The idea would be that possessing the aesthetic concept is a sophisticated accomplishment, which builds on and includes possession of the ordinary concept. The problem, however, is that where a whole is present so is the part. So if the aesthetic concept applies to a thing, so should the nonaesthetic concept. But where something is aesthetically delicate but physically sturdy, the aesthetic concept applies but not the nonaesthetic concept. Hence, the part–whole suggestion is as unpromising as the analytic entailment suggestion.

A third suggestion would be that a constitution relation holds. Consider the following pairs of abilities: the ability to walk and the ability to play football; the ability to throw and catch things and the ability to juggle; the ability to use language and the ability to tell a joke; the ability to make sounds at the piano by pressing keys and the ability to play a Beethoven piano sonata. In these cases, the simpler ability is partly constitutive of the more complex ability. But this is not a good model for the relation between aesthetic and nonaesthetic concepts. Deploying the aesthetic concept should mean deploying the nonaesthetic concept that partly constitutes it. But there are physically sturdy but aesthetically delicate sculptures, so the aesthetic concept applies without the nonaesthetic concept. Hence, the aesthetic concept cannot be partly constituted by the nonaesthetic concept.

II.C

What we learn from these suggestions and their inadequacy is that the causal view needs to be developed in a certain way. Let us first ask: how can the possession of two concepts be causally related? What would that mean? Possessing a concept is a certain kind of capacity or ability— the capacity or ability to have intentional mental states with certain contents.[11] Such conceptual capacities or abilities have causal properties, and they may be acquired by causal processes. The two standard options are that they are innate or they are learned. The important point, though, is that the acquisition of concepts may be structured. Possessing one concept may be a causal condition of possessing another concept.

Consider some examples of abilities that stand in causal relations. Adults who can walk have that ability as a causal consequence of having been babies who could crawl, even though walking and crawling in adults are distinct abilities. An adult may be able to walk but not be able to crawl due to bad knees. Similarly, the ability to hear may be a causal condition of acquiring many skills that are distinct from hearing, which we might possess even though we can no longer hear. The ability to compose music might be an example. There is no strictly necessary tie (we can imagine it otherwise), but a causal relation may nevertheless hold.

Conceptual abilities may stand in this kind of causal relation. Consider learning mathematics:

there are more and less basic mathematical concepts, and one acquires the more basic ones first. For example, perhaps one first learns to count before one can do more advanced branches of algebra that do not involve numbers. Or consider scientific theory change: one comes to possess new concepts on the basis of the possession of old concepts, and one may even come to reject those old concepts without which one could not have acquired the new concepts. For example, children have absolute concepts of up and down, and possessing those concepts is plausibly a causal prerequisite for acquiring sophisticated relativistic concepts of direction. We could *in principle* possess the sophisticated concepts without ever having possessed the simpler ones, but this is unlikely for creatures like us. I suggest that the aesthetic realist can maintain that a relation of this kind holds between aesthetic and nonaesthetic concepts of sadness or delicacy: the conceptual abilities are distinct, but possessing, or having possessed, the nonaesthetic conceptual ability is a causal condition of possessing the aesthetic conceptual ability. There is a causal route from one to the other. That is, for creatures like us, in normal conditions, possessing the aesthetic concepts of delicacy or sadness depends causally on possessing, or on having possessed, the nonaesthetic concepts of delicacy and sadness.

II.D

This causal model allows that it is indeed possible to possess the aesthetic concept without possessing the nonaesthetic concept, which is what Budd found objectionable. Budd's objection can be met, at least superficially, by embracing what he took to be a reductio. But I have not yet provided positive support for thinking that aesthetic and nonaesthetic concepts of sadness or delicacy are related as the causal theory says. Furthermore, we might wonder: is there not something intuitive in Budd's point that we must possess the nonaesthetic concept in order to possess the aesthetic concept?

I propose that we make a distinction between determinate and general aesthetic concepts. Consider the aesthetic property that we describe as "delicacy." This aesthetic property is variably manifested or realized in music, poetry, painting, clouds, and many other things. All may be cases of delicacy$_A$. Now consider the particular delicacy$_A$ of some cirrus cloud. This is a *determinate* aesthetic property, and this aesthetic property is *not* shared by delicate music or poetry, although some other cirrus clouds may share it.

