

Goodman on Metaphorical Exemplification and Musical Expressiveness

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1. Introduction

In *Languages of Art*, Nelson Goodman proposed that the concept of expression be analysed in terms of the concept of exemplification and, in particular, in terms of the concept of metaphorical exemplification. In the years following the publication of this ground-breaking work, Goodman's proposal attracted a good deal of discussion with some philosophers favouring his proposal while others were sceptical. In the end, the debate petered out, as is often the case with philosophical debates, without any resolution being reached. This essay revisits what Goodman has to say about expression. In my view, no one, perhaps not even Goodman, had a clear understanding of his theory of how artworks are expressive, and a goal of this essay is to clarify Goodman's position. The focus here is on what it means to say that a work of music can metaphorically exemplify an emotion or be expressive of an emotion. This essay proposes that the best way to interpret what Goodman has to say about expression is to see him as proposing a variation on the familiar, and plausible, resemblance theory of expressiveness. A second goal is to show that Goodman's account of expression is not an advance on more standard versions of the resemblance theory.

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Before turning to Goodman's treatment of expressiveness, one preliminary point is necessary. As we shall soon see, the concept of exemplification is crucial to Goodman's analysis of expressiveness. Goodman frequently speaks of symbols exemplifying labels rather than of the exemplification of properties. He speaks in this manner because of his commitment to nominalism, that is, the belief that only individuals exist. According to the nominalist, properties do not exist over and above individuals. In the section devoted to expression in *Languages of Art*, however, Goodman often falls back into talk of the exemplification of properties. He does so for ease of exposition, and I will usually follow him in talking of the exemplification of properties. For present purposes, nothing depends on speaking of the exemplification of properties rather than the exemplification of labels.

2. A theory of expressiveness

The first point to make is that Goodman does not have a theory about how artworks express emotion. He has, rather, a theory about how a work of art can be expressive of emotion. The distinction between music that is expressive of emotion and music that expresses emotion is familiar from the work of Peter Kivy and Stephen Davies. The concept of expression is understood in various ways, but Kivy and Davies both hold that to say that a work of music expresses emotion is to say that it manifests an emotion that a composer has or has had. In contrast, to say that a work of music is expressive of emotion is to say that it resembles behaviour that expresses emotion. A work of music may be expressive of emotion without expressing emotion.

Coincidentally, both Kivy and Davies illustrated what it is for something to be expressive of emotion by reference to a dog's face. Kivy writes that «when we recognize sadness in the Saint Bernard's face» we are not «recognizing *that* the Saint Bernard is sad; for the Saint Bernard's face...does not express the Saint Bernard's sadness» (Kivy 1989: 50). The dog's face only resembles the face of a sad person. Similarly, Davies has recalled that he realized that basset-hounds «are sad-looking, but no one thinks that they feel as they look» (2003: 2).

That is, their faces resemble a human's frowning face, but the faces of basset-hounds do not manifest their emotional states. They are not expressing sadness. A dog's face may be expressive of sadness even though it is an unusually cheerful animal. Similarly, music may be expressive of sadness without expressing the sadness of a composer.

In concentrating on how music can be expressive of emotion, rather than on how music expresses emotion, Davies and Kivy followed in the footsteps of O.K. Bouwsma (1954) and John Hospers (1954-55), both critics of the view that works of art express emotion. In an oft-quoted *mot*, Bouwsma states that «the sadness is to the music rather like the redness to the apple, than it is like the burp to the cider» (1954: 98). That is, sadness is a property of the music and does not manifest some other property, namely some composer's state of mind. The debate over whether works of art express, or are expressive of emotion, was probably the central debate in aesthetics in the 1950s and '60s, and Goodman's position must be understood against the background of this debate. Although he speaks of expression, he aimed, like his contemporaries, to give an account of how works of art can be expressive of emotion.

