

Is Classical Music Superior to Pop Music? On the Structure of the Evaluation of Music

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The question whether classical music is superior to pop music is discussed in everyday life, it is socially relevant regarding funding issues, and it is debated in the philosophy of music. The aim of this paper is to lay out the general structure of the evaluation of music and to show how classical music is superior to pop music. Its four main points are:

- (1) Musical works/styles/genres can be evaluated comparatively if we presuppose a purpose that is pursued with listening to that music.*
- (2) A musical work is more suitable for a purpose than another musical work because of their musical properties and because of the properties of the listener.*
- (3) A purpose of listening to music is the mirroring of the listener's personality. With regard to this purpose, classical music is more suitable than pop music.*
- (4) Classical music is suitable for this purpose because it is sufficiently complex and it is ideally listened to in a focused manner.*

Keywords: *aesthetics of music, evaluation of music, instrumentalism, aesthetic value, aesthetic relativism*

Introduction

Is classical music superior to pop music? Outside academia, the widespread opinion is that there are no differences in the quality of musical works. However, this view is at odds with current practice, in which the quality of musical works or performers is passionately debated. Furthermore, schools and music academies in Europe follow a curriculum that is centered on classical music roughly between 1700 and 1900. Instrument instruction also has its focus here. For a long time, this focus was based on a social consensus about the value of classical music, which no longer exists. Finally, the question of the evaluation of music plays a role in the philosophical discussion of the aesthetics of music. The latter must not be considered closed.

The paper's aim is twofold: *Firstly*, it will outline a general framework which allows to evaluate musical works comparatively. *Secondly*, it will be shown that works of classical music are generally superior to works of pop music if the purpose of listening is to gain deeper self-knowledge and to develop one's own personality.

At the beginning of the paper, an overview of the literature relevant to the discussion is provided. Then it will be clarified what is meant by classical music and pop music. In the main part, my approach to the evaluation of musical works is

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presented. It will then be shown how works of classical music may be considered superior to works of pop music. Finally, some central objections are discussed.

Literature Review

The question whether classical music is superior to pop music has been addressed in recent papers. James O. Young (Young 2016) attributes a higher quality to classical music, as it has more means of expression. This wealth of expression is largely due to its complex and functional harmony. Young grounds his claim empirically. Because of the richness of expression, classical music has a psychological depth that pop music only rarely achieves. Stephen Davies (Davies 1999) starts from a debate between Bruce Baugh and James O. Young (Baugh 1993, Young 1995, Baugh 1995). Baugh argues that rock music and classical music each have their own criteria of evaluation. Davies reaches the opposite conclusion.

I follow Young in attributing greater expressiveness to classical music. My approach goes beyond Young, however, as I explicate the instrumental structure of music evaluation that he only hints at. Like Baugh, I believe that different evaluative criteria should be applied to different genres and styles of music. However, my approach also turns against Baugh by laying out a higher-order general structure in the evaluation of musical works.

The question whether classical music is superior to pop music also touches on the debate about the “evaluation of music”. It deals with the way in which musical works can be evaluated comparatively. Jerrold Levinson (Levinson 1996) assumes that listening to music can have intrinsic value. The quality of this listening experience is measured in three dimensions. (1) How rewarding is it to follow the formal structures of music? (2) How rewarding is its expressive content? (3) How rewarding is the connection between expression and formal structures? According to Stephen Davies (Davies 2005), the aim of evaluating music is to recommend which works should be learned, performed, or listened to. Davies takes an instrumentalist approach, where ultimately music is a means to the end of hedonic pleasure. Music can serve many purposes. However, Davies emphasizes that we should approach it with aesthetic interest. We do so when we understand musical works as individual solutions to formal problems as posed by forms such as the symphony or the concerto. The quality of musical works is therefore measured by their unique solution to formal problems. According to Theodore Gracyk (Gracyk 2011), there is a purely aesthetic evaluation of music. Musical works are a means of achieving aesthetic reward. Aesthetic reward has intrinsic value. Gracyk discusses various evaluation principles, but concludes that these are of heuristic value, if at all. He does not provide a model for how musical works should be evaluated. According to Alan Goldman (Goldman 2011), listening to music can have intrinsic value. The value does not consist in using musical works for therapeutic or community-building purposes. Rather, we appreciate and evaluate their formal structure and logical development, but also their expressive qualities.

