The Secular Reception of Relgious Music

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Praise God
in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power.
Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness.
Praise him with the sound of the trumpet : praise him with the psaltery and harp.
Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs.
Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.
Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord.

- Psalm 150

I

Music can scarcely avoid moving us, and in a variety of ways. But can it ever be inappropriate to be open to certain of its expressive powers? Sacred music seems to have a surprising power over unbelievers not just to quicken or delight them as other music does, but also to ply them, as little else can, with what might be called devotional feelings. Thus, for instance, a secular person may find himself both presented with a peculiar sort of serious joy or a quiet exaltation, and sensible to it. These feelings may be compelling and memorable, and sought after, even though they have no direct footing in his life, since for him there is nothing to venerate. In the unbeliever, the status of such feelings, of such an experience of religious art, can seem questionable. For, to put the matter crude-

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ly, what, for this kind of person, can they be about? The music may arouse the listener to serious joy or to an attitude of exaltation, but what, for this person, is the joy *in* and what does he exalt? These attitudes, however inchoate, do seem directed and not just at themselves. Nor do they seem directed just at the music that awakens them in us.[1] The sorrow of a *misericordiam* is not a sorrow at the music of the *misericordiam*: nothing need have failed in *that*—on the contrary. This music is itself a celebrating, not the celebrated. But if our listener's responses are attitudes *towards* but are neither just towards the music itself nor to the things of ordinary life, so considered, then what can they really be for someone who recognises nothing beyond art and the other things of ordinary life? One possibility is that these responses to religious art, these feelings, are just that: experiences enjoyed for their own sake, experiences which cannot signify for this person in the way they need to. There may be an attitude towards them, but they themselves only *seem* to be attitudes towards anything. And this would seem to detract from them, to show them as confused, parodies of the attitudes they seem to be and thus, ironically, as profane.

In a well-known essay, Michael Tanner wonders whether our relation to art of indisputable profundity and enduring capacity to engage may not be compromised by sentimentality, and in the case of great religious art, inescapably so. He writes,

> …my answer to the question whether sentimentality is an historical phenomenon is that it is, to this extent: enormous numbers of our feelings and attitudes towards the most basic issues are based on some more-or-less traditional Christian outlook. But we are no longer living in a Christian society, in any serious sense, and most of us are not Christians. Our general view of the world is not at all like Christ's. And yet we depend for much of our emotional and spiritual succour on art and teaching that not only presupposes the truth of Christianity, but actively propagates it. Many an atheist thinks that the B minor Mass is one of the greatest works of art; that is what I feel. But I am not at all sure that I should. The brevity with which I have mentioned this matter means not that it is an afterthought… but that I am too disconcerted by it to know what to

[1] This much seems clear enough without venturing into any particular theory of musical expression or, for that matter, drawing on any. Here I am concerned only with rather straightforward facts about how many people are moved in special ways by devotional music.

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say.[2]

The general thought here is that emotions risk sentimentality when had, and sought, "in the void", outside the right context for them. This would happen when they lack the right objects and lack the wider setting of attitudes and actions to which they would naturally contribute. This is possible because emotion thus disengaged from its proprietary contexts can still have a magnetism of its own; but it then moves from being a form of concern with the world to being an object of concern in its own right. Persons given to the cultivation of sheer affect will "(1) respond with extreme readiness to stimuli; (2) appear to be pained, but actually enjoy their pangs; (3) respond with equal violence to disparate stimuli at an amazing pace, the amazement being engendered by the speed with which one piece of intensity is as it were casually replaced by another".[3] And discharge in (suitable) action is postponed or avoided.

In the particular case of sacred music, whatever is evoked in us by the devotional works of Anton Bruckner or J. S. Bach, not to mention Medieval plainsong, cannot now resonate with a whole conception of the human predicament and destiny of the right kind, one that is untroubled by qualification or doubt. And so what such works can evoke is not the kind of functioning, sustaining part of our lives that it offers to be and that it was to others. What is in the music for us no longer echoes in our actual outlook on life or in our practices, and to that extent its emotional resonance, is isolated (at most a kind of imitative heritage experience). This arises from the fragility, if not downright unavailability, of beliefs integral to a range of emotions in what might be called their devotional or sacred forms: emotions of reverence, solemnity, *agape*, hope, serenity, and ecstasy, for example. People now are apt to be disinclined to the sorts of belief that such sentiments require, or even incapable of these, given the range and depth of the inimical beliefs that have come to form the hardened channels of our thought, to borrow Wittgenstein's image.[4] For the secularist, then, it seems that sacred art cannot really illuminate, vivify, celebrate or affirm things that are accepted. Its undoubted expressiveness can lead him at most to accesses of feeling, not to emotion in the fullest sense, i.e., emotion with appropriate objects sustained by appro-

[2] Michael Tanner, "Sentimentality", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 77 (1976-77), pp. 145-146.