The realist can admit that the *general* notion of delicacy$_A$, which very different things share, *is* a notion that requires that we have the concept of delicacy$_{NA}$. It is plausible that being able to think of that grouping of determinate aesthetic features depends on grasping the nonaesthetic concept, and without it, the collection of aesthetic properties would seem arbitrary.

The same is not true of the specific delicacy$_A$ of a thing, such as the specific delicacy$_A$ of a cirrus cloud.[12] The realist's view should be that we *can* have the concept of that specific kind of delicacy$_A$ without having the ordinary concept of delicacy$_{NA}$. That we can have a concept corresponding to the specific aesthetic property without having the ordinary nonaesthetic concept of delicacy is obvious if we consider people who have rich aesthetic experiences of particular cirrus clouds and their specific aesthetic properties. Such people may well not have thought of using the word 'delicate' as a helpful or appropriate word to describe their specific aesthetic properties. Furthermore, there is no reason to think that such people are operating with the nonaesthetic concept. That is why there is much to be said for the view that concepts of determinate aesthetic properties and ordinary nonaesthetic concepts do not have much to do with each other, except that using the word that usually expresses the nonaesthetic concept may be a convenient way of describing what determinate aesthetic concepts refer to.

II.E

Determinate aesthetic properties have priority over more general aesthetic properties in the following way: things have determinate aesthetic properties in virtue of which they have their more general aesthetic properties. For example, something may be beautiful in virtue of being delicate in a particular way, just as something can be colored in virtue of being red or in virtue of being scarlet. Moreover, our experience of the more determinate delicacies of things that we encounter in our aesthetic experience is explanatorily prior to our grasp of more general kinds, such as delicacy$_A$. It is not that we do not experience more general aesthetic properties of things; it is that we experience those more general aesthetic properties in virtue of our experience of more determinate aesthetic

properties. Our basic musical aesthetic experience is of relatively determinate aesthetic properties, and that explains our more general aesthetic experience.

I should admit to having a quite general metaphysical view in the background, which dovetails with this view of aesthetic concepts. The metaphysical view is that the world (objects and properties and whatever else there may be) has both determinate properties and more general ones. Things have determinate properties (such as specific colors or lengths) as well as more general properties (being a color or being more than six feet tall). But the determinate properties are metaphysically fundamental. Something is a living thing in virtue of being a mammal, in virtue of being a monkey, in virtue of being a specific monkey. The world is how it is generally in virtue of how it is determinately.[13] To some extent, there is an echo of this metaphysical fact in our experiences and thoughts. Our perceptual experience might be of a colored thing, of a red thing, and of a scarlet thing. Perhaps in our perceptual experiences we cannot discriminate further more determinate kinds of scarlet, although the colors are in fact more finely divisible. Nevertheless, the content of our perceptual experience is structured into more and less determinate contents, even though it may have no *completely* determinate contents in the way the world itself has completely determinate properties that determine its more general properties.

Similarly with our aesthetic experiences. We experience sounds as beautiful. We also experience those sounds as delicate. We also experience those sounds as being delicate in a musical kind of way, in a way that delicate pottery is not—musical delicacy. And we also experience the sounds as being delicate in the particular way that Chopin's Polonaise No. 12 in B Flat Major is delicate; call that Chopin Polonaise No. 12 delicacy.[14] Our musical experience is of *all these at once*, just as our perceptual experience may be of a thing being colored, red, and scarlet all at once. In both cases, the experience is structured. We experience the beauty in virtue of experiencing the delicacy in virtue of experiencing the musical delicacy in virtue of experiencing the Chopin Polonaise No. 12 delicacy. Without that determinate experience of delicacy, there could be no other aesthetic experience. This determinate experience is basic musical experience. And having *that* determinate experience does not rest on having the ordinary notion of delicacy, even though the word for ordinary delicacy may happen to be a useful way of describing musical experience in its cruder, less determinate aspects.