I agree with the above authors that musical works should be judged comparatively. Evaluating music is not a matter of identifying the best or ideal

musical work, but of determining whether one musical work is better than another. My position differs from that of the authors in that I do not assume an intrinsic value of musical works or the listening experience. Furthermore, I do not regard musical works as a means for a particular kind of aesthetic pleasure or reward. Nevertheless, I advocate an instrumentalist approach according to which we must evaluate musical works by whether they serve as a means to an end, such as dancing or deeper self-knowledge.

Evaluating Music Instrumentally

To begin with, we need to clarify what is meant by classical music and pop music. Classical music is understood as the canon of Western art music from the Renaissance, Baroque, Classical, Romantic and Impressionist periods, i.e. the masterpieces of composers such as Palestrina, Vivaldi, Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Wagner, Mahler, and Debussy. The music of the Middle Ages and modernist music (*Neue Musik*) are excluded for the sake of simplicity. Pop music is understood as widespread musical works that have been created since around the 1950s and can be found in genres such as rock'n'roll, beat, rock, folk, funk, reggae, punk, metal, hip hop, house, and techno. Jazz music and the traditions of non-Western music play no role in the following considerations (similarly Young 2016: 523f).

The question whether classical music is superior to pop music can be put more concretely: Is a specific work of classical music superior to a specific work of pop music? My approach is that differences in the quality of musical works can be identified if we understand musical works as means to certain ends. The quality of musical works can thus be evaluated based on their suitability for the purpose. The purpose is “extra-musical” and not a form of aesthetic reward. The structure of the evaluation of music can be put as follows:

Musical work m^1 with the properties p^{m1} is more suitable for the purpose z for listener l with the properties p^l than musical work m^2 with the properties p^{m2} .

This structure of the evaluation of music will now be illustrated using an example from military music. Military music is functional music. Its being music for a purpose should be uncontroversial. It is claimed that the *Dessauer Marsch* is more suitable for motivating soldiers to march than Ed Sheeran's song *Photograph*. The variables are shown as a list and their content will only be sketched.

- m^1 : *Dessauer Marsch*
- p^{m1} : clear rhythm, tempo 100bpm, form in 8-beat pattern throughout, instrumentation with marching band, major key, emphasis on the heavy beats in the melody
- l : soldiers
- p^l : tired, unmotivated, lacking combative spirit
- z : awaken the soldiers' combative spirit/triumphant feeling, march in step, make the marching tempo felt
- m^2 : Ed Sheeran *Photograph*
- p^{m2} : Tempo 110bpm, major key, instrumentation with acoustic guitar, piano, sparse chords, calm vocals, syncopated melody

The suitability of a march compared to a love song for the purpose of marching may come as no surprise. However, the juxtaposition illustrates which musical characteristics— p^{m1} and p^{m2} —make the *Dessauer March* suitable for marching in comparison to *Photograph*. Of course, the variables could be fleshed out in more detail, but our focus is the structure of musical evaluation. In the same way, examples could be given from other contexts in which functional music is typically used. Think of music in commercials, dance music, film music or music at a dinner party.

Next, the variables are commented on.

Musical work m^n : There are contexts in which the comparison of genres, styles, epochs or the entire music of a composer or performer may be useful. For example, a restaurant owner may wonder whether funk or house music is more suitable for the champagne reception of a wedding party.

Properties of musical work p^m : The properties of a musical work are those properties that can be attributed to the work on the basis of the score, the recording or the digital production, e.g. melody, harmony, rhythm, tempo, instrumentation, but also voicings, beat, riffs, sounds, or digital tools used.

Listener l : Often we listen to music together. The appropriateness of musical works can depend on the purposes of all listeners. For the sake of simplicity, no distinction is made in the structural sentence between a single listener and multiple listeners. For the sake of simplicity, we also assume that music is listened to. Performing or composing music is excluded from our considerations.

Properties of the listener p^l : The term “properties” is used in a broad sense. These can be psychological states such as feelings, fears, or desires, but also physical characteristics such as fitness, physical condition, or appearance. Age, gender, or relationship status may also play a role, depending on the context. Think of the music in commercials.

Purpose z : People often do not explicitly pursue any goals when they listen to music. Nevertheless, they find some musical works more suitable than others. The purpose must then be assumed in the sense that none of the people involved consciously decided on the purpose. Furthermore, the purpose is often not set by the listeners themselves, but by others. Think of military music, music in commercials, or music in restaurants. For the sake of simplicity, no distinction is made between one or more purposes. Finally, there is a difference between listening to music on the car radio, in the stadium or while cooking. The context of listening to music could also be represented as a variable on its own but is considered here as part of the variable of purpose.