[3] Ibid, 140.

[4] *On Certainty*, paras 95-97, 99.

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priate judgments.[5] The secularist is left with a range of quickenings, poignancies and other flattering or beguiling stirrings that he may not meet elsewhere but which are still unsignifying.

II

The question I want to ask is whether the secularist's reception of sacred music (and perhaps of religious art generally) *must* come down to this sort of, perhaps unwitting, dilettantish indulgence. Must it be this if he hears and responds spontaneously, i.e., is not canny enough to approach the music ironically, or voyeuristically, or to avoid hearing it altogether? I will suggest some reassuring answers to this question. While recognising that secularists' reception of such music probably is always overhung by the danger outlined above, it is also, I will suggest, capable of being more complex and less "disconcerting" a prospect.

Sentimentality certainly involves a focus on experiencing feeling, to the point of seeking specifically to engineer this. By itself, however, that cannot be impugned as indulgent or as corrupt. The wish to partake of certain desirable feelings is not of itself a fault. However incomplete the experience may be, it does serve to enlarge the person, perhaps if only as an exercise in empathy.[6] (Or it might, for instance, acquaint the person with the price of his cognitive commitments, the emotional limits they impose.) And the secularist who is susceptible to the unique expressive world of religious music may contrast with the sentimentalist precisely at the point where the latter becomes dishonest. Sentiment is most obviously corrupted by mendacity when we purchase it in wanton disregard of reality. In mendacious sentimentality, one coaxes into being or shelters from scrutiny the beliefs or pictures required to nourish desired feelings. What is so puzzling about the secularist's openness to religious music, however, is precisely that he knowingly undergoes the experience without the right nurturing beliefs. But that would seem actually to *prevent* these experiences from being sentimental rather than making them sentimental, as Tanner fears. For what clearly would make the feelings sentimental would be an

[5] For the distinction between emotion and emotional feeling, see Peter Goldie, *The Emotions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), ch. 3; and David Pugmire, *Rediscovering Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).

[6] For more on this, see Robert Solomon, "In Defense of Sentimentality", *Philosophy and Literature*, 14/2, Oct. 1990.

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attempt to conjure up the background of belief in order to underwrite the feelings, to gatecrash and seek admission to the experience as an insider. (There may be much self-deceived religiosity of this kind.) By contrast, the clear-headed secularist's cards remain puzzling, but at least they are on the table.

What is to be made, however, of the emotions of the secularist who does not try to kid himself about his commitments and who is not being shamelessly indulgent? This secularist will realise that the emotions to which he is sensible in sacred music cannot arise for him in a fully developed form, viz., as feelings arising out of and backed by what he takes the world to be like; for they are not consonant with the world or human life as he must conceive of them. If there is no God, there is no glory of God. So what this sort of music expresses is experienced by him vicariously. One could gesture at this by saying that he feels the feelings but not as his own: his feeling them is, of course, his own, but they, what they are, are not. But what exactly does this mean? How can one partake of a sentiment without possessing it (being possessed by it)? The secularist's (intellectually) "out of character" vulnerability to sacred music is a case of what might be called counterfactual empathy. The music leads him some way into the experience of a religious person. He reacts as he would if he were religious, which he isn't. The nature of this undertaking is not obvious, and it could be misunderstood. In particular, it is not the same as imagining himself in a fully religious frame of mind: just as he does not persuade himself that he is in this frame of mind, neither need he imagine himself being in it. He is not just imagining how a religious person would feel. That would be possible, but it is a different exercise. It is not like hearing an alien country's national anthem at the Olympics and imagining how the hearts of their moist-eyed team must be swelling. The secularist's feelings upon hearing the music are not imaginary, nor is he only imagining feeling them. One can imagine how certain things must feel that one cannot oneself feel, such as pride at the sound of Burkino Faso's anthem at the Olympics or the chagrin of Napoleon as he grasped his defeat at Waterloo (the circumstances of *that* pride, and of *that* chagrin will lend each of these feelings a distinctive complexion). Where emotions are contingent on being someone I cannot be, I am left to imagine what their experience is like, and perhaps to have sympathetic feelings of my own in response to what I imagine (I am happy for the Burkinabé, pity Napoleon in that moment).