II.F

It might be said that the more general concept of delicacy is the disjunction (perhaps the infinite disjunction) of all the determinate concepts of aesthetic delicacy. But it is not clear that we can think of such disjunctive concepts or that they can figure in the contents of musical experience. And even if we can, we can ask what all the disjuncts have in common. What they have in common might only make sense given the nonaesthetic concept of delicacy. This is because the elements of the disjunction are quite diverse—a mess. It is not plausible that the disjunction is a natural one or that it figures in a fundamental way in our aesthetic experiences. Only the nonaesthetic concept gives any principle of unity to the heterogeneous set of aesthetic properties collected together under the general aesthetic concept of delicacy. That is *why* we cannot possess those relatively indeterminate aesthetic concepts without possessing, or without having possessed, the corresponding nonaesthetic concept. (This is the explanation that Budd seeks for the case of general aesthetic concepts.) Possession of one is indeed a necessary condition of possession of the other. But this does not apply to the determinate aesthetic concepts that are explanatorily fundamental.

What if someone denied both the existence of determinate aesthetic properties and also that we represent them in experience? On such a view, we demonstratively identify complex nonaesthetic properties (such as complex visually or aurally available patterns), and we represent these nonaesthetic properties as embodying general aesthetic properties, such as generic delicacy, but not as representing determinate aesthetic properties. The question posed is this: why think that we represent determinate aesthetic properties in addition to determinate nonaesthetic properties and general aesthetic properties? How 'fine-grained' is our aesthetic life? In response, consider delicacy in clouds, music, and poetry. It is plausible that they are three different aesthetic properties of delicacy and that we therefore have three different concepts of delicacy to think of them. There are not merely three different nonaesthetic ways

of generating generic delicacy—by visual appearance, by sounds, and by words. What each generates is a different delicacy. However, suppose that the skeptic intransigently denied this and insisted that the only aesthetic representational content is generic delicacy, not three kinds of aesthetic delicacy. One argument would be this: aesthetic experience grounds aesthetic pleasure. If there were only one aesthetic concept in play, generic delicacy, then the pleasurable response in the three cases should be the same. But aesthetic pleasure in the delicacy of visual appearances, in sounds, and in words is very different. Hence, the concepts in play in aesthetic experiences are also different. Furthermore, what goes for the three delicacies also goes for finer discriminations among aesthetic concepts. A more theoretical consideration is that realism in any area (apart from special cases like mathematics) goes along with a nonsparse view of the properties in question. It is an odd idea that we should be realistic about generic properties in some domain but not also about finer-determinate properties of that sort. For those finer-grained, more determinate properties determine the generic properties. Realistic properties typically either lie on a continuum or are determined by properties of that sort that lie on a continuum (apart from special cases). So skepticism about determinate aesthetic properties while embracing generic aesthetic properties is an uncomfortable combination.

II.G

Budd's complaint was that realism implies a certain possibility—of possessing the aesthetic concept without the nonaesthetic concept. The answer is this: in regard to determinate aesthetic concepts, the realist may embrace what Budd thinks is problematic. It is simply not the case that possessing a determinate aesthetic concept that represents a determinate aesthetic property, which is gestured at by means of a word used metaphorically, requires possession of the concept that the word usually expresses when applied literally. The realist denies that the acquisition of that determinate aesthetic concept must go through the nonaesthetic concept, and Budd's assertion that it does is question-begging and unsupported. Nevertheless, it is not implausible that acquiring more *general* aesthetic concepts must go through the possession of general nonaesthetic concepts. That is, if an aesthetic concept picks out a general

aesthetic property, and we metaphorically describe that aesthetic property by means of a word that literally expresses a nonaesthetic concept that picks out a nonaesthetic property, then we could have had the aesthetic concept without first possessing the nonaesthetic concept. But there is no reason to think that this is implausible. Either way, the aesthetic realist view is unproblematic.

III. METAPHORICAL DESCRIPTIONS AND AESTHETIC CONCEPTS

III.A

Given the distinction between aesthetic and nonaesthetic concepts and the causal account of the connection between them, how should we understand metaphorical linguistic descriptions of aesthetic properties—descriptions that use words that normally refer to nonaesthetic properties? In particular, how should we explain why certain words for nonaesthetic properties are appropriate ones for metaphorical descriptions of aesthetic properties? And how does the nonaesthetic meaning of the words figure in the aesthetic metaphorical use? Postulating causal relations between aesthetic and nonaesthetic concepts by itself does not answer these questions.[15] Budd writes:

