"The Expression Theory Again"

In this paper I discuss a version of the Expression Theory of art. My aim is not to dwell upon the objections faced by this version of the theory, although the criticisms which it invites are both obvious and fatal. Rather, my concern is to explain the theory’s attractiveness. Or perhaps I should say that my aim is to explain away the prima facie attractiveness of the theory, for my approach is not a sympathetic one. The initial plausibility of the theory, rather than hinting at a novel but important truth lying at the theory’s heart, arises instead from a natural but mistaken characterisation of the relationship between artists’ feelings and the expressive properties or powers of the works of art they create.

Many views have gone under the name "Expression Theory". Three types of so-called Expression Theory are not relevant to my discussion. I am not here concerned with attempts to define the meaning of "art" in terms of the expression of emotions (see Tolstoy, [1898] 1962). Nor am I concerned with views the point of which is to insist that expressive properties, qualities, features or powers can be predicated truly of works of art (see Sircello, 1965 & 1972). Nor am I interested in views the point of which is to claim that there need be nothing odd nor anything aesthetically illegitimate in a person’s response emotionally to works of art (see Elliot, 1966-67). Views of the last two types do not deserve the title of "theory" since they testify to the facts which stand in need of explanation without attempting to provide that explanation. (The facts mentioned are these - that art is expressive of emotion in some way which typically gives rise to an emotional response. Not that aesthetic theory does not face obvious problems in accounting for the rationality of such responses - see Davies, 1983 A.)

The version of the Expression Theory with which I am concerned is one which explains art's expressiveness as arising from artists’ expressing their concurrent emotions or feelings in the production of art. The emotions read off from works of art are recognised and responded to as those of their creators; that is, they are recognised as emotions felt by artists and given expression through the act of creation. On this view, one can read off an artist’s feelings from his or her art just as one can read off a person’s sadness from his or her tears. The audience's emotional response to the expressiveness of an artwork is a response to that work as expressing emotions felt by its creator at the time of creation. That is, in its expressiveness an artwork reveals its creator’s feelings and is responded to as doing so. The emotions expressed in an artwork, rather than being consciously and coolly designed into the artwork by its artist at a time of calm concentration, are somehow poured or discharged into the artwork during its creation.11_ On this view artists express in their works emotions, feelings, moods or attitudes, rather than expressing ideas, suppositions or beliefs.12_ That is to say, in the theory here under consideration, the expression of emotion in art is thought not to be compared usefully to the expression of thought in words, although some theorists might talk loosely of art as a 'language' with which artists 'communicate' with their audiences.

It might be objected that the version of the Expression Theory which I have chosen to discuss is an unacceptably crude example of the theory. More sophisticated versions of the theory appreciate and attempt to avoid the power- ful difficulties faced by the theory I have characterised. To this objection I reply as follows: The version of the theory I discuss is its AUr._-form; other versions are sophistications upon this proto-theory in that they attempt to
preserve its spirit whilst modifying it in a way which attempts to meet the difficulties which threaten it. It is not unfair of me to concentrate on the Ur-theory because my concern does not lie with the objections which it faces and, so, does not lie with the success or otherwise of attempts to meet these objections. Rather, I am interested in the undoubted appeal of the proto- theory. My aim is to show that appeal to be spurious. Indirectly then, I hope also to show that the desire to preserve the spirit of the Ur-theory - the desire which motivates the quest for replies to the objections which the Ur-theory faces - is misguided.

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Very briefly, the obvious objections to the Expression Theory here under discussion amount to this: It is not common for most artists to work creatively under the duress of emotion. So, as a general account of the creative process, the Expression Theory is mistaken. And nor does it fare any better as an account of the process involved in the production of artworks which are expressive of emotion. Artists are no more likely to feel emotion in the creation of expressive works than in the creation of non-expressive works. Moreover, when they are emotionally moved and see themselves as pouring their emotions into their creations, artists may fail to create artworks which are expressive.

Beyond objections on empirical grounds such as those mentioned above, the main line of critique makes a conceptual point against the Expression Theory. It notes that the theory supposes that the expressiveness of a process is transmitted to the product which has its genesis in that process; the theory assumes that the expressiveness of an action will be apparent in traces left by that action. Such suppositions are neither true in general nor true in the particular case of an artist’s creating a work of art. The Expression Theory wrongly claims that the expressiveness perceived in artworks stands to their artists’ feelings as the expressiveness of those artists’ tears stands to their feelings of sadness. But it is not the case that artists’ feelings can be read off their artworks just as they might be read off their tears; it is not the case that the expressiveness of works of art is appropriately to be seen as a direct and visible sign of their artists’ feelings (see Bouwsma, 1950; Hospers, 1954-55; Khatchadourian, 1965; Tormey, 1971, Ch.4 and Appendix).