The emotional deficit of the secularist, however, is different from that of a person contemplating the experience of others whom

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he cannot be: different and less.[7] Given the facts as they are, I couldn't be an Burkinabé, and it is even more deeply true that *I* couldn't be Napoleon. The secularist, however, is not so inaccessible as this to the beliefs he lacks. He cannot, perhaps, believe certain things that others do and did believe, but as a human being he could have believed them. He enjoys what might be called an primary/initial susceptibility to any outlook that people can take. Just what does he lack? The secularist and the religious person differ not in the kind of feeling a musical work may evoke; they differ over what it is about. The love of God, hope of redemption, serenity in the thought that whatever the misfortunes of life, they are not final: these emotions, and others like them, are not available to the secularist, owing to their content. It follows that the secular listener actually cannot experience the release that a believer could in the extraordinary openings of the *et resurexit* and *expectio* passages of the *B minor Mass,* for instance. The non-believer will be struck and stirred by the dazzling resurgence of hope proclaimed and celebrated in these openings, but their *reassurance* cannot be his. The triumph in those trumpets, however palpable, is not for him. I suggested earlier that only a secularist who forgot this and tried to suppose otherwise, would have descended into sentimentality. A secularist who forbears to do this is privy to some of the feeling here but not to the fully formed emotions, with their complement of content.

III

We might wonder all the more, then, why this person imbibes such music at all. What is he doing? The answer is that the nature of devotional emotions may be of more general interest than it might seem. Do such emotions actually stand apart from their workaday cousins (mundane fear, joy, consolation, etc.) to form a *sui generis* class of emotions on whose forbidden threshold the bemused secularist enviously lingers? (This would indeed be only one step short of gate-crashing sentimentality.) Not quite. A central candidate for

[7] "Cannot" represents a sliding scale here: I logically couldn't have been Napoleon; I could have been Burkinabé (by early emigration), but failing that, I cannot now have their perspective or identify with them as they identify with themselves. The sense in which the secularist cannot be a person of faith falls between these: there is almost no way, given what, in his time, he cannot help believing and disbelieving, in which he could take, say, a medieval perspective. It is not just that he *does* not have such a perspective.

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a distinctively religious emotion would be reverence. Now, reverence is indeed graver, and an attitude in which one is more given over, than its secular approximations in the shape of approval or esteem or respect. And yet, Kant was able to claim reverence as our principal moral emotion without invoking any grounding theological basis for this. Similarly for its bracing sibling, awe: it figures in our experience of the sublime, of which Kant purports to find an entirely secular account.[8] Whatever we make of the details of his accounts of these, Kant's starting point is hard to dispute, namely that these experiences are available to people whether or not they are theists. They do not invoke theological content or depend on it in any direct way. Similarly, other emotional attitudes, such as love, humility, sorrow, pity, joy, serenity, ecstasy, are not different in kind as between sacred and secular contexts. What, then, gives these familiar emotions the special gravity that we find in them when they arise in the context of religious observance or of sacred art? Whilst to travesty any of these emotions in their ordinary settings may strike anyone as offensive, even a secularist could find *profane* the sentimentalisation of them in a sacred setting. Perhaps that is part of the reason the thought of sentimentality in this setting seems so disconcerting to Tanner. (Similarly, it would seem, for instance, seriously inappropriate to perform the *expectio* at a memorial service for a particular individual, however respected and loved they had been. It is, so to speak, too big for any individual.) How can this be?

I want to suggest that devotional emotion is a case of something more general: the transfiguring of mundane emotion into what one might call emotion of the last instance, to the reception and expression of which religious imagery is especially well-suited, and not accidentally.