[T]he alleged causal connections would not give a satisfactory explanation of the use of the same word for the aesthetic property and the corresponding non-aesthetic quality.[16] ... [T]he alleged fact that the possession of one concept is causally dependent on the possession of another ... does not make the word for the second concept an apt metaphor for the other, let alone the most appropriate or natural one.[17]

A petty quibble would be that this complaint does not amount to an *objection* rather than a request for more information. It is true that the causal account does not explain why, of the many possible metaphors that we might use to describe music, we often choose to use words for emotion, motion, or height, in particular. It is true that more needs to be said to explain why in general, and in particular cases, such metaphors are used in the description of music. However, giving such an explanation would be very ambitious. It would be nice to have such an explanation, of course. But it is no objection to the bare thesis that there is a causal connection between the possession

of aesthetic and nonaesthetic concepts that it does not provide that ambitious explanation. For it could be that the causal account can be supplemented with such a further explanation. The causal account might only be part of an ideal, fully satisfying account, one that tells us why every appropriate metaphorical description is appropriate. Lacking that, it is still true that the causal account provides a defense against the objection that on the realist account there could be no connection between the two concepts.

III.B

Does the aesthetic realist owe an explanation of all the appropriate metaphors that we use in describing music? I would say that this is asking too much for at least three reasons.

First, nonrealists also face explanatory burdens with metaphorical descriptions. Given the mental states that nonrealists postulate as constituting musical experience, it is not obvious how the metaphors we use relate to those mental states. So it is not only realists who have explanatory burdens. What needs to be argued, because it is unobvious, is that nonrealists have an explanatory advantage over realists on the matter.

Second, there is no reason to expect a unified explanation covering all cases. There is a large variety of metaphorical descriptions of music. An explanation of the appropriateness of music in terms of emotion is unlikely to have much in common with an explanation of the appropriateness of descriptions of music in terms of the weather, or traffic, or conversation. Different metaphorical descriptions have different explanations. Furthermore, like all metaphorical description, the metaphorical description of music has a creative side, which is bound to buck the constraints of any general theory. So we should be skeptical about whether any unitary theory should be sought.[18]

Third, it seems to be a question of empirical psychology that some metaphors are found appropriate and others inappropriate. Philosophy here only has to remove the misconception that no explanation is possible. For the realist, it is a brute psychological fact that certain metaphors cause certain thoughts; the effectiveness of metaphors (which may vary cross-culturally or between persons) depends on such psychological facts. Suppose that someone describes economic or geological processes in metaphorical terms (perhaps in terms of 'hands' or 'plates'). In such cases, struc-

tural causal features of the things that the words literally represent correspond to structural causal features of economic or geological processes in such a way as to make the metaphor appropriate. Because of these structural isomorphisms, these metaphors may impart knowledge of economics or geology. The case of music is sometimes like this, and sometimes not. Sometimes there are structural analogies. But often, it is more like the case of metaphorical descriptions of sensations or moods. For example, it is just a fact of human psychology that the phenomenology of depression is well captured in terms of darkness and heaviness rather than their opposites. We must rest content with such associations. Psychology may explore this, but philosophy need go no further. Why should it? There is no remaining perplexity that it needs to remove. It is the same with many metaphorical descriptions of the aesthetic properties of music. Why exactly are 'sad' and 'delicate' appropriate descriptions of some music? There is a psychological story to be told, but there is no philosophical problem, puzzle, or paradox: there are the aesthetic properties of the music, and there is the psychological fact that the use of the words 'sad' or 'delicate' draws our attention to those aesthetic properties. What is the problem? Of course, nonrealists and emotion theorists of music have other explanations. But for an aesthetic realist, there is just an empirical psychological matter here, and therefore there is no dialectical difficulty or objection to the moral realist from the fact that some descriptions seem more appropriate than others. Why do certain sensations or moods seem appropriately described in terms of some colors rather than others? We may be psychologically curious about this, but no philosophical problem lurks. It is the same with metaphorical descriptions of music. The way to make a philosophical problem, of course, would be to take the descriptions literally. But unless we are looking for trouble, why do that?