(I mention in passing a further objection which seems to me to be unwarranted. This objection notes that, as it stands, the Expression Theory does not explain why artists’ expressing their feelings in their art would be valued as the expressiveness of art is valued [see Todd, 1972, esp p.479]. This objection is unfair in attacking the theory for not considering a matter which lies, anyway, beyond its immediate remit. The theory purports to explain what it is for art to be expressive and there is no reason to expect that that explanation must also make obvious why it is that we attach value to the expressiveness of art as we do. And as a matter of fact, it is not difficult to see how the theory might be developed to meet the objection - perhaps the creation of art is especially suited to the expression of important and/or highly specific feelings which are not easily amenable to description or to other forms of communication.)

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As a prelude to considering the appeal of the Expression Theory it is necessary that I distinguish between different types of emotional expressiveness which I will call “primary”, “secondary” and “tertiary”. Subsequently I will argue that the appeal of the Expression Theory comes from its recognising that we respond to art as if art were like a primary expression of emotion, in conjunction with its failing to appreciate that art can be only a secondary or tertiary expression of artists’ feelings.

Some emotions have characteristic forms of expression which I shall call "primary". Sobbing, for example, is a primary expression of sadness and like emotional states. Primary expressions occur unintentionally and unreflectively. Indeed, these forms of expression may not be easy to mimic consciously and, where it is known that they are deliberately adopted, they are seen usually to be merely pretended and not to be expressive of genuine emotions. Because they are not consciously contrived or adopted, these are forms of expression into which one falls or to which one gives way. Sad people need not weep and need not always feel
like weeping when they are sad - but sometimes they must feel like weeping when they are sad, and if they do not then weep it is because they control the impulse to weep which goes with and is partly constitutive of sadness. The control and suppression of primary expressions of emotion may be intentional, although their occurrence or tendency to occur is not. Where one’s sadness is extreme a sob may be wrung from one by the force of one’s feelings and in spite of an intention not to show one’s feelings. So primary expressions are not expressive in virtue of their being intended as such. Rather, they are expressive in themselves of the emotions to which they stand as primary expressions.

Primary expressions of emotion might reasonably be characterised as "natural". But this would not be to deny that they are shaped by learning or conditioning. "Ouch" or "ow", uttered unthinkingly under circumstances in which the utterer had been caused sudden and unexpected pain, are primary expressions of that pain. But speakers of French under the same circumstances give primary expression to their pain by saying "ouf" and speakers of other languages use other vocables for the primary expression of sudden pain. Even the ways in which we smile or weep might be shaped subtly by cultural practices which differ from group to group.

Because they are not adopted intentionally and because they betray "inner" states, there are respects in which primary expressions of emotion are like symptoms (the spots of measles) or natural signs (the smoke which indicates the presence of fire). In pursuing this comparison one might come to doubt that Aexpressiveness_ is a notion which applies appropriately to what I have called "primary expressions". Spots signify or symptomise or betray the presence of measles, but they do not Aexpress_ measles. So is it wrong to regard tears as expressing sadness? Some proponents of sophisticated versions of the Expression Theory have argued that the answer to this question is "yes" because they wished to move away from the idea that art is expressive as tears are, and in doing so they demoted tears from their apparent status as expressions of feeling. These writers distinguished between the mere venting of emotion and the expressing of emotion and they dismissed what I have called "primary expressions" as mere ventings.

But to pursue the analogy with symptoms and natural signs as far as this conclusion seems to be absurd - as Wollheim recognises (1966-67, esp pp.231-3; see also Tormey, 1971, pp.98-102) only philosophers (and only a few of them) would feel uncomfortable in regarding tears as expressive of grief under the appropriate circumstances. The analogy might be broken by arguing that tears are constitutive of, and not merely concomitant with, sadness, whereas symptoms and natural signs are no more than concomitants (see Wollheim, 1964, esp pp.275-7; 1966-67, esp pp.233-8 & 241-4; Tormey, 1971, pp.29-32 & 47-50). (Of course the analogy must fail somewhere, otherwise it would become a statement of type-identity rather than of analogy.) Emotions are the sorts of things which are expressed, and diseases or fires are not. Diseases and fires can be Arepresented_ as can their symptoms and signs; Athoughts_ about diseases or fires can be Aexpressed_ as can thoughts about their symptoms and signs. But diseases and fires differ from emotions in not being directly expressible, and tears differ from symptoms or signs in being direct expressions (under appropriate circumstances) of that which they betray.