What is meant here by "emotion of the last instance"? Some emotions set relatively tight limits to the range of objects they can take. Filial love and the affection of friendship confine themselves to just certain individuals, comparatively few in number, given the contingencies of life. (This is in addition to the conceptual restrictions on the types of thing that can evoke emotion of a given kind, so that, for instance, bucolic paradise is not, without further ado, a possible theme for panic.) But there may be no restriction of principle on the way or degree to which things of the right kind may be admissible as themes of an emotion of a given type. And accord-

[8] For the experience of *ehrfurcht*, see *Critique of Practical Reason*, Mary Gregor (ed. & transl.) in *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanual Kant: Practical Philosophy,* pp. 206-207, 269.

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ingly, there may be no constraint on the variations, nuances and especially to the degrees of perfection to which that emotion might be susceptible. There could always be more about a thing, as it is seen better and as its fuller relations emerge, to variously find fascinating, to wonder at, deplore or fear. The potential cognitive reach of some emotions seems open-ended. Now, this is apt to be felt negatively, in the form of discontent with what the world as it is actually offers, which may answer only fitfully and imperfectly to possibilities which it nevertheless intimates. It is striking how our emotional sensibilities can make us aware of the limits of our environment or experience. (Hence the Emma Bovarys and the Fausts of this world.) Our emotional susceptibilities prepare us for more than ordinary life, with its mediocracies, constraints and ambivalences, is able to offer. They open us to possibilities of fear, rapture, and wonder that the clamour of daily realities can only suggest.

This points to two features of the emotional life: its dispositional character and the importance of imagination in it. Whether emotions should be regarded fundamentally as dispositions (as Wollheim seems to hold[9]), they certainly can reside in us as dispositions, i.e., as responses held wholly or partly in readiness. These can range from the active to the more reactive or passive. The capacity to be shocked or astonished, for instance, illustrates passive or dormant emotional dispositions. For if I am already awakened to and prepared for the things that might shock or astonish, they have precisely lost that power over me. If anticipated, they cannot catch me out in sufficiently fresh a form to startle. Anxiety, by contrast, is active in the sense of already anticipating the worst before it materialises, and even whether or not it does. Here, the emotion primes one for trouble. To the mind prone to anxiety, the world assumes a preliminary form (as a network of perils) independently of whether anything has happened: the glass is already half empty. Of course, this prefiguring of experience, for which at least certain emotions equips us, needn't be explicit: latent expectations may betray themselves only in the felt rightness of what turns out (if only in its intriguing promise) or in its seeming meagreness ("Is that all?").

What is at work here is clearly the imagination. Imagination may be needed to stir some of a person's emotional dispositions or to awaken others fully. Where there is nothing actual that can elicit an emotion, at all or in its fullness, imagination through the medium

[9] Richard Wollheim, *On the Emotions* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 9-12.

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of art, may suffice. Emotion is often aroused or affected by imagining something that is not perceived or even believed to exist. It might seem that a secularist's susceptibility to the expressiveness of religious art involves, in particular, what Ben Ze'ev terms "counterfactual imagination"[10]. In order to be effective, the emotional imagination requires that we perceive what we are thinking of "as real, namely, as resembling reality in some sense"[11] But in counterfactual imagination, I realise that what I imagine is actually false.[12] It thus,

> involves the falsity of its antecedent: it specifies a prior or current event that has not occurred. Since we are aware of this falsity, counterfactual imagination involves some kind of self-deception: we deceive ourselves into believing that reality is, or was, different from what we know it to be. However, while the counterfactual imagination involves a subjective, mental simulation of reality, this simulation is experienced as an act of observation, not as an act of construction, enabling us to attribute some sort of objectivity to the imaginary content.[13]

The element of self-deception alleged here probably would make emotional responses indebted to this kind of imagining sentimental. However, as an account of what needs to happen, this may be a step too far. As opposed to *dis*believing the antecedent, we may simply not believe it or believe it only possible, which frees us to contemplate things *as if* the antecedent were true, now without subterfuge. Moreover, this epistemically non-committal kind of imagining may serve the aroused emotion rather than cause it, i.e., inform without itself arousing. Thus, art inducts us directly into an affective state, which may *then* be appreciated as how it would feel if the world were so-and-so. "May" be thus appreciated because no very definite picture of the world need be conjured, nothing very much beyond the general thought of *something,* by way of an unspecific place-holder, that would be adequate to this feeling. Thus, triumphant crescendos in Beethoven's Fifth Symphony need not be envisaged as triumphs at or in anything specific. Indeed, it is important *not* to give them any programmatic content or reference, even an imagined one, for the triumph there is precisely of a kind that nothing that ever will happen could give. The reference is to a possibility only, and not one that mundane experience is apt to offer.