Classical Music as a Mirror of Personality

The purpose-oriented evaluation of musical works may be uncontroversial in the case of functional music. But how can this method of evaluation help us in the case of art music, which does not appear to be functional? The approach taken here assumes that we can also pursue purposes in listening to classical art music. The

proposed structure for evaluating musical works can be applied to our question concerning a possible superiority of classical music over pop music.

Depending on the purpose one seeks to realize, different “value hierarchies” of musical works can be formed. With regard to many dance styles, pop music is certainly more suitable than classical music. Nevertheless, classical music is superior to pop music for at least one purpose. This purpose is to mirror one’s own personality. We can listen to music to hold up a mirror to ourselves, to parts of our personality. And this can contribute to a deeper understanding of ourselves. By engaging with music, we can explore, develop, and shape our personality.

What does this mean? By personality I mean enduring cognitive and emotional characteristics of people, e.g. longings, fears, goals, or ideals. This concept of personality is largely the same as personality concepts from personality psychology (Larsen/Buss 2018: 4-10; Schütz/Rüdiger/Rentzsch 2016: 17-21). Roughly speaking, the idea of mirroring one’s own personality is that we like music that expresses our personality traits or enables us to experience them. In this sense, an aggressive person would like aggressive music and a balanced person would like balanced music. It should be emphasized, however, that longings are also understood as part of the personality. The idea of mirroring one’s own personality should therefore not be understood in the narrow sense that music we like is always a copy of our personality traits. Even a person who is reserved and introverted can enjoy energetic and aggressive music, for example because they feel a longing to break out of their restraint.

To elaborate these ideas, in (1) and (2) I will discuss some everyday phenomena that suggest a connection between the music we like and our personality. In (3) to (5) it will then be argued that classical music is particularly well-suited to realize said purpose.

(1) *A judgment of taste is something personal.* Imagine a guy named Agamemnon claiming at a party that *Shake It Off* by Taylor Swift is of inferior quality. His friend Clytemnestra then exclaims indignantly that it is her favorite piece. It is likely that she is personally affected by Agamemnon’s verdict. Let us now imagine that Agamemnon had instead claimed that spaghetti Bolognese is a truly awful meal. Clytemnestra would be less concerned, even if it were her favorite dish. This everyday phenomenon shows that musical taste is personal in the sense that it often affects our personality. This applies regardless of whether we prefer classical music or pop music.

(2) *»Happening« of liking.* Whether we like music or not happens to us. We hear a piece of music and spontaneously think: “Oh, that’s beautiful!” It takes hold of us and we have a good feeling. We cannot decide on whether we like this piece of music or not. Some pieces of music we only like on a warm summer evening because they reflect, underline, and reinforce the atmosphere of that evening. We like other pieces of music for decades and this liking matures the more we listen to them. This may be because we associate these musical works with a certain event or a certain period in our lives. But that is not always the case. One way of explaining this phenomenon is the approach taken here. Musical works can mirror parts of our personality. They express something, allow us to experience something, or have a structure that corresponds to our personality. It is obvious that it is a pleasurable

feeling if we assume that music expresses or allows us to experience psychological states that we long for. For example, when listening to Wagner's music, we may have the experience of a heroic effort of deep meaning. If we feel a longing for this in our less heroic everyday lives, this experience gives us pleasure. Contrary to the position taken here, Alex King (2022) reconstructs the experience of aesthetic liking as a weighing up of aesthetic reasons. In my opinion, this fundamentally contradicts our everyday experience.

The purpose of holding up a mirror to our own personality and thus understanding ourselves better can be pursued with any music that we like in the long run. For example, Diomedes may be a great *Rammstein* fan. This could mirror his longing for a certain form of archaic masculinity. It is therefore not disputed that the purpose of mirroring one's own personality can be achieved with pop music. However, it is claimed that classical music is generally more suitable for achieving this purpose.