Like Davies and Kivy, Goodman follows in the footsteps of Bouwsma and Hospers when he writes that, «the term "expression" belongs to the symbol itself – regardless of the cause or effect or intent or subject matter.» Goodman goes on to say

That the actor was despondent, the artist high, the spectator gloomy or nostalgic or euphoric, the subject inanimate, does not determine whether the face or the picture is sad or not. The cheering face of the hypocrite expresses solicitude; and the stolid painter's picture of boulders may express agitation. The properties a symbol expresses are its own property (1976: 85-6).

These passages make clear that, though Goodman speaks of expression, he is concerned with how works of art can be expressive of emotion. Goodman does not deny that a work of art may express an artist's emotions. He explicitly allows that a work may do so (1976: 85). However, he has a theory of expressiveness, not expression.

Goodman also makes clear that to describe works of art using emotion-predicates is not to say that they arouse emotion. A work co-written with Catherin Elgin contains this passage:

Although «evocation» is sometimes used almost interchangeably with «allusion» or «expression», it should be distinguished from them; for while some works allude to or express the feelings they evoke, not all do. A building from an earlier era does not always express the nostalgia it evokes (Goodman and Elgin 1988: 43).

This passage distinguishes the concept of the arousal of emotion from the concept of the expression of emotion. Or, more precisely, it states that to say that a work of art arouses emotion is not to say that it is expressive of emotion. He does not deny that works of art can arouse emotion, but Goodman does not aim to give an account of how this might be. For the sake of convenience, I will say that he is analysing the concept of expressiveness, though he speaks, misleadingly, of analysing the concept of expression.

3. Expressiveness and metaphorical exemplification

Now that we know that Goodman has an account of expressiveness, not an account of expression, we can look in detail at his position. Goodman sums up his analysis of expressiveness in these terms: a symbol (here we are concerned with works of art) *a* expresses property *b* if and only if «(1) *a* possesses or is denoted by *b*; (2) this possession or denotation is metaphorical; and (3) *a* refers to *b*» (1976: 95). In this context, to say that *a* possesses *b* is to say that *a* exemplifies property *b*.

In order to understand Goodman's account of expressiveness, a little must be said about exemplification. Exemplification is reference by means of a sample. This is a commonplace and well-understood sort of reference. Consider, for example, a teal paint chip. The paint chip refers to the property of tealness by being teal. For present purposes we do not need to say much about the concept of reference. Suffice it to say that when a symbol refers, it picks out something. In this

case, an exemplar picks out the property of tealness. So far, nothing here is controversial. The crucial and controversial part of Goodman's analysis of expressiveness is the suggestion that some symbols can metaphorically exemplify properties.

Goodman needs to introduce the concept of metaphorical exemplification into his analysis of expressiveness since he needs to be able to explain how some works of art can be expressive of properties that they cannot literally possess. A paint chip can literally exemplify tealness, because the paint chip can literally (that is, actually) be teal. In contrast, a painting or a work of music cannot literally be sad. Consequently, paintings and works of art cannot literally exemplify sadness. And yet, uncontroversially, such works of art can be expressive of sadness. In order to be able to analyse the concept of expressiveness in terms of the concept of exemplification, Goodman introduces the concept of metaphorical exemplification. He writes that what «is expressed is metaphorically exemplified. What expresses sadness is metaphorically sad» (1976: 85). The concept of metaphorical expression is in need of careful analysis.

Some writers have believed that to say that an artwork metaphorically exemplifies property *p* is simply to say that the work is metaphorically described as *p*. On this view, for example, to say of a musical performance that it is sad makes it metaphorically sad. That is, a musical performance is metaphorically sad because a metaphor is used to describe the performance. This seems to have been the view of Francis Sparshott, who wrote that the «decision to apply to works of art language that is literally applicable only to persons is arbitrary, in that no reason can be given for it other than its felt aptness» (1974: 187). Some passages in *Languages of Art* suggest that this is the correct account of the concept of metaphorical exemplification. Goodman writes, for example, that a «picture is metaphorically sad if some label – verbal or not – that is coextensive with (*i.e.*, has the same literal denotation as) “sad” metaphorically denotes the picture. The picture metaphorically exemplifies “sad” if “sad” is referred to by and metaphorically denotes the picture» (1976: 85). This passage is difficult to interpret, but it can be read as saying that attributing sadness to a picture by means of a metaphor makes it metaphorically sad.

