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Comment

## Theories, frameworks and aesthetics Comment on “From everyday emotions to aesthetic emotions: Towards a unified theory of musical emotions” by Patrik Juslin

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There is much to admire in Patrik Juslin’s winding article [1], so one is hesitant to dwell on a few shortcomings. Juslin has taken on the ambitious task of bringing “aesthetic” emotions into his previous work on music-related affect. However, there are a number of philosophical issues that are dealt with hastily. For philosophers, the article often conflates normative and prescriptive arguments. For example, in the conclusion: “contrary to Hanslick, listeners do regard emotional arousal as an important criterion for the aesthetic value of music.” Hanslick was not arguing about what people think. The fact that lots of people think emotional arousal is important doesn’t make it so. For most philosophers, one cannot take a vote on aesthetic values, any more than one can take a vote on Truth.

Where psychologists place great store on commonplace or typical experiences, for better or worse, writers on aesthetics have traditionally focused on the exceptional experience presumed to be the hallmark of art. Today, most of our musicology colleagues view their job, not as one of describing what people commonly experience when listening to music, but in suggesting how listeners might hear differently, and how they might better experience the music ([2], see [3]). Temperley has aptly captured the diverging goals by distinguishing “descriptive” and “suggestive” theories of music [4]. Although philosophers are interested in the normative studies carried out by psychologists, they feel in no way bound by these studies when forming their views about how art ought (or might) be experienced.

A related issue arises from replacing the concept of artwork with the concept of experience (see Juslin’s footnote 8). Although I personally agree with Juslin’s perspective here, many philosophers dispute the subjectivization of art by psychologists. Many would claim that Mozart’s Jupiter Symphony remains a work of art, even if there were no humans to experience it. For many humanities scholars, social scientists have so reified *experience* that psychologists would claim no tree falls in the forest unless someone perceives it. Evidently, intelligent adults may disagree about ontology. I am highly sympathetic to Juslin’s views, but the nuanced views of philosophers are given short shrift.

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Regarding BRECVEM, Juslin sensibly describes it as a framework, rather than a model or a theory. It is a useful inventory of factors to take into account when considering music and emotion. By itself, it offers no explanation (in a causal sense) for any given music-related affect. There are some lapses, however. In the conclusion, it is claimed that BRECVEM can or may account for a wide range of phenomenon, including chills, sadness, nostalgia, awe, admiration and pleasure. It would be better to regard it as a welcome framework that can inspire the development of theories for such musical experiences.

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