(3) *The language of emotions.* Music has repeatedly been described as the language of emotions. Personally, I think this description is too narrow, as music can express not only feelings, but also the atmosphere of a situation, attitudes, actions, physical or psychological movements and much more. This can be seen in the vocabulary we use to describe music. For example, music is aggressive, gentle, serious, joyful, exuberant, athletic, moving, strict, dramatic, rational, boring, unsteady, torn, calm, restrained, hectic, or heavy. For our task, however, it suffices to say that music—and even purely instrumental music—can have a content that is sufficiently subtle and complex to mirror one's own personality. This does not mean that instrumental music can express specific situations such as “Medea is an aggressive person who threatens Jason with a knife”. However, it is claimed that music can express aggression and threat or that it can allow us to experience them. The view that music expresses content is not synonymous with the view that music makes content experienceable or “sympathetic”. Roger Scruton (1997: 343-368) takes the latter position. I use both phrases as they are equally compatible with my approach. We can feel pleasure when we attribute to Wagner's music the expression of heroic exertion. But we can also feel pleasure when Wagner's music allows us to experience such feelings or to be sympathetic to them.

The approach, on the other hand, is not compatible with an extremely formalistic position, such as that of Eduard Hanslick. Roger Scruton has rightly pointed out that Hanslick's formalism is inconsistent. Thus Hanslick speaks of the content of music as “sounding forms that move” (»tönend bewegte Formen«, Hanslick 1966: 59). However, since music does not move in the literal sense, Hanslick uses a metaphor here and thus already ascribes a content to it (Scruton 1997: 340-342). The fact that the approach taken here is not compatible with extreme formalist positions is therefore of little consequence if one follows Scruton's rejection. However, the approach is compatible with musical works that do not express specific feelings, as might be the case with some Bach fugues. The position is also compatible with a formalist attitude to listening. I will discuss this further below.

Music can have a content and this content is to be found in the sphere of experience, of “how something feels”, of longings, feelings, atmosphere, moods, or movements in a broad sense. This field of content is one that we also associate with

an individual's personality. It is not claimed that an individual's personality is limited to this, but simply that, for example, long-lasting desires or feelings make up a central part of the personality. There are also "propositional" parts of the personality that music might be less suitable for mirroring, such as political convictions or values that can be expressed in sentences, e.g.: "Hera is convinced that spouses should remain faithful to each other."

Classical music is often not composed as functional music. And even if a specific piece was written for a specific purpose, such as Bach's Passions, it is not usually listened to today as functional music. This is possible because it is not limited to its function. Atheists or believers of other religions can also listen to Bach's Passions with reward. The reason lies in the expressive richness of classical music. The content of classical musical works is often so deep that it can easily be detached from its original functional context and listened to as "art music". This is less the case for popular music. It is often composed for the purpose of remaining in the background, whether, for example, as pop music in the narrower sense on the car radio or as house music in the club. The content of pop music is less deep because of its function. As background music, for example, it should not capture and fill the listener's attention, but leave room for other social or individual activities. Or it is meant to express clear feelings unambiguously. The depth and richness of expression of classical music is one reason why it is generally better suited to mirroring the personality of the listener than pop music.

(4) *Complexity*. One "formal" reason for the expressive depth and richness of many classical musical works lies in their complexity. This can be demonstrated by many musical dimensions, such as harmony, rhythm, dynamics, polyphony, form (e.g. musical sentence and period, sonata form, rondo, symphony, concerto), melody (e.g. thematic transformation), and instrumentation. Young (2016) demonstrates this in detail for the dimension of harmony and more briefly for tempo, measure and rhythm. There are counterexamples for each of these dimensions. This means that there are individual works of pop music that are more complex in one or the other dimension. Nevertheless, it is probably uncontroversial that classical music as a whole is by far more complex than pop music. The fact that the development of works of classical music is more difficult to anticipate than that of works of pop music also contributes to their greater complexity. This complexity leads to many possibilities of musical expression. Personalities are also highly complex entities. The mirroring of aspects of our personality in a musical work is more likely to be successful if the musical work has a similar or higher degree of complexity than our personality. Of course, I am not claiming that a person's entire personality is mirrored in a single work, but only some aspects of their personality. The more superficial aspects of our personality may be mirrored in a pop song. The more profound ones require more complex musical works with more subtle expressive capacities.

(5) *Listening attitude*. Today, the historically evolved attitude to listening in classical music differs from that in other forms of music. Ideally, listeners sit completely still in front of the performers, such as an orchestra or a string quartet. They do not talk to their neighbors during the performance, they do not eat, they do not pursue other activities at the same time. These rules of conduct when listening

to classical music aim to ensure that one can concentrate fully on the music as an individual without distraction.