[10] Aaron Ben-Ze'ev, *The Subtlety of Emotions* (MIT Press, 2000), pp.193-198.
[11] Ibid., p. 193.
[12] Ibid., p. 195.
[13] Ibid., p. 198.

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The content of emotion of the last instance is in this sense schematic.

One constraint that is loosened by this kind of delocalised imagining is the constraint of self-concern that characterises so much ordinary emotion. All emotion is felt by someone and constitutes a point of view. Much emotion is personal in the further sense that it concerns things as they impinge on oneself and one's particular cares; and these are obviously going to be things very localised and taken in their relation to the self. Thus, a person usually exalts in something that involves him (directly or indirectly); fear is usually of something that specifically threatens the person feeling it (or those with whom he identifies); love focuses on particular persons (or categories of person) to whom one has special sorts of tie; respect often acknowledges qualities that seem to diminish my own. It is possible, however, for these emotions to be disentangled from one's personal world and made to settle on wider aspects of the world independently of their bearing, if any, on me, and then in suitably magnified forms. To be sure, not all emotions can be thus extracted from their initial personal settings and references: jealousy, or resentment, or hate pick out individuals and have specific histories. But others can be, and if the world doesn't cooperate by offering aspects of a suitable kind—if it is everywhere nasty or anticlimactic—such aspects or the general idea of them, can at least be conjured in imagination, if not in a belief system that invokes a (supernatural) world that does so oblige. This capacity to find themes for emotion that are not confined, even obliquely, to the cares of the self might seem denied, and at one of its most promising points, by Kant's account of the experience of the sublime, to which I adverted earlier. Thus, while it is true that we feel elevated by the sight of tracts of nature that exceed what can be comprehended by sense, it turns out that however vast these seem, they are actually finite, and their real function is to dramatise true infinity, which can only exist in us as an idea.[14] However, even Kant's surprising contention that the greatness of the world in its sublimity

[14] "…if we call anything, not only great, but absolutely great in every point of view (great beyond all comparison), i.e. sublime, we soon see that it is not permissible to seek for an adequate standard of this outside itself, but merely in itself. It is a magnitude which is like itself alone. It follows hence that the sublime is not to be sought in the things of nature [after all], but only in our ideas … *The sublime is that, the mere ability to think which shows a facility of the mind surpassing every standard of sense.*" Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment* (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1972), J. H. Bernard transl., pp. 88-89.

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actually lies within still leaves it more than personal: "our" Idea of infinity is not mine or yours but *the* idea of it, the same in us all.

We can, then, find ourselves with more emotional room than the offerings of the daily world can cater for. This is part of what Plato's metaphors of cave and sun serve to express. The firelight of quotidian life is localised, dim and flickering; it hardly prevails against the impinging shadows. But beyond the confines of the cave's shadow world there awaits another illumination, one that is dazzling and complete. Plato is emphatic that these contrasts arise not only at an epistemological level, where reason (*nous)* can lead us beyond the fragmentation, confusion and myopia of perception but also within emotional life, where, in the *Symposium*, for example, the maturation of the love of the beautiful (*eros*) involves ascending the ladder upwards from the beguilement by bodies and individuals towards the "soul of beauty"[15]. We might use these metaphors to understand as Platonistic what I earlier termed emotion of the last instance. This is not the only sense in which Platonism has been spoken of in connection with emotion, so I will enlarge for a moment on what I intend by it. Peter Kivy, borrowing from Julius Moravcsik, alludes to "Platonic attitudes", which include certain emotions. Such emotions are those like pride that cannot occur as mere states of feeling, as joy can, but must have objects, and, crucially, "there are no standard bodily manifestations of them."[16] By and large, Kivy thinks, music cannot express these. Kivy holds that music does express emotions in their general forms (e.g., anger as distinct from anger at your lateness yesterday) but not those general emotions that just are attitudes towards certain objects and lack distinctive bodily manifestation. This referential feat eludes music, at least "pure" instrumental music, because they lack bodily expression of which music might be mimetic.[17] Even on these assumptions, this problem would presumably fade if considerations of text or context were admitted as belonging to music, leaving national anthems and marching music, for instance, capable of pridefulness.[18] I will not pursue that question here, nor the suspicion that Kivy substantially underestimates the physical print of pride (in gait, and mien, for instance) and the affective profile in feeling that it can have (which may also apply to many other Platonic attitudes).