By the "secondary" expression of emotion I mean behaviour which issues from the emotions felt, but which could not be seen as expressive by someone lacking (independent) knowledge of the agent’s intentions and/or circumstances. Secondary expressions of emotion may be intentional, though they need not be. They are distinguished from primary expressions not (always) by virtue of their intentionality but, rather because they are forms of expression which are not constitutive of the emotions to which they give expression. It is because they are non-constitutive of the emotions to which they give expression that independent knowledge of the intentions and/or circumstances is required by those who appreciate those actions as expressive.
An example of a secondary expression of a person’s emotion would be that of a man who throws himself into the activity of designing and building a house at a time of grieving for a dead wife and in response to that grief. Knowing his intentions and circumstances one might describe the act of building the house as an expression of his grief - as his coming to terms with his grief, or his burying or turning his back on his grief, or his dissipating the force of his grief in action, or his creating a private memento of his loss, or his giving his grief time to subside, and so on. These are, admittedly, attenuated uses of the notion of expression, but it is not inappropriate to talk of such activities as expressing the man’s grief. But notice that, whilst the actions and the house itself are expressions of grief to those who understand their motivation, we would not usually say that the actions or the house are expressive in themselves of grief. We would say that grief is expressed through rather than in them. This locution acknowledges the fact that their expressiveness depends upon their being seen as resulting from certain intentions and/or circumstances.

(Of course, although the secondary expression of emotion is free expression in being largely unconstrained by conventions and rules, it is not so free that just any behaviour might become a secondary expression of grief, say, merely as a result of the agent’s intending that it be such. If the man mentioned above hit the high spots with a blonde on his knee intending (as we happen to know) that this be a secondary expression of his grief, we would not judge his actions to be such an expression unless there were something special about the circumstances. We would deny that his actions are at all expressive of grief and would dismiss his "intention" as no more than a pious hope. Indeed, we might be inclined to doubt that he feels any grief.)

Tertiary expressions of emotion differ from secondary expressions in that, through their use of conventions and rituals, they permit the audience to become aware of the agent’s intentions through its experience of the work, rather than via independent sources. That is, the conventional nature of the actions or of their product is such as to make the intentions of the agent clear as regards the expressiveness of his or her actions or their products. Of course it is a condition for tertiary expressiveness that the use of those conventions be both intentional and sincere. So, if the man mentioned above built, instead of a house, a mausoleum dedicated to the memory of his dead wife, that mausoleum would be a tertiary expression of his grief provided that he was sincere about his feelings in expressing them this way. The commissioning of mausoleums is a conventional expression of grief. And note that, in virtue of the conventional nature of this form of expression, the man mentioned need not design and build the mausoleum for himself as a condition of its being a tertiary expression of his grief. He may commission the design and its execution, taking interest neither in the progress of the design nor in its execution, without this undermining the status of the mausoleum as an expression of his grief. He cannot in the same way commission others to cry his tears (as a primary expression of his grief) for him. (Though he might employ professional mourners, their tears are a tertiary and not a primary expression of his grief.) Nor, under most circumstances, can he commission others to give secondary expression to his emotions. Indifference is evidence of insincerity where a claim to secondary expression is concerned, but need not be in the case of tertiary expressions. The expressiveness is carried forward by the conventions in the case of tertiary expressions in a way which obviously is not possible for secondary expressions.

Of course, once the conventions are established, they can be misused to present the appearance of an expression of grief where none is felt. Thus, a cynic who has loathed his wife and rejoices in her death might, as an expensive and private joke, commission a grand mausoleum dedicated to her memory. Because the established conventions may be used insincerely as well as sincerely, they can be employed to lie, to stretch the truth, for ironic effect, and so on.

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How does the version of the Expression Theory which is under discussion categorise the expressiveness of art? In maintaining that the expressiveness of art stands to the artists’ feelings as their tears stand to their felt-sadness, the Expression Theory analyses the expressiveness of art as primary. And the appeal of such a view is obvious. Emotions are expressed in primary expressions, whereas (usually) they are expressed only through secondary or tertiary expressions, and our experience of the expressiveness of art locates the feeling in it. Moreover, the expressiveness of art moves its audience in a way in which primary, but not secondary or tertiary, expressions of emotions do. Secondary and tertiary expressions of emotion are indirect, mediated, often formalised types of expression and, as such, they distance the audience from the emotions which are expressed through them. Accordingly, secondary and tertiary expressions of emotions seem not to call for an emotional response from others. By contrast, primary expressions of emotion confront others directly with the force of the person’s feeling and emotional indifference in the face of primary expressions of emotion is difficult to maintain and, anyway, not appropriate usually. Such indifference might rightly be seen as callous, for example. Similarly, the expressiveness of works of art seems to present emotions directly to their audiences and that expressiveness is highly evocative of emotional responses from members of the audiences. Emotional indifference to art’s expressiveness might properly be seen as evidence of a lack of appreciation and understanding.