Firstly, the aspect of listening without distraction: The complexity of classical music makes it necessary to deal with only the music. Any kind of secondary occupation results in not grasping the music in its complexity. The fact that this ideal has been formed indicates that grasping this complexity is not only intended for music nerds but is seen as a central feature of successful listening to classical music. This ideal of listening has created the possibility for composers of classical music to create complex works and the audience's expectation to listen to such works.

Secondly, the aspect of listening as an individual: You engage with classical works of music on your own, as an individual. If the ideal of classical music reception has been described correctly, it is irrelevant whether you attend a concert together or alone. The engagement with the content of classical music happens as an individual. Many other styles of music can only be adequately experienced as a group. The various forms of dance music are experienced as a couple, as an organized dance group or as a disorderly crowd. Many forms of pop music are listened to as background music. Concerts of pop music have always been a mass event in which the audience does not sit still, but moves, talks, screams, or sings along.

To summarize, we can complete the variables of the structure of the evaluation of music:

Classical music with the properties of depth of expression and high complexity is more suitable for the listener I with the properties of concentrated listening and for the purpose of mirroring I's personality than pop music with the properties of clear expression and lower complexity.

Objections

Aesthetic Relativism

The idea of evaluating musical works instrumentally contradicts Kant's famous thesis that an aesthetic perception of works of art is "disinterested" (Kant 1974: 117). More recent authors in this tradition of philosophical aesthetics speak of an "aesthetic interest", which is to be distinguished from all other "profane" interests or purposes (Davies 2005: 206). Thus, Stephen Davies opposes an instrumentalist approach to the evaluation of musical works that assumes many equally legitimate purposes. His contention is as follows: Assume that an evaluation can only be made in relation to certain purposes. Then musical work m^1 can be more suitable for some purpose than musical work m^2 . Relative to another purpose, however, m^2 may be more suitable than m^1 . If two listeners disagree about the value of a musical work, then they cannot agree unless they are pursuing the same purpose. According to Davies, this unfortunate situation can only be dealt with by designating a specific purpose as essential. This outstanding purpose is the "aesthetic interest" that we take in a musical work. Furthermore, an instrumentalist approach supposedly leads to radical aesthetic relativism or subjectivism, which eliminates the rational basis for any evaluation of

musical works (Davies 2005: 198). In the following six points, I will argue that a multitude of value hierarchies is unproblematic and that we can therefore dispense with the assumption of a vague “aesthetic interest”.

(1) In most cases, we agree on what purpose we want to pursue with a musical work. If we do not agree, many discussions or conflicts about the value of a musical work can still be resolved by pointing out the conflicting purposes that are pursued.

(2) In real life, musical works are not used for an infinite number of purposes, but only for a few, such as dancing, marching, relaxing, distracting or creating an atmosphere conducive to conversation. In everyday life, there is no radical relativism or subjectivism. The danger seems rather to be theoretical.

(3) If we want to create a unified hierarchy of musical works, we have to introduce differences in the value of the purposes or activities listed. This does not seem to be promising. Should rowing be more valuable in principle than dancing, or *vice versa*? We might distinguish between activities in which music is the servant of other practices and activities in which listening is of central importance. But again, it is *prima facie* not clear why dancing to music should be less valuable than concentrated listening.

(4) Furthermore, we should reflect on the function of evaluating music. We want to make recommendations with comparative judgments (Davies 2005: 196). These often-implicit recommendations are sometimes made for a specific purpose, e.g.: “When I go for a run, I always listen to Metallica.” Or: “Chet Baker’s music is really relaxing for dinner.” On the other hand, we seem to make recommendations for no particular purpose: “Chopin’s *Nocturne No. 1* is my absolute favorite piece.” Or: “Beethoven’s early piano sonatas are not quite as good as his late ones.” In my opinion, these seemingly purpose-free evaluations are to be understood as ellipsis. The purpose is not explicitly formulated. This means neither that the purpose pursued in these cases must be an aesthetic interest, nor that it must lie in the mirroring of one’s own personality. In many cases, it will be “mundane”, such as relaxing or creating a good mood.