This is not, however, the correct account of metaphorical exemplification. Goodman seems to explicitly rule out this analysis of the concept of metaphorical exemplification when he writes that

A symbol must have every property it expresses; what counts is not whether anyone calls the picture sad but whether the picture is sad, whether the label «sad» does in fact apply. «Sad» may apply to a picture even though no one ever happens to use the term in describing the picture; and calling a picture sad by no means makes it so. This is not to say that whether a picture is sad is independent of the use of «sad» but that given, by practice or precept, the use of «sad», applicability to the picture is not arbitrary (1976: 88).

This passage seems to be decisive. A musical performance, for example, is not sad because someone calls it sad. It is one thing to metaphorically attribute a property to a work of art and another for a work of art to metaphorically exemplify the property.

We are still owed an account of what metaphorical exemplification is and giving this account presents a challenge. Stephen Davies observed that «it is not obvious what it is for exemplification, as opposed to attribution, to be metaphoric» (1994: 146). If metaphorical exemplification is not simply the product of using a metaphor to describe some symbol, and if it is not arbitrary, there must be some basis for saying that a symbol metaphorically exemplifies some property.

In order to make some progress in understanding metaphorical exemplification, we need to reflect a little on how Goodman thinks about metaphor. Many metaphors, he tells us, «involve transfer of a schema between disjoint realms» (Goodman 1976: 81). Another way to put this point is to say that a label, usually applied to one type of object, is applied to another sort of object. Employing property-talk, we can say that a property that is usually attributed to one sort of object is attributed to another sort of object. Sometimes, this attribution of a property from one realm to an object in another realm can result in a statement that is, according to Goodman, metaphorically true. For example, «The lake is a sapphire» is metaphorically true. Of course, to say of a lake that it is a sapphire is not precisely to attribute a property to the lake. I suggest that the sentence should be taken as a way of

saying «The lake is sapphiric.» The property of being sapphiric, which is normally applied to sapphires, is applied here to the realm of lakes, to which the property of being sapphiric is not normally applied.

Goodman makes clear that not every application of a property from one realm to an object in another realm will result in a metaphorically true sentence. He gives «Muddy Pond is a sapphire» as an example of a sentence that is metaphorically (and literally) false (1979: 126). The metaphorical falsehood of «Muddy Pond is a sapphire» is instructive. It is false because Muddy Pond, unlike some alpine lake, has no salient properties in common with a sapphire. (Of course, giving an account of what makes a property salient will be difficult.) Muddy Pond is not blue, translucent, iridescent, coruscating and so on. In contrast, an alpine lake can have all of these properties. A good metaphor draws attention to the fact that objects from two distinct realms have certain properties in common.

We are now in a position to say when a sentence is metaphorically true. The metaphor is metaphorically true when the two objects have salient properties in common. «The alpine lake is a sapphire» is true because the lake has a variety of salient properties in common with a sapphire. «Muddy Pond is a sapphire» is false because the pond and a sapphire have no salient features in common. In particular, Muddy Pond is not sapphiric.