Nevertheless, art seems clearly not to be a primary expression of emotion. The expressiveness of works of art usually is consciously contrived by their artists which suggests that, as expressions of artists’ feelings, artworks are secondary or tertiary. But even in those (comparatively rare) cases in which the artist creates an expressive artwork in an unreflective creative frenzy brought on by his or her emotional feelings, still there are obvious grounds for hesitating to consider the work as a primary expression of his or her feelings. Primary expressions are partly constitutive of, and not merely concomitant with, the emotions they express (see Wollheim, 1964, esp pp.275-7; 1966-67, esp pp.233-8 & 241-4; Tormey, 1971, esp pp.29-32 & 47-50). Which is why one must teach children the meaning of emotion-words in connection with the occurrence (or depiction or description) of their primary expressions. But the expressiveness of works of art seems to be no more than concomitant with the artist’s feeling, even where the emotion expressed in the artwork is the same emotion as that felt by the artist. Unlike expressiveness which is primary, the expressiveness of the artwork would not be destroyed were we to learn that the artist had felt nothing during the work’s creation, or that the artist had deliberately contrived the work’s expressiveness. That the expressiveness of art lacks the intimate link with emotion felt by a person which characterises primary expression is evident in the fact that one could not teach the meaning of emotion-terms to a child if one’s examples all were examples of art in which emotions are expressed (as opposed to examples of art in which persons are represented or described as giving expression to their feelings).

A further respect in which the expressiveness of art differs importantly from the primary expression of emotion deserves comment. As the Expression Theory rightly observes, both the expressiveness of art and the primary expression of emotion are highly evocative of emotional responses. But the Expression Theory fails to note a crucial difference in the emotions evoked. The emotional response called forth by a primary expression of emotion (or by a representation of such) rarely mirrors the expressed emotion - rather, the response is suited to the character of the emotion expressed. Thus, sadness invites a compassionate response, wretchedness invites pity, anger invites fear, and so on. (This remains essentially true where it is not possible for the response to be acted upon, nor for the response to affect the emotional context. So, films of the suffering of victims of the concentration camps call forth compassionate and pitying responses although the responders know perfectly well that the people filmed are now long past suffering anything.) Whereas the emotions expressed in art (as opposed to the emotions depicted or described in art) often call forth mirroring responses...
Sad music tends to evoke sadness; happy music tends to make people feel happy. This suggests clearly, I think, that we do not respond emotionally to art as a primary expression of artists' feelings. No doubt it is objections such as these which have led to revisions of the proto-theory which I have been discussing. Two ways of defending the theory recommend themselves. Each defence tries to preserve the aim of explaining the expressiveness of art in terms of the connection between that expressiveness and artists' feelings. And both defences hope to avoid the problems mentioned above by denying that this connection is like that which holds between an emotion and its primary expression. According to the one view art is a secondary or tertiary expression of the artist's feeling and the feeling which is experienced by the audience as in the artwork is the one felt by the artist. According to the other view art is a secondary or tertiary expression of the artist's feeling and the feeling which is experienced by the members of the audience as in the work of art is a projection of their own emotional response to the work of art as an expression of the artist's feeling.

In either case the departure from the Ur-theory is likely to be accompanied by "reminders" that emotions cannot be art (except metaphorically), and that "real" expression (such as is found in art) is to be contrasted with the mere venting of emotion.