III.C

A different issue is the need to understand how the ordinary nonaesthetic meaning of 'delicacy' *guides* its metaphorical aesthetic use. Drawing on an argument from Scruton, Budd puts the worry like this:

[A]n understanding of the metaphorical use must be *guided* by an understanding of the literal use of the sentence: the meaning of 'sad' used literally *informs* the

correct interpretation of its aesthetic metaphorical use, for the point of using the term 'sad' is precisely to indicate or express a connection between the music and sadness—it is precisely to relate the music to sadness.[19]

The idea that literal meaning 'informs' metaphors is plausible, although I prefer to put the point by distinguishing "literal meaning" from "metaphorical use." Clearly the literal meaning is what is deployed in the metaphorical use of the word. I am not sure how far it limits the metaphorical use, but it certainly constrains it, for it is what is used. As a pot is made from clay and a house from bricks, so a metaphor is made from literal meaning. So of course the literal meaning constrains the metaphorical use. The notion of 'guiding' or 'informing' in the quoted passage may imply these kind of constraints, which are common to all metaphors, since they are made from words with literal meanings. For example, the literal meaning of color words, in this sense, 'guides' or 'informs' their metaphorical use in describing moods and emotions. It is similar with the literal meaning of the words 'sad' and 'delicate' and the metaphorical use of those words in the description of music and musical experiences.

However, if we go on to say that the literal meaning (Budd says "use") of 'sad' and the metaphorical use of 'sad' are connected by a relation between the music and real emotion, this is no longer neutrally acceptable, and it is problematic in at least two ways. First, it is question-begging if it is supposed to be an argument against the realist's construal of metaphorical descriptions. Second, it is intrinsically implausible. For example, when we describe a mood as black, it is surely not because we envisage a real relation between the feeling and the color. (Is the brain of a depressed person darker than the usual gray?) The claim about music and real sadness is both dialectically tendentious and intrinsically implausible as a general theory.

III.D

The fact that there is a difference between the two concepts is compatible with some kind of guiding relation, or perhaps a constraining relation, holding between the literal meanings of nonaesthetic words and the aesthetic metaphorical use of them. As we saw, asserting the existence of a causal relation between possessing the two concepts does not itself explain the relations between literal meanings and metaphorical uses. But the causal account is not incompatible with some such account. Indeed, we might expect some causal relation between the concepts to be a necessary part of a plausible account of guiding. When a guide dog guides a blind person, there is a causal relation between dog and person. There is more to it than that, but a causal relation is part of it.

Realists and nonrealists have different explanations of the phenomenon of guiding. All sides should agree that the literal nonaesthetic meaning of the word guides, or perhaps constrains, the nonliteral aesthetic use of it. But for the aesthetic realist, one guides the other because the literal meaning of the word leads the person receiving the metaphor to experience and think of the aesthetic property that was intended to be indicated, or to which our attention was intended to be drawn, by the nonliteral use of the word.[20] By contrast, for an aesthetic nonrealist, such as Scruton, nonaesthetic meanings guide their aesthetic uses because the literal meaning indicates which imaginative act is supposed to be involved in aesthetic aspect perception: it is the imaginative act that deploys the concept that is typically expressed in literal uses of the word. But, for Scruton, that concept is not 'asserted,' as it were, or held to apply to things.[21] Other nonrealists may have other explanations.[22]

III.E

There might seem to be a problem about how, on a realist account of the use of metaphor, the audience arrives at the exact aesthetic thought that it is supposed to have. Is the interpretation of metaphor, for the aesthetic realist, just a leap in the dark? The answer is that it is, to an extent. The literal meaning is *some* kind of guide, insofar as we have dispositions to associate literal meanings with aesthetic properties, but it leaves much open; one person understands what another person means if they share aesthetic experiences of the music. If one person understands another's metaphorical description, then they hear the music as possessing somewhat similar aesthetic properties. But if they have very different experiences of the music, then it is just a fact of life that they may not understand each other's metaphors. In the interpretation of metaphors for describing music, the other mind's problem is real.