An analysis of the concept of metaphorical truth still leaves the concept of metaphorical exemplification obscure. Understanding metaphorical truth is a step towards understanding metaphorical exemplification, but a metaphorically true statement does not metaphorically exemplify anything. Metaphorically true statements and works that are metaphorical exemplars are actually quite different and this difference is the source of some of the difficulty in understanding what Goodman has to say about metaphorical exemplification. Metaphorical truths and metaphorical exemplification are related concepts. The statement «The alpine lake is a sapphire» is not metaphorically sapphiric. However, when «The alpine lake is a sapphire» is true, then the lake metaphorically exemplifies the property of being sapphiric. When a metaphorical statement is true, then properties that are normally attributed to something (a sapphire, for example) are attributed to another thing (in this case, a lake) and the other thing metaphorically

possesses and metaphorically exemplifies those properties. Similarly, when the sentence «The work of music is sad» is true, then the work of music exemplifies the property of being sad. A metaphorical statement that attributes properties to a work of music will be true, and the work to which the sentence attributes properties not literally possessed by works of music will metaphorically exemplify those properties, when the work of music and objects in the realm have some salient features in common.

One of Goodman's examples can be used to illustrate how a picture can metaphorically exemplify a property. Goodman considers a picture that depicts Winston Churchill as a bulldog. We may then say of the picture that it is metaphorically bulldogged. A property associated with bulldogs, namely bulldoggedness, is attributed or, as Goodman says, transferred to the picture of Churchill and we say that Churchill is bulldogged. It is metaphorically true that Churchill is a bulldog because, as a matter of fact, Churchill has a number of properties in common with those conventionally attributed to bulldogs. He looks a little like a bulldog, he is bulldogged, loyal and so on. Consequently, the picture is metaphorically bulldogged. In contrast, a picture might depict Boris Johnson as a bulldog, but it is metaphorically false that Johnson is a bulldog since he is not bulldogged, loyal or possessed of any of the properties associated with bulldogs. The picture will not metaphorically exemplify bulldoggedness. On the other hand, that Johnson is a weasel is metaphorically true.

These reflections suggest an answer to the question about what it is for a symbol to metaphorically exemplify a property. A symbol can metaphorically exemplify some property when a metaphorically true sentence attributes that property to the symbol. For example, the drawing of Churchill as a bulldog metaphorically exemplifies the property of bulldoggedness if and only if it is true that Churchill is bulldogged. Similarly, a composition *C* metaphorically exemplifies the property of sadness if and only if the sentence «Composition *C* is sad» is metaphorically true. That this is the correct interpretation of Goodman's concept of metaphorical exemplification is confirmed by the passage in which he writes that a work is metaphorically sad when it «comes under a transferred application of some label coextensive with “sad”» (1976: 85). Presumably, the transferred application of

the label (or property) must result in a metaphorically true sentence. Not all attributions of sadness to musical compositions are true. For example, «*Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* is sad» is metaphorically false. To say that *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* is sad is akin to saying that Muddy Pond is sapphiric. These reflections confirm the earlier conclusion that the application of the label «sad» or the property of sadness to a work of art is not arbitrary.

4. Expressiveness and resemblance

Goodman's account of how works of music (and some other works of art) metaphorically exemplify emotions such as sadness is less informative and developed than it could be. In fact, we have very little to go on. One passage is, however, illuminating. In this passage, he writes that music «may exemplify rhythmic patterns, for example, and express peace or pomp or passion; and music may express properties of movement while dance may express properties of sound» (1976: 91). Presumably, though Goodman does not say so, music can exemplify tones of voice and patterns of movement of the voice under the influence of emotion.

In this passage, Goodman appears to present a version of the resemblance theory of musical expressiveness. Certain rhythmic patterns are associated with the expression of emotions such as peacefulness, pomp and passion. (Pomp is not exactly an emotion. Kivy refers to it as a «Platonic attitude» (Kivy 1990: 179) Pompousness is, however, associated with a certain sort of excessive pride and pride is an emotion.) Similarly, sadness is expressed by leaden movement and joy is expressed by sprightly movement. Music can also move in a leaden or a sprightly fashion. When a piece of music exemplifies behaviour expressive of an emotion, then it can be metaphorically true that the music exemplifies the emotion. That is, according to Goodman, given properties associated with certain forms of movement are transferred from the forms of movement to the music. For example, a piece of music may exemplify leaden movement and properties associated with leaden movement, among them sadness, are transferred to the music and the music comes, metaphorically, to exemplify sadness.