The first of these views clearly faces difficulties. Since the audience does not usually require knowledge, beyond that which is provided by the artwork, of the artist's intentions before being able to appreciate the work's expressiveness, artworks presumably are tertiary rather than secondary expressions of their artists' feelings. But in cases where the work undeniably is a tertiary expression of the artist's feelings, this fact seems to be irrelevant to an aesthetic appreciation of the work. Faure wrote his Requiem on his father's death and (given that his sincerity is not in doubt) it is a tertiary expression of his grief. But it is coincidental that it is his feelings which are given tertiary expression in the writing of the Requiem. The feelings given tertiary expression might as well have been those of another person who had commissioned Faure to write a requiem. And, because we would regard the feelings of the person who commissioned an artwork to be irrelevant to its appreciation, so Faure's giving tertiary expression to his grief in writing the Requiem is a matter of aesthetic irrelevance. So, even in those cases where it is at its most plausible, the first theory "explains" the expressiveness of art at the cost of making that expressiveness aesthetically irrelevant. Artists may (sometimes) give tertiary expression to their emotions in creating artworks, but this fact seems not to explain (as the Expression Theory is supposed to do) how artworks are expressive in themselves, nor how expressiveness in art is aesthetically relevant.

The expressiveness of art which is aesthetically relevant seems not to be conventional as are tertiary expressions of emotions. I concede readily that there is an element of convention which plays a part in determining the expressive properties of any work of art. That is, I accept that the expressive-ness of a property is in part dependent upon the categorisation of the artwork in which it is instantiated (see Walton, 1970). And I accept (what may not be a different point) that the expressiveness of a property may depend upon the range of properties chosen by the artist for his or her use (see Gombrich, 1969 esp ch.12 & 1963, esp pp.257-69; Tomas [1952] 1962). But the conventions involved here seem not to be of a quasi-linguistic variety which have as their point the revelation of a meaning intended by the utterer. Rather, they seem more like the conventions which operate with respect to primary expressions of emotion in that they map the ranges of tolerance within which and against which individual elements are naturally expressive. (So, across a range in which red is naturally brighter and jollier than violet, green is bright in the context of a range the scope of which extends from violet to green, and is dull in the context of a range the scope of which extends from red to green.) To the extent that the expressiveness of primary expressions is taught, being dependent upon a range of alternatives which is determined, at least in part, by cultural factors, then (to that extent) primary expressions of emotion are conventional. But that kind of conventionality is unlike the ordinary, Aarbitrary kind of conventionality which characterises tertiary
expressions of emotion. The conventions of primary expressions serve merely to structure elements in a way which reveals the potential for expressiveness which is natural to them, whereas the conventions of tertiary expression are arbitrary in that they can be neither apposite nor inapposite. And it is the very arbitrariness of tertiary expressions which encourages the audience to look through and beyond them to the intentions and emotions to which they give expression. Whereas, and by contrast, the aesthetically relevant conventions of art focus the audience's attention on the intrinsic properties of the artwork, rather than directing their attention beyond the artwork to other matters (see Davies, 1983 B). The conventions of art which are aesthetically relevant are, when appreciated, such as to direct the audience's attention to qualities of the artwork and not (as are the conventions which make apparent tertiary expressions of emotion) such as to render the work of art transparent so as to reveal that which lies behind it. In summary: Art may be no less conventional than is the use of language which has communication as its aim. But the conventions of art, unlike those which regulate communication, serve to reveal the contextual significance of elements and not to reveal the intentions which motivated their arrangement (whether or not such intentions might be inferred in the appreciation of the arrangement).

The second of the views mentioned above, according to which the expressiveness of art is a projection of the audience's response to the artist's secondary or tertiary expression of emotion, also is subject to objections. The notion of projection seems to be implausible, both because it fails to accommodate the possible (and common) mismatch between what is felt and what is expressed, and also because it provides no (obvious) way of distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate responses occasioned by the artwork.

More to the point, this second view of artistic expressiveness fails in much the way that the first view fails. The second view explains the expressiveness of art as a projection of the audience's response to a secondary or tertiary act of expression performed by the artist. Now, unless this approach can describe the artist's act of expression as aesthetically relevant then neither can it explain the audience's emotional response as aesthetically relevant. So, this second revision of the proto-theory must deal with the difficulties which face the first revision, as well as with those which apply specifically to it.

Thus, the two most obvious ways of attempting to defend the Ur-theory seem to fail. If they are at all successful in explaining the expressiveness of art, they are successful in explaining one respect in which art might be expressive, but not in explaining the expressiveness of art in a way which accounts for the aesthetic relevance and importance of that expressiveness. Neither the Ur-theory nor its improvements proves to be adequate. The attractiveness of the Ur-theory lies, I have suggested, in its recognising that we respond to the expressiveness of artworks as if that expressiveness were primary, and in its recognising that it is artists who are responsible (if anyone is) for the expressiveness of works of art. The attempts at revising the theory which I have considered fail both in the attempt to clear objections from the theory's path and in the attempt to preserve the aesthetic relevance of audiences' responses to works of art as responses to those works as expressing their artists' feelings.