The guidance problem for Scruton's nonrealist view is less great, since the usual meaning of the word expresses the concept that is intended

to be imagined but not applied. One is, in effect, instructed: "Use that concept in your imaginative act." The literal meaning indicates which imaginative act there should be. We are to imagine, for example, that the music is delicate or sad or that it stands in some relation to delicacy or sadness. It might be said that the interpretation of aesthetic metaphors generates an other-minds problem for the realist but not for the nonrealist, and so this is a reason to prefer nonrealism. The reply is that the other-minds problem *is* sometimes real, and not merely an academic exercise; so in such cases it is better for a theory to *preserve* such a problem, to some degree. It is a good problem, not a bad problem. Given convergence in experiences, we can interpret other people's aesthetic metaphors, but lacking convergence in experience, such interpretation may be difficult or impossible. Convergence in interpretation, for the realist, comes about because what the metaphor causes listeners to notice or think of is the same or similar. Or else they already experience the music in similar ways and thus take the metaphor in similar ways. Whether one person understands another's metaphorical description of music depends on the contingent fact that their musical experience is similar. This is a fragile basis for understanding each other's linguistic descriptions, but this fragile basis is all we have.

CONCLUSION

Aesthetic realism has many advantages. One is that it can easily explain important features of our aesthetic judgments about music, such as their aspiration to correctness, since aesthetic properties are the source of correctness and incorrectness.[23] The aesthetic realist interprets many descriptions of music as metaphorical descriptions of aesthetic properties of music. Since the words used in metaphorical descriptions have only a literal meaning, aesthetic realism requires that the nonaesthetic words are used to express both aesthetic and nonaesthetic concepts. Having distinguished the concepts, some plausible account must be given of their relation. The causal account of the relation between the possession of aesthetic and nonaesthetic concepts provides this, since the concepts are distinct but connected. If that means that one can possess aesthetic concepts without the corresponding nonaesthetic concepts, then so be

it. At least, this is not implausible of determinate aesthetic concepts, even if it is not true of many general aesthetic concepts. Furthermore, there is a plausible account of metaphorical description that accompanies the view of aesthetic concepts and nonaesthetic concepts; the literal words for the nonaesthetic properties are appropriated and used to draw attention to the aesthetic properties. The exact details of how this happens and of why some metaphors are more appropriate than others is a matter for empirical psychology and not something that is philosophically puzzling.

Aesthetic realism, I believe, offers us a compelling view. Our musical experience is directed to aesthetic properties of music, which we sometimes experience with delight.[24] This is the reality to which our aesthetic concepts refer and this is the reality that we seek, albeit imperfectly, to describe using metaphor.[25]

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1. See Roger Scruton, *Art and Imagination: A Study in the Philosophy of Mind* (London: Methuen, 1974) and Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford University Press, 1997).

2. Nick Zangwill, "Against Emotion: Hanslick Was Right about Music," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 44 (2004): 29–43, and Nick Zangwill, "Music, Metaphor and Emotion," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65 (2007): 391–400.

3. Thus, someone who postulates *secondary* literal meanings of 'sad' or 'delicate' that are said to apply to music but not to people or eggshells is classified as nonliteralist in this sense. (See, for example, Stephen Davies, *Musical Meaning and Expression* [Cornell University Press, 1994], pp. 162–165.) I criticized this view in "Music, Metaphor and Emotion." Here I note merely that a "secondary literal meaning" theorist will need a great many magically created secondary literal meanings whenever a word is applied to music without precedent. We are creative in our aesthetic description of music using the (primary) literal meanings of words that we have to hand. A dictionary list of fossilized secondary meanings cannot account for this.

4. See Nick Zangwill, *The Metaphysics of Beauty* (Cornell University Press, 2001), chaps. 1 and 2, where I defend the view that substantive properties are ways of being beautiful or ugly. See also Nick Zangwill, "Moral Metaphor and Thick Concepts: What Moral Philosophy Can Learn from Aesthetics," in *Thick Concepts*, ed. Simon Kirchin (Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 197–208.

5.   One prominent nonrealist idea is that musical experience involves *imagining* emotion, motion, height, or delicacy. Roger Scruton and Jerrold Levinson's views are of this sort. See Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music*; Jerrold Levinson, "Musical Expressiveness," in *The Pleasures of Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (Cornell University Press, 1996), pp. 90–125; Jerrold Levinson, "Musical Expressiveness as Hearability-as-Expression," in *Contemplating Art: Essays in Aesthetics* (Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 91–108. For critical discussion of Scruton, see Nick Zangwill, "Scruton's Musical Experiences," *Philosophy* 85 (2010): 91–104. Other nonrealist views relate music to real, and not merely imagined, emotions in artists or listeners. My focus in this article is on realism, not its rivals, although in Section II.E I will note a distinctive explanation of metaphorical appropriateness that is available to imagination theories.