(5) Incommensurable value hierarchies are to be evaluated differently in the field of aesthetics and in the field of morality. While in morality we sometimes need unified value hierarchies to resolve conflicts without violence, in aesthetics we can largely “get out of each other’s way”. A standard ethical example is the question of the morality of abortion. In this case, the fetus’ right to life and the mother’s right to self-determination are in conflict. We can only choose one or the other. On the other hand, if there is a conflict of musical taste, we can in most cases choose which musical work we want to listen to. Conflicts arise time and again, for example if the neighbor’s music is too loud. However, the quality of the music is hardly relevant when dealing with such conflicts. Instead, reference is made to excessive noise and the like.

(6) The presented approach does not imply that we can evaluate the quality of music “merely subjectively” if we want to remain rational at the same time. We can argue passionately and rationally about the quality of musical works. However, the approach leaves room for “rational dissent”. Two disputing parties can disagree completely rationally about the value of a musical work if they assume different purposes. They can disagree even when assuming the same purpose, since the

suitability of a musical work for a given purpose also depends on the weighting of various musical properties. If the purpose of listening to music is to mirror one's own personality, there can be a rational dissent about the evaluation of musical works even if there is agreement about both the purpose pursued and the expressive content of the music. After all, we have different personalities.

Subjectivism

In the philosophical discussion on the evaluation of music, there is largely a consensus that evaluations can be undertaken. This is in striking contrast to the everyday view that the evaluation of musical works is completely "subjective" and that a generally binding, "objective" evaluation cannot be achieved. I will counter the subjectivist objection by pointing out to what extent my approach does justice to both subjectivist and objectivist "intuitions".

The intuition of subjectivism is that the evaluation of music is subjective in at least three meanings of the word. (1) The evaluation of musical works cannot be justified objectively, in the sense of being generally comprehensible. (2) The evaluation of musical works varies from person to person. (3) The evaluation of music is something deeply personal. While the presented approach rejects (1), it does justice to (2) and (3). As we have seen, the fact that our evaluation of music differs from person to person does not speak against generally comprehensible evaluation criteria. Moreover, the fact that our taste in music is something deeply personal is due to the fact that one purpose of engaging with music can lie in mirroring one's own personality.

The intuition of objectivism is (1) that it is possible to make generally comprehensible statements about the evaluation of music. Musical evaluation is not solely subjective in the sense of being random. (2) The evaluation of music depends on the properties of the work to be evaluated. It is therefore object-oriented. My approach is consistent with both intuitions. The evaluation of music is not just random but can be justified in a generally comprehensible way. However, it is dependent on purposes. Purposes are set by individuals and are in this sense something subjective. The evaluation of the adequacy of a musical work also depends on the properties of that work. With reference to the example of the march: the march must have a suitable tempo, suitable dynamics, suitable instrumentation and a suitable key in order to fulfill its purpose effectively.

The approach presented here also explains another phenomenon related to the evident subjectivity— i.e. individuality—of our musical taste: We can recognize music as good music without liking it. For instance, we can value the compositional quality of a musical work, appreciate its historical impact or recognize the adequacy of the musical means used in relation to the expression achieved. Nevertheless, it can happen to us that we do not like the work, that it does not carry us away, or does not speak to us. This is because we can rationally justify the suitability of a musical work for its purpose on the basis of the structure of evaluation described above. At the same time, however, we can realize—just as rationally—that the piece does not concern us personally. The musical work does not offer a mirror of our personality and remains unsuitable for this purpose.

Intrinsic Value

In contrast to our instrumentalist approach, Roger Scruton believes that listening to masterpieces of music is an intrinsic value: “We speak of aesthetic value because there is aesthetic experience – the experience which arises when we attend to appearances ‘for their own sake’.” (Scruton 1997: 374)

Scruton’s view is of particular interest here, as he also assumes a close connection between music and personality: “[A]rt provides us with a means not merely to project our emotions outwards, but also to encounter ourselves *in* them.” (Scruton 1997: 348; italics in the original) “We encounter works of art as perfected icons of our felt potential, and appropriate them in order to bring form, lucidity, and self-knowledge to our inner life.” (Scruton 1997: 352)

These statements by Scruton suggest an instrumentalist approach, which he rejects, however. Scruton points to an analogy between listening to music and an Aristotelian ideal of friendship. Friendship is a value in itself. We do not treat another person as a friend if we primarily focus on our own advantage that may arise from the relationship. At the same time, a genuine friendship is beneficial, just think of a friend’s support in emergency situations (Scruton 1997: 375). Furthermore, Scruton illustrates this with the distinction between purpose and function. While a friendship can be functionally beneficial to a person, the benefit should not be the purpose that person is pursuing. The latter even endangers the friendship.