Sadness is associated with leaden movement because sad people move leadenly. The statement «The Dead March from Handel's *Saul* is sad» is (metaphorically) true, and the Dead March metaphorically exemplifies sadness, because the Dead March resembles the expression of sadness. In contrast, «*Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* is sad» is metaphorically false since it does not resemble behaviour expressive of sadness.

Goodman's talk of music expressing sadness by metaphorically exemplifying sadness amounts to saying that music is heard as sad because music has properties in common with behaviour expressive of emotion. Reduced to its essentials, Goodman's view of musical expressiveness is just a variation on the resemblance theory of musical expressiveness. According to the resemblance theory, music is expressive of a given emotion when it resembles (that is, has properties in common with) vocal or non-vocal behaviour that expresses that emotion.

The resemblance theory of musical expressiveness has its roots in antiquity, but it was revived in the twentieth century and Goodman was certainly familiar with it. A brief statement of the theory is found in Bouwsma, who held that sad music «has some of the characteristics of people who are sad. People who are sad move more slowly, and when they speak, they speak softly and low» (1954: 99). This account of musical expressiveness was developed in detail by several philosophers, notably Davies. In his view, our «experience of music is like our experience of the kinds of behaviour which, in human beings, gives rise to emotion characteristics in appearances» (1994: 239). He holds that the «expressiveness of music depends mainly on a resemblance we perceive between the dynamic character of music and human movement» (1994: 229). Kivy, in contrast, focused on resemblance between music and the sound of a voice under the influence of emotion. (At least he did at one time. He subsequently abandoned the resemblance theory.) In a famous example, he compares the falling musical phrase at the beginning of Monteverdi's *Lamento d'Arianna* to the expressiveness of a voice under the influence of grief (1989: 20).

Music resembles in many ways the human voice under the influence of emotion. They can have tempo, pitch, contours, dynamics, attack and a variety of other properties in common. A slow voice with small changes in pitch, for example, expresses sadness and music with similar properties is heard as expressive of sadness. The evidence for the

resemblance theory of musical expressiveness is not only anecdotal. Psychologists have accumulated experimental evidence that confirms the resemblance between music and the human voice and between music and the motions of the human body. Moreover, experimental evidence supports the claim that music is heard as expressive of emotions when it has properties in common with behaviour associated with the expression of emotions. For example, psychologists have found evidence that falling musical lines are experienced as expressive of sadness, just as Kivy had hypothesized in the case of the *Lamento d'Arianna* (Juslin and Laukka 2003).

Goodman would, presumably, give a similar account of expressiveness in other arts. Consider, for example, a performance of Mikhail Fokine's choreography for Saint-Saëns' *The Swan*. We say that «The swan is in pain.» We do so because the movements of the dancer resemble the movements of a suffering animal and, consequently, the dance is expressive of pain. Goodman would say that the performance of the dance metaphorically exemplifies pain and that «The swan is in pain» is metaphorically true. He would do so because of the resemblance between the dancer's movements and the movements of suffering bird. In other words, the dancer and a suffering animal have properties in common. It is not clear that talk about metaphorical exemplification and metaphorical truth adds anything to our understanding of why the performance is expressive of pain. Notice that a different account must be given of how works of literature are expressive of emotion. Works of literature typically do not resemble the emotions of which they are expressive.

5. Assessing Goodman's theory of expressiveness

Goodman's theory of musical expressiveness and standard versions of the resemblance theory differ in important respects. In particular, Goodman believes that to say, for example, that a piece of music is sad is to speak metaphorically. He goes on to introduce the concepts of metaphorical truth and metaphorical exemplification. On standard versions of the resemblance theory, to say that music is sad is to speak literally. The concepts of metaphorical truth and metaphorical

exemplification are not needed. One can wonder whether Goodman's talk of metaphorical truth and metaphorical exemplification add anything valuable to the resemblance theory. There is good reason to doubt that it does.