The following summary recapitulates the main points of the argument so far. The Expression Theory is right in seeing the expressiveness of art as aesthetically important but wrong in seeing the expressiveness as a primary expression of artists' feelings. It is right in recognising that at audience's response to the expressiveness of art is more like a response to a primary than to a secondary or tertiary expression of feelings. And it is right in recognising that the artist is responsible, if anyone is, for the expressiveness of the artwork. Its failure lies in its attempt to marry these observations. Of course art can be used by artists to express their feelings, although evidence suggests that this is not common. Where art is so used by artists, usually the artworks created must be understood as secondary or tertiary expressions of their artists' feelings. Art which is expressive in this way need not be expressive in itself; a concern with art as a secondary or tertiary expression of feelings is a concern which leads one away
from, rather than towards, the expressiveness in the work. So, revisions of the Ur-theory, which are more convincing in explaining how artworks express their artists' emotions, fail because they cannot justify the aesthetic relevance of the type of expression they characterise.

I have suggested that our knowledge of the creative process indicates that artists intend their artworks to express that which their works do express, that they deliberately design the expressiveness into their artworks. The techniques by which this is achieved might be applied automatically, their use having been mastered in the past, or they might be applied with painstaking calculation. (Mozart often worked in the former way, Beethoven often in the latter, and Berg sometimes in the one way and sometimes in the other.) How, in non-technical terms, might works of art be designed to be expressive?

First, the artist might describe or represent a person in a situation which standardly would lead that person to feel an emotion, and/or to act in a way which can be understood as their giving expression to their feeling. So, for example, the artist might depict a weeping woman cradling in her arms a dead, younger man, perhaps her son. Secondly, the artist might describe, represent or present material which is likely to be associated in the minds of the audience with the occurrence of some emotion. So, for example, the picture of the woman holding the dead man might be presented as a Pieta.

Now, although the attribution of properties or states to fictional people or events raises interesting issues and although it is not perhaps immediately obvious how one would justify the rationality of emotional responses to the represented emotions of fictional persons (see Davies, 1983 A), the types of expressiveness mentioned above are not difficult to recognise and understand. The depicted emotions (or beliefs, or attitudes, or whatever) belong to the fictional persons who experience and may give expression to them.

Rightly, the Expression Theory notes that cases of these two types of expressiveness in art fail to exhaust all instances of expressiveness in art. As well as describing, representing and indicating by association the presence of emotion, works of art express within themselves emotions, feelings and attitudes which cannot be attributed to any fictional (or actual) person described or represented within the work. An emotion or attitude may be expressed towards the propositional or representational content of the work. For example, the self-satisfied smugness of a pictured person may be depicted as contemptible. Furthermore, emotions may be expressed in works with neither propositional nor representational content, nor any emotional associations. For example, the last movement of Beethoven's A Seventh Symphony is, simply, joyous. And rightly, the Expression Theory recognises that, in lacking an "owner", instances of this type of expressiveness stand in need of explanation. The Expression Theory hopes to provide the required explanation in arguing that the attitude or emotions thus expressed are the artist's. But such an approach faces problems which already have been mentioned. So, this (third) type of expressiveness cannot be explained as a primary form of emotional expression, and neither can it be explained as a secondary or tertiary form of expression (since the expressiveness is aesthetically relevant and is located in rather than through the work of art), even if the work does happen to be a secondary or tertiary expression of the artist's corresponding attitude or emotion.

How, without appealing to the feelings of artists, might one account for this type of expressiveness? One possible answer to this question quickly may be dismissed. It will not do to suggest that art expresses aesthetic emotions which are neither felt nor shown and, so, are quite unlike "real", non-aesthetic emotions. It will not do because this approach makes the expressive- ness of art of dubious concern as a result of its depriving the notion of expression of its usual meaning. In severing the connection between emotions in art and emotions in life, this approach makes artistic expressiveness no more like the human expression of emotions than river banks are like savings and trading banks. And, without that likeness, the power of
artistic expression to interest and move us as it does becomes a matter of impenetrable mystery (see Hospers, 1954-55, esp pp.326-7; Scruton, 1974, esp pp.38-43).

A more promising line of explanation argues that art is expressive in the way in which facades, carriages and gaits - that is, in virtue of its physiognomic presentation of the appearance of an emotion (see Urmson, 1973; Davies, 1980; Kivy, 1980). I noted before that, where what would otherwise be seen as the primary expression of an emotion is seen to be consciously contrived, it is no longer seen as expressive. More correctly I should say that it is no longer seen as a primary expression of an emotion which is felt by a person. Such behaviour may retain an expressive character in its appearance, even where it is consciously adopted and, hence, is not a primary expression of felt-emotion. On this view, works of art are not expressive in that they reveal anyone's occurent emotions. rather, they are expressive in that they present appearances of emotion.