Analogies may illustrate a claim, but they do nothing to substantiate it. It has to be shown that the alleged analogy exists, and it can only be shown by justifying the relevant issues for both parts of the analogy. However, it is the relevant issue what the analogy seeks to substantiate. Scruton therefore speaks of using an analogy to “illustrate” his point (Scruton 1997: 375). His analogy has some weaknesses, though. If one of the “friends” in a “friendship” is constantly seeking their own advantage, even at the expense of the advantage of the other, then it is not friendship. However, if we listen to music with the purpose of holding up a mirror to our own personality, it is a legitimate and worthwhile way of listening to music. Furthermore, the distinction between purpose and function may make sense in the case of friendship. This is different in the case of the purpose of mirroring one’s own personality. If we consciously pursue this purpose, then the result, namely an improved knowledge of our own personality, is more likely to occur than if we “merely” follow the musical development.

It seems that the successful reception of classical music requires experience and even musical education. It takes many hours of concentrated study to understand the depth of expression in Beethoven’s piano sonatas. And it is possible that the reception will be more successful if one initially refrains from the purpose of mirroring one’s own personality and focuses the attention primarily on the development of the subjects, for example. Our mental capacities are after all finite. However, it is not clear that improved self-knowledge can only be achieved by completely renouncing the pursuit of this purpose.

Another widespread concern, to which Scruton refers, is that an instrumentalist approach opens the door to the political exploitation of music (Scruton 1997: 374).

This concern is historically understandable with regard to cultural policy in totalitarian regimes. However, it obviously throws the baby out with the bath water. Firstly, the purpose of mirroring one's own personality is not political. Secondly, it is hard to see why an instrumental approach to the aesthetics of music necessarily supports its political exploitation, given the multitude of purposes that can be pursued with music. The obsession with the intrinsic value of art in general and music in particular seems to be part of a Cold War worldview: On the one hand, free societies with free art that serves "only itself", on the other, socialism, in which art is subordinated to political directives.

Formalism

There is another objection to the purpose of mirroring one's own personality. According to this objection, this purpose presupposes that music has expressive qualities. The approach presented is therefore based on an expressivist conception of music. A formalistic understanding of music, by contrast, is not compatible with this purpose. My view is thus based on controversial assumptions that have been discussed since Hanslick, without one view being universally accepted (Hanslick 1966). To refute this objection, we will show that our purpose is compatible with both positions and that it can do justice to both. According to a formalist view, music has no expressive content at all, or at least has no advantage in this respect compared to natural languages. Music is rather a kind of play of forms like the arabesques of a tapestry (Hanslick 1966: 59-60). According to an expressivist view, music can express something. The phrase "the language of emotions" also conveys the view that music can describe inner states of the soul more precisely than natural languages. Both views are compatible with the purpose of mirroring one's own personality if we regard them not as assumptions about the nature of music, but as different, equally valid attitudes to listening. In the case of expressivism, this is obvious. If feelings and the like are expressed in music, then this expression can be used as a mirror to ourselves.

In the case of a formalistic approach to listening, this requires explanation. There is no denying that some people listen to music in a formalistic way and find it particularly pleasing. In this way we can follow the movement of different voices in a polyphonic work of the Renaissance, even without any theoretical knowledge. Or, with a little more knowledge of music theory, we can follow the entries of the different subjects in a Bach fugue as well as their augmentation, diminution, or inversion. Finally, we can consider the formal requirements of an instrumental concerto as a compositional problem and admire its solution in a piano concerto by Mozart (Davies 2005: 213-232).

Some people enjoy this way of listening very much, others less so, even if they have acquired the necessary knowledge and have an appropriately trained ear. We have already mentioned one way of explaining this phenomenon. Music that we like in the long term mirrors our personality and this is also the cause of our liking it. People who particularly enjoy a formalistic way of listening probably have a tendency towards rationality, combinatorial problems, complex thought structures and the like. These are undeniably parts of their personalities, and these parts are

mirrored in the music. The formalistic approach to listening is thus not only compatible with the purpose of mirroring one's own personality, but also explains why people find pleasure in such abstract plays of form.