[15] Plato, *Symposium* 211c-e.

[16] Peter Kivy, *Music Alone: Philosophical Reflections on the Purely Musical Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 177.

[17] Ibid., 176-177.

[18] See Aaron Ridley, *The Philosophy of Music* (Edinburgh University Press, 2004) for an extended treatment of these issues.

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Is it even clear that mimesis of motion exhausts music's power to evoke suggestive imagery?[19] However it is done, and contextual guidance does not always seem necessary, musical figures do seem able to reflect the rather generalized shape that the themes of many emotions can have. (Wistfulness and certainly vainglory, which can be as overtly opaque as you like, do seem well within the reach of music.) And that feature of many emotions is what I intend by the Platonism of emotion. It is the capacity of some emotions which take objects to attach to unindividuated forms of the property that is their proprietary kind of object. Or, again, to attach to this property in cases where there are few if any other properties co-present that might distract from or compromise it. If one was to glorify or exalt something, for instance, a victorious Roman general passing beneath the arch in triumph might do nicely. But he would still have those vices the slave whispers in his ear, and anyway he is mortal. So the spectacle, if that is the right word, of the Demiurge would do yet better. (The glory in the uplifting main theme of the overture of *Rienzi*, well suited to the former, would underserve the latter. Justice there would require something like the finale of Bruckner's Seventh.) When the experience of it is thus untrammelled, the property can emerge at its most exquisite. The emotion is then felt fully. This is what Plato imagines *eros* as seeking: the experience of beauty itself, unrelativised and undiminished by entanglement with anything else, "the same on every hand".

When Platonistic, then, emotions point us towards the possibility of ever greater completeness and ever finer resolution in the experience of them, something that adds allurement to the merest stirrings of them. Imagination can attach some emotions to thoughts of ever greater kinds of perfection. In the case of awe and the sublime, it is allegedly the transcendental imagination in the shape of reason that achieves this (i.e., generates the Idea of infinity) for us. But amplification of this kind is not reserved to this case. We are sensible and responsive to not just success or even triumph but also to apotheosis; not just special moments but epiphanies; love that does not fail; dread not of bankruptcy but of the Abyss. The figure of Faust, in Goethe's version, is instructive in this connection. Faust embodies this urge to get past the limits of mundane

[19] It has not seemed clear to many. For an account of musical expression that accords prominence to mimesis of the human voice, see, e.g., Aaron Ridley, *Music. Value and the Passions* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), esp. chs 4 & 5. For an account that highlights mimesis of the inward dimension of felt experience, see, e.g., Malcolm Budd, *Values of Art*.

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emotion and indeed the mundane world itself. In his impatience Faust turns from all he has been able to find in life hitherto and seeks more from another realm, the supernatural, as he summons The Earth Spirit:

> I feel it, you swirl around me, spirit I crave.
> Reveal yourself
> Ha! How it tears at my heart!
> To new feelings
> All my senses stir themselves
>
> -Goethe, *Faust* I, 475-479

The final passage of The Rainbow moves in the opposite direction, not in departure from what is but to its transfiguration,[20]

> She saw the hard, cutting edges of the new houses, which seemed to spread over the hillside in their insentient triumph, a triumph of horrible, amorphous angles and straight lines, the expression of corruption triumphant and unopposed, corruption so pure that it is hard and brittle: she saw the dun atmosphere over the blackened hills opposite, the dark blotches of houses, slate roofed and amorphous, the old church-tower standing up in hideous obsolescence above raw new houses on the crest of the hill, the amorphous, brittle, hard edged new houses advancing…a dry brittle terrible corruption spreading over the face of the land, and she was sick with a nausea so deep that she perished as she sat. And then, in the blowing clouds, she saw a band of faint iridescence colouring in faint colours a portion of the hill. And forgetting, startled, she looked for the hovering colour and saw a rainbow forming itself. In one place it gleamed fiercely, and, her heart anguished with hope, she saw the shadow of iris where the bow should be. Steadily the colour gathered, mysteriously, from nowhere, it took presence upon itself, there was a faint vast rainbow. The arc bended and strengthened itself till it arched indomitable, making great architecture of light and colour and the space of heaven, its pedestals luminous in the corruption of new houses on the low hill, its arch the top of heaven.
>
> And the rainbow stood on the earth. She knew that the sordid people who crept hard-scaled and separate on the face of the world's corruption were living still, that the rainbow was arched in their blood and would quiver to life in their spirit, that they would cast off their horny covering of disintegration, that new,

[20] D.H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow* (Penguin, 1949), pp. 495-496.