This brief outline of an account is far from adequate as it stands. Even if it is true that we experience artworks as no less expressive than we do human faces, something needs to be said about this for it is not at all obvious how music, for example, could present expressive aspects as faces do. It will be unconvincing to argue that dynamic and structural similarities between human actions and music account for the expressiveness of music. That is to say, it is hard to see how the expressiveness of music could be generated merely by the mimicry of the dynamics and structure of human actions or physiognomy. More-over, it will be necessary also to explain how appearances of emotions are evocative of emotional responses, given that those appearances are not taken as evidence of occurent emotions. But these are not matters which here can be pursued. For the present purpose it is sufficient that there is a plausible alternative to the account offered by the Expression Theory.

According to the alternative theory, artists deliberately create art with a physiognomy which is expressive in that it presents characteristic appearances of emotion. In this way they achieve the type of expressiveness which the Expression Theory is concerned to explain - expressiveness which is aesthetically interesting and valuable because it is experienced as residing in artworks, by contrast with expressiveness which stands at a remove from artworks and their immediate properties and which focusses instead on emotions felt by people. But, of course, the theory need not deny that artists sometimes are concerned to express their own (or their employers') feelings. A woman artist grieving for her dead son might choose to express her grief by painting a Pieta, or by painting a work which expresses (rather than represents) sadness. This mode of expression is like that of a person who, on actually feeling sad, deliberately adopts a sad expression with the aim of appearing sad. The physiognomic expression adopted is, in such a case, a secondary or tertiary expression of the person's feeling, although the same behaviour or physiognomy would be a primary expression of the person's feeling were it to occur unthinkingly rather than deliberately. As a secondary or tertiary expression of an occurent emotion, it exploits the prior expressive character which that physiognomy or behaviour possesses in virtue of its relation to (actual) primary expressions of (actual) felt-emotions.

The point, though, is this: As a secondary or tertiary expression of someone's (actual) emotion or (actual) attitude, the expressiveness of the work of art is not (in any usual or obvious way) aesthetically relevant. Rather, it is the form of expression which is appropriated by the artist (to the end of creating secondary or tertiary expressions of [actual] emotions or [actual] attitudes) which has aesthetic relevance. That is to say, the expressiveness which is aesthetically relevant is the expressiveness which the work has by virtue of its presenting in its appearance emotion-characteristics integrally associated with primary expressions of emotions or attitudes. What is aesthetically relevant is the expressive character present in the artwork, and not the fact (if it Ais a fact, which usually it is not) that this expressive character has been used because it matches the mood to which it gives secondary or tertiary expression.

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By now it should be clear where the error of the Expression Theory lies. That theory assumes that all expressions of emotion must be expressions of felt-emotions and is concerned, therefore, to locate an "owner" of the emotions expressed in art. Where those emotions or attitudes cannot be attributed to some person depicted, they are attributed to the artist who, after all, is responsible, if anyone is, for the appearance of expressiveness in his or her artworks. But the Expression theory founders, either because it mistakenly sees art as a primary expression of artists' feelings or because, in revised form, it wrongly supposes that there is aesthetic relevance in artists' giving secondary or tertiary expressions to their feelings in their creative acts. The Expression Theory rightly acknowledges that we respond to the expressiveness of art as presenting the appearance of primary expressions of emotion and rightly acknowledges that it is just such expressions which are both aesthetically important and in need of explanation. But, because it assumes wrongly that all appearances of primary expressions of emotion must be primary expressions of occurrent emotion if they are not to be deprived totally of expressive character, the Expression Theory misconstrues the relation between artistic expression and the expression of actual emotions in behaviour. (And it is because sophisticated versions of the theory are keen to preserve the connection with the artist's feelings that they attempt to force the analysis by equating the type of expressiveness which is aesthetically relevant with artists' giving secondary or tertiary expression to their emotions or attitudes.) The Expression Theory need not be wrong in holding that artists feel emotions which (sometimes, at least) they intend to be expressed in their artworks. And it need not be wrong in holding that such intentions may be realised successfully. But it is wrong in holding that the expressiveness of art can be explained solely and simply as artists' expressing their feelings. The artist's intention that some emotion be expressed in his or her artwork is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for that work's expressing that emotion. And in those cases where the artist's intention is realised, that fact is irrelevant in that the expressiveness of the artwork can be apparent to someone who is aware neither of the artist's feelings, nor of the artist's successfully realised intention. Ultimately the expressiveness of art is independent of artists' feelings and of artists' intentions to express their feelings in their creations.