6.   I follow a broadly Davidsonian account. See Donald Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean," in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), pp. 245–264, especially pp. 262 and 263 (originally published in *Critical Inquiry* 5 [1978]: 31–47). For my own development of such a view, see my "Metaphor as Appropriation," *Philosophy and Literature* (2014).

7.   See Nick Zangwill, "Metaphor and Realism in Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 49 (1991): 57–62; reprinted in *Metaphysics of Beauty*, pp. 166–175.

8.   Malcolm Budd, *Aesthetic Essays* (Oxford University Press, 2008), at pp. 177–179.

9.   Nick Zangwill, "Music, Essential Metaphor and Private Language," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 48 (2011): 1–16.

10.   Budd, *Aesthetic Essays*, p. 178.

11.   Peter Geach writes, "concepts . . . are capacities exercised in acts of judgement" (*Mental Acts* [London: Routledge, 1957], p. 7).

12.   I am not talking about what are sometimes called "tropes," but about types instantiated by that cirrus cloud or ones very like it. A delicate vase does not possess *that* property of delicacy, whereas other similar cirrus clouds may do so. These determinate aesthetic properties may be but need not be what I have elsewhere called *total* aesthetic properties, which are the conjunction of *all* of a thing's aesthetic properties (Zangwill, *Metaphysics of Beauty*, chap. 3).

13.   I also think that something similar is true of precise and vague properties: something may be vaguely orange in virtue of being precisely red.

14.   When I came to try to locate an actual example, I was surprised to find how little of Frédéric Chopin's piano music fitted that description.

15.   If the Essential Metaphor Thesis is true, it explains why we are driven to use metaphors of some kind or other to describe music, but it does not explain the particular metaphors we use.

16.   Budd, *Aesthetic Essays*, p. 178.

17.   Budd, *Aesthetic Essays*, p. 178.

18.   See further Nick Zangwill, "Appropriate Musical Metaphors," *Nordic Journal of Aesthetics* 38 (2010): 1–4. At one point, Budd seems to be arguing that the realist must think that there is only *one* metaphor to describe any aesthetic property (Budd, *Aesthetic Essays*, p. 178). But that would be an odd commitment for a realist. The realist view is, or should be, a pluralist one: that any aesthetic property that is described in metaphorical terms, such as an emotion metaphor, might also be appropriately described by other metaphors, such as metaphors of the weather or traffic. What cannot be substituted is some nonmetaphorical description. Different metaphors are more or less appropriate to a reality that ultimately defies literal description. (Similar issues and problems beset the argument in Malcolm Budd, *Music and the Emotions* [London: Routledge, 1985], chap. 2, especially section 13.)

19.   Budd, *Aesthetic Essays*, p. 179.

20.   Davidson talks of how metaphors may make us "appreciate some fact," and he talks of "what a metaphor calls our attention [to]" (Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984], pp. 262 and 263).

21.   See Roger Scruton, *Art and Imagination*, *Aesthetics of Music*, and "Musical Movement: A Reply to Budd," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 44 (2004): 184–187.

22.   The theorist who has a greater problem with guidance than either the realist or the Scrutonian nonrealist is the literalist, who thinks, for example, that in our emotion descriptions of music, we are ascribing relations between the music and real emotions. But our immediate experience of the music is of features of the music that are experienced as nonrelational or intrinsic. Therefore, on the literalist theory, the usual literal meaning of words like 'sad' guides us to error—which sounds more like *misguiding* than guiding!

23.   See further Nick Zangwill, "Aesthetic Realism 1," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics*, ed. Jerrold Levinson (Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 63–79.

24.   It can seem, in a good case, like the rest of the world does not exist and that we inhabit a world of sound—an auditory universe of the sort entertained by Peter Strawson (*Individuals* [London: Methuen, 1959], chap. 2), with auditory objects and events as well as properties. (See also Scruton, *Aesthetics of Music*, chap. 1.) Or, perhaps, rather, it seems that our mind is constituted by those sounds.

25.   This material was delivered at the Research School of Social Sciences at Canberra, at La Trobe University, and at the School of Advanced Study at the University of London. Thanks to those who asked questions on these occasions, and thanks also to a very helpful referee for this journal.