Goodman's theory begins with the claim that the sentence «The music is sad» is a metaphor. Goodman is not the only person who says that to speak of music using emotion predicates is to speak metaphorically. Roger Scruton (1997) and Nick Zangwill (2007) both hold that to describe music as sad is to speak metaphorically. (Neither of these philosophers believes, however, that music can metaphorically exemplify an emotion such as sadness. Zangwill, on the contrary, believes that music «has nothing to do with emotion» (2004: 29).) Philosophers are moved to adopt this position simply because music cannot literally be sad or in any other emotional state.

Many philosophers of music hold, however, that a sentence such as «The music is sad» is a literal statement. Davies (2011), for example, holds that words such as «sad» can be used literally to refer, not to felt emotions, but to appearances that are expressive of certain emotions. We speak, for example, of a person cutting a sad figure or having an angry face. In such cases, Davies believes, we refer to a person's physiognomy or comportment. That is, we are saying that a person's demeanour is expressive of, for example, sadness and not saying anything about his state of mind. Similarly, Davies believes, to say that music is sad or joyful, is to say, and to say literally, that it is heard as expressive of these emotions. A number of empirical studies (Gabrielsson 2002, Juslin 2005) have found that, at least in many cases, listeners describe music using emotion predicates to describe what psychologists call «perceived emotions.» Perceived emotions are the emotions of which a composition is expressive. Perceived emotions are contrasted with felt or aroused emotions.

Here I am inclined to side with Davies over Goodman. The only good reason to regard sentences such as «The music is sad» as metaphorical is the belief that music has nothing to do with emotion and Goodman believes that music can be expressive of emotion. Zangwill holds that music is not expressive of emotion, does not express emotion and does not arouse emotion. If he were right, sentences that describe music using emotion predicates could not be literal.

However, Zangwill's position is, in the face of the empirical evidence, heroically implausible. A lot of music is expressive of emotion and music seems to arouse emotion as well. Musicians express themselves in at least some music. When people describe music using emotion predicates, they are (literally) saying that music arouses, expresses or is expressive of emotion. Since talk of music's expressive properties is literal, not metaphorical, the motivation for Goodman's account of expressiveness is undermined.

Standard versions of the resemblance theory say that music can resemble behaviour expressive of emotions. When music does so, according to this version, it is heard as expressive of the emotion associated with the behaviour in question. On Goodman's account of musical expressiveness, music exemplifies the «rhythmic patterns» associated with an emotion. When rhythmic patterns are exemplified, emotions are expressed, that is, metaphorically exemplified. Goodman's introduction of talk of metaphorical exemplification seems to have no real advantage. None of Goodman's talk about metaphorical exemplification is useful. The key claim is that music has properties in common with expressive behaviour. When a piece of music has properties in common with expressive behaviour, it is possible to say that it exemplifies those properties, but that does not add much. Crucially, music does not metaphorically exemplify these properties. Music literally is, for example, leaden, sprightly, frenzied and so on. When music has these properties it is heard as expressive of sadness, joy, excitement and so on. I conclude that standard versions of the resemblance theory are preferable to Goodman's theory of musical expressiveness.

6. Conclusion

Goodman has not had a major impact on thinking about music's expressiveness. He was, however, a major philosopher, one of the most important to have reflected on art in recent times. Consequently, reflection on his theory of expressiveness is worthwhile. If the thesis of this paper is right, and Goodman has presented a version of the resemblance theory of musical expressiveness, the theory has received

the backing of a significant figure. However, Goodman's original contributions to thinking about musical expressiveness are not helpful and that they have not seen more uptake is not a surprise. In particular, the concept of metaphorical exemplification contributes little to understanding how music can be expressive of emotion.

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