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_1.        Obviously such an account accords with a common view of artistic inspiration (see Osborne, 1977).
2.        This distinction does not rest on a denial that emotions inevitably have a cognitive content. Post-Wittgensteinian writers have discussed the cognitive content of emotions at length - for example, see Bedford (1956-57), Kenny (1963) and Tormey (1971).
3.        See Dewey (1934, esp pp.60-1), Collingwood ([1938] 1963, esp pp.60-1), and Ducasse (1964 & 1966) - Hare (1972) gives a good summary of Ducasse's views. Some who are not expression theorists have also distinguished between venting and expressing - see Alston (1965) and Tomas ([1952] 1962, esp p.31).
4.        Casey (1971) offers a phenomenological description of this experience as if such a description might replace a conceptual analysis of artistic expressiveness.
5.        Of course, one need not be a defender of the Expression Theory in order to suggest that the expressiveness of art is to be analysed in terms of the way in which artworks evoke (or tend to evoke) emotional responses in their audiences. In general, such an analysis is dismissed as unworthy of much attention - see Hosper (1954-55). Defenders of "emotionalism" have included Hepburn (1963) and Nolt (1981) - for a critique of Nolt's view see Stecker (1983).
6.        Tormey (1971, esp pp.117-20) makes the point against the view that art may be analysed as (in my terms) a secondary expression of artists' emotions, but he has little to say about the possibility of artworks' being (in my terms) tertiary expressions of emotion. Siricello (1972, esp
ch.2) argues that art is best to be understood (in my terms) as a tertiary, rather than a secondary, expression of emotions, moods and attitudes.
7. Wollheim has discussed Gombrich's views - see 1966-67 (esp pp.239-41), 1964 (esp pp.275-7) and 1968 (esp sects 28-31).
8. Lewis (1969) provides an analysis of the ordinary notion of convention. The view that the contents of a work of art might be explained entirely by reference to artists' conventional uses of materials and media has been attacked by Baxter (1983). (And whether or not the social place of art may be defined in terms of conventions also is a matter of debate - see Lord [1980] and Peggy Zeglin Brand [1982].)
9. Sircello (1972, esp chs.1 & 2) has argued that there is a further type of expression to be understood as involving "artistic acts". I have argued against such implicit appeals to artists' intentions (see Davies, 1982) but I do not wish to deny the importance of the type of expressiveness to which Sircello alludes. Some critics of the Expression Theory (eg Todd, 1972) miss the point in failing to appreciate that the Expression Theory aims to analyse only this problematic (and most important) type of expressiveness.
10. Scruton (1983, esp p.61) seems to have such worries in mind when he suggests that faces can be expressive in themselves, without regard to occurent emotions, only because Asometimes_ their expressiveness does indicate the presence of occurent emotions; his point being that art cannot supply the same (in my terms, primary) connection with occurent emotions. Elsewhere I have suggested some answers to this particular difficulty and to the other problems raised in this paragraph - see Davies, 1980.
11. Tilghman (1984, esp pp.175-8) has rejected such a view as implausible. On his view, the experience of art as expressive is Aireducibly_ analogous to the experience of human expressions (of occurent emotions); that is, artistic expressiveness is not grounded in any similarities between human physiognomy and the "physiognomy" of art. An analysis such as I have recommended leaves the philosophical problem untouched, he says, because the similarity must be described by means of the very language (in terms of action, rather than mere movement) which the resemblance is supposed to underwrite (see esp p.177).

Despite these criticisms, I am not sure that the recommended theory is so different from the view which Tilghman defends. It may be true, ultimately, that the experience of expressiveness is grounded in irreducible experiences of similarity between, for example, spatial and musical movement, or musical movement and intentional human action. But, for all that, there is philo- sophically interesting territory to be explored between the experience of artistic expressiveness and the irreducible experiences of similarity in which, finally, it is grounded. And it is just that territory with which the recommended theory is concerned. Tilghman himself allows that, to take analogous case, the experience of seeing a duck in the duck-rabbit figure is not irreducible as is the experience of seeing a dot in the picture as the duck’s eye is irreducible (see esp p.184). And, anyway, there is something very odd in the complaint that a view leaves the philosophical problem untouched when it comes from someone whose aim is to show that there is no such problem (see esp p.169).

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