Self-knowledge

It is an undeniable fact that we listen to musical works over and over again, often for years or even a lifetime. We always find pleasure in it, and this pleasure may increase after decades of listening to a work. This phenomenon has been explained above with reference to the close connection between our personality and the works of music we admire. However, it also raises an objection. Let us assume that the result of listening to music for the purpose of mirroring one's own personality is a kind of self-knowledge. This self-knowledge can be expressed in propositional sentences. For instance, if Patroclus listens to Wagner's music, he could summarize the result in the following sentence: "I have a longing for heroism with deep meaning."

The following objection is possible. Research or generating knowledge are often finite processes. Once Patroclus has found and articulated the knowledge, he can dispense with any further listening to Wagner's music. However, this contradicts the phenomenon described above. We hear the musical works we particularly appreciate again and again (Goldman 2011: 158). I will make four points in response to this objection.

(1) In contrast to some other fields of knowledge, self-knowledge does not appear to be a finite process. One of the reasons for this is that we are constantly changing. And listening to music plays a role in this. By engaging with music, we can not only recognize our personalities, but also develop and shape them. By listening to Wagner's music, Patroclus can experience what it feels like to accomplish great deeds with deep meaning. In dealing with this feeling, he can notice similarities and differences to other related feelings, such as the feeling of great responsibility.

(2) The interpretation of musical works is not a terminable process. As with other works of art, we can approach the meaning of a musical work hermeneutically, but we cannot determine it once and for all.

(3) The propositions that can be articulated as a result of listening to music should rather be regarded as hypotheses. Patroclus should therefore say: "I notice that I like Wagner's music. This may be because it expresses a feeling of heroic effort for a deeply meaningful cause. Maybe I feel a longing for such a feeling."

(4) We do not like most works of music for the rest of our lives. They only keep us busy for a while. This applies to classical works as well as pop music. This applies to masterpieces as well as trivial pieces. Sometimes musical works have told us everything that interests us after listening for a few times. We have learned a few things about ourselves but realize that this only has a superficial connection to our personality. Sometimes we have changed so much that the mirroring of our personality no longer takes place. We are then amazed that we valued a musical work so highly in the past. In these cases, we do and should indeed dispense with any further listening.

Identity

Pop music is generally better known for forming a sense of identity (*Identitätsstiftung*) than classical music. Listeners of classical music rarely dress in fan fashion nor do they form comprehensive subcultures. On the other hand, for example, metal fans have long been a subculture. More recently, Taylor Swift fans also define themselves in a subcultural manner. The identification with a musical style and the constitution of a lifestyle around it is one of the characteristics of youth culture that emerged with pop music, which can be traced back to Elvis Presley and the Beatles (Wicke 2017). The thesis that music can be used to mirror one's own personality is compatible with this. However, at first glance, classical music seems to play a subordinate role. I will address this objection in two points.

(1) Mirroring one's own personality is different from forming an identity with the help of music. Forming an identity is primarily aimed at creating a sense of belonging. Music is, then, not primarily a means of self-knowledge, but rather a means of establishing social belonging, community or distinction from others, such as the parents' generation. Nevertheless, the mirroring of one's own personality in music can play a role in creating this sense of belonging. People who do not like metal music will hardly decide to become part of the metal community.

(2) The purpose of mirroring one's own personality can also be pursued with the help of pop music. A passionate listener of Manowar's *Warriors of the World* is likely to have a propensity or longing for militarism and the personality traits associated with it. Nevertheless, I argue that classical music is generally better suited to this purpose than pop music. And this was discussed above for classical music with reference to its depth of expression and the special attitude of listening. Pop music, on the other hand, is often designed to express clear messages using simple means of expression or to function as background music. It is not usually listened to in a contemplative manner, but in a group or even a crowd. Singing and dancing along are expected behaviors in both a normative and descriptive sense.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to summarize the three most important results of the paper.

(1) A general structure of the evaluation of musical works, styles, and genres can be provided: Musical work/style/genre m^1 with the properties p^{m1} is more suitable for the purpose z for listener l with the properties p^l than musical work/style/genre m^2 with the properties p^{m2} .

(2) The superiority of classical music over pop music can be established by assuming the purpose of mirroring one's own personality. Applied to the structure of the evaluation of music, the following thesis can be justified: Classical music with the properties of depth of expression and high complexity is more suitable for the listener l with the properties of concentrated listening and for the purpose of mirroring l 's personality than pop music with the properties of clear expression and lower complexity.

(3) Our instrumentalist approach does not lead to radical aesthetic relativism or subjectivism, nor does it lead to political exploitation. Finally, it does not exclude a formalistic attitude towards listening.

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