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> clean, naked bodies would issue into a new germination, to a new growth, rising to the light and the wind and the clean rain of heaven. She saw in the rainbow the earth's new architecture, the old, brittle corruption of houses and factories swept away, the world built up in a living fabric of Truth, fitting to the over-arching heaven.[21]

F. R. Leavis derided this passage as an ad hoc device for bringing the novel to an end, leaving mysterious the fact that Lawrence drew on it for the very name of the novel.[23] Our concern here is with the impulse to which it bears witness and to its language. The scriptural cast to the language ("And the rainbow stood on the earth") is no accident. It seeks momentousness and a finality of perspective. Note that the rainbow is in place of some actual outcome (however much something like the resurrection of the body is hinted at); it is not a political outcome in the shape of a New Jerusalem of public housing, bright new shops, street lighting, pubs, and a decent health centre, but a feeling-laden symbol. The symbol embodies the Platonistic projection of emotions, here hopeful imaginings, that find no reference amidst the meanness of everyday life left to its own, and that could not be framed in any concrete policy (however much it might obliquely animate certain policies). They are emotions of the last instance, emotions whose objects are consummate realisations of their kind. And it also exemplifies the sense in which the content of emotion of the last instance is schematic. The exaltation is not in any specific programme for a new life but in what might animate such a life. (There is also a proto-musical quality to the repeated, refrain-like return of certain images in the passage.)

What this passage brings out, however, in contrast to the passage from Faust, is that much as Platonistic emotion may strain for religious imagery, it *can* find expression outside of religious art and find occasion within a secular belief system. Emotional attitudes of a Platonistic character are also what religious art serves to express, in less strained ways, in that they are directed at limit cases of what the sorts of emotions invoked are about. In that setting, themes of hope, joy, serenity, love, pity, fear and wrath are much more than

[21] Note that if the Platonistic direction of an emotion is diverted, so that what the person is imagining ceases to reach outwards from ordinary life and become schematic but is instead allowed to condense into a concrete fantasy of some achievable, even foreseeable apotheosis, where hopes and dreams of the greater are pinned on the lesser, it can become morbid or tragic, in a way exemplified, again, by Emma Bovary.

[23]. F. R. Leavis, *D.H. Lawrence: Novelist*, (Penguin Books, 1955), pp. 148-149.

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just localised and personal:

> Be thou exalted, O Lord, above the heavens: let thy glory be above all the earth.
> (*Psalm* 58,11)

And where the vantage-point is indeed personal (e.g., petitionary), what it invokes is not. Thus,

> Behold, thou has made my days as
> An handbreadth; and mine age is as
> Nothing before thee: verily every man
> At his best state is altogether vanity…
> And now, Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in thee.
> (*Psalm* 39, 5,7)

My suggestion is that religion, whatever else it does, provides a strikingly apt vocabulary for the expression of emotion of the last instance. But it is also striking that the qualities of religious emotion, of reverence, awe, exaltation, solemn joy, for instance, *can* also be rendered in art that does not draw on religious imagery. In Bach's organ works, form as such is displayed as a poignant and reverential presence. Solemn joy can be felt in a pure keyboard work such as the *Goldberg variations*. A diffuse, unconditional momentousness pervades Bruckner's symphonic works, which also involve dramas of primordial stirrings, vast emergences and denouements, loving reflections, cosmic rollockings, impossible serenities, and conclusive silences. Music that employs explicit religious imagery is a special way, but still only one way, of doing justice to the Platonism of emotion. Religious emotion is to be subsumed under that, as are both the devotional and the secular works of composers such as Bach and Bruckner.

It follows that religious art, when it is not mistaken by a secularist for an act of religious observance, offers an un-self-deluded expression of the Platonism of emotion. This secularist is not furtively trespassing on religion. It is the secularist who approaches great religious music with the most minimal cognitive claims, and it is he who is least likely to be guilty of sentimentality.[24]

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[24] I have benefited at many points in this essay from conversations with Aaron Ridley and Alex Neill.

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