

ResearchSpace@Auckland

Version

This is the Accepted Manuscript version. This version is defined in the NISO recommended practice RP-8-2008 <http://www.niso.org/publications/rp/>

Suggested Reference

Davies, S. (2002). Profundity in Instrumental Music. *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 42(4), 343-356. doi: [10.1093/bjaesthetics/42.4.343](https://doi.org/10.1093/bjaesthetics/42.4.343)

Copyright

Items in ResearchSpace are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise indicated. Previously published items are made available in accordance with the copyright policy of the publisher.

This is a pre-copyedited, author-produced PDF of an article accepted for publication in *British Journal of Aesthetics* following peer review. The version of record (see citation above) is available online at: doi:

[10.1093/bjaesthetics/42.4.343](https://doi.org/10.1093/bjaesthetics/42.4.343)

<http://www.oxfordjournals.org/en/access-purchase/rights-and-permissions/self-archiving-policy.html>

<http://www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/issn/0007-0904/>

<https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/docs/uoa-docs/rights.htm>

Stephen Davies, Philosophy, University of Auckland

Important note: This is a final draft and differs from the definitive version, which is published in **British Journal of Aesthetics**, 42 (2002): 343-356. I have been assured by the University of Auckland's research office that if they have made this publicly available then it does not violate the publisher's copyright rules.

Profundity in Instrumental Music

Stephen Davies

According to Peter Kivy, to be profound, music would have to be about a profound subject that is treated in an exemplary way. Instrumental music does not satisfy this definition; usually it is not about anything humanly important, and when it is, it can convey no more than banalities. Like others, I argue against the propositional character of Kivy's 'aboutness' criterion; profundity can be revealed or displayed other than via statements and descriptions. I am less inclined than some of Kivy's critics to argue that music conveys profound insights into the emotions or abstract metaphysical ideas, such as unity and identity. Instead, I draw a parallel with great chess, which illustrates the fecundity, flexibility, insight, vitality, subtlety, complexity, and analytical far-reachingness of which the human mind is capable. That demonstration is of deep significance, given the wider importance of an appreciation of our intellectual and imaginative powers, even if chess says nothing about the skills to which it draws attention. My thesis is that some instrumental music is profound in a similar way; namely, for what it exemplifies and thereby reveals about the capacities of the human mind.

According to Peter Kivy, to be profound music would have to be about a profound subject that is treated in an exemplary way or in some way adequate to its subject matter.¹ Though he allows that music expresses emotion, Kivy denies that it is profound in virtue of doing so. This is because it is not about the emotions it expresses. Indeed, instrumental music is not usually about anything, though some works, such as J. S. Bach's contrapuntal compositions, are about the possibilities of musical materials, and are thereby about music itself. Bach's treatment of his musical ideas is exemplary, but his subject matter, the potential of musical materials, is not worthy of great concern and does not go to the moral heart of human life. Accordingly, while Bach's music is of abiding interest and of importance to many people, it does not qualify as profound. Kivy's intuition is that some

music is profound, and Bach's should qualify if any does, but his intuition gives way under the pressure of his own analysis.

I share Kivy's intuition. Unlike him, I would be inclined to reject the analysis of profundity, rather than to abandon the intuition that some music is profound. His account of profundity is vulnerable in its insistence on what I will call the 'aboutness' criterion. Kivy seems to require for 'aboutness' both reference and predication.² This makes the expression of profundity essentially propositional, so it is not surprising that instrumental music fails to make the grade. But surely this sets too restrictive a standard? (It will exclude, as well as music and painting, all but the most explicitly didactic literature.) I agree with Kivy that profound things should draw our attention to important matters or truths, but they might do so by revealing, depicting, exhibiting, pointing to, or exposing those matters or truths, instead of by stating or describing them. There are ways of conveying ideas other than by asserting them. These ways might show rather than say how things are.³

If the analysis of profundity is made more plausible by being weakened in the manner suggested, it is immediately easier to see both how instrumental music might qualify as profound and how its expressive powers could feature as elements in its profundity. Be that as it may, most of Kivy's commentators have accepted the outline of his theory and have replied by arguing that instrumental music can satisfy it.⁴ They adopt one (or both) of two strategies. The first argues that music is profound in terms of a direct connection it makes to extra-musical matters of importance in the world, usually via emotions it expresses. The second locates music's profundity more squarely with the manner of treatment of purely musical elements of content and form, as Kivy does in his initial discussion of Bach's supreme craftsmanship. Unlike Kivy, the proponents of this line suggest there are indirect ties between music's autonomous character and matters of human importance that are sufficient to vouch for music's profundity.

Levinson advocates the most compelling version of the first response to Kivy's analysis.⁵ He begins by arguing, as I have done above, that Kivy's account of the 'aboutness' criterion is inappropriately restrictive. He avers, it is reasonable to regard music as about the emotions expressed in it since

composers intend it to be about them, a third party can make a reference to an emotion via an illustrative use of the music's expressiveness, listeners expect music to be expressive and take it to be designed to be such, and music's expressiveness often is salient and central to its character. Beyond the ways in which music can be profound that are considered by Kivy, Levinson recommends as worth considering: '1) it explores the emotional or psychic realm in a more insightful or eye-opening way than most music; 2) it epitomizes or alludes to more interesting or complex extra-musical modes of growth and development than most music, and gives us a vicarious experience of such modes; 3) it strikes us as touching, in some fashion or other, on the most fundamental and pressing aspects of human existence—e.g. death, fate, the inexorability of time, the space between aspiration and attainment'.⁶

Kivy has responded in 'Philosophies of Arts.' It is not true that composers generally intend that their works have the expressive properties they do; expressiveness is an unintended epiphenomenon accompanying musical features that are intentionally chosen to be as they are for reasons other than their expressiveness. Only with the Romantics does one get music that includes expressive properties as part of the work's structural plan, Kivy says. For my part, I find these claims not to be credible. I think that many composers are fully aware of their music's expressiveness and that they do not separate its expressive from its structural character, so that they might intend the one by intending the other. But let us not dwell on these points, nor on Kivy's reaffirmation of a restricted, quasi-linguistic approach to the 'aboutness' criterion, since he is prepared to concede, if only for the sake of the argument, that music may be about the emotions it expresses. He allows the point because he has a yet more telling objection to follow. Even if it is about the emotions and they are of considerable importance, music is not capable of conveying more than dull banalities about them. In effect, it fails the final necessary condition for profundity; namely, that its subject matter be treated in a way adequate to its significance. We might learn from the exposition of the first movement of Mozart's Symphony No 40 that the experience of happiness could naturally follow one of unhappiness, but where is the profundity in that? And if the first movement of Beethoven's Symphony No 5 refers us to growth, and we speculate on the growth of the

cosmos since the Big Bang, our thoughts on that subject are unlikely to be profound. And even if they are, the profundity surely attaches to the thoughts rather than to the music.

I confess I am sympathetic to these final objections of Kivy's. I do not deny that instrumental music can be expressive, or that we might come to new beliefs and understandings as a result of contemplating or being moved by its expressiveness, and I allow that music occupies a central place in the lives of some people as a result of its expressive power or associations,⁷ but I share with Kivy the view that music is not profound as a result of revealing deep truths or ideas about emotions or their place in human life.⁸ One cannot articulate the lessons taught about life by music's expressive progress without being made painfully aware of their prosaic nature. And if, perchance, one's thoughts are profound, this profundity is occasioned by the music without being attributable to it, because the content of those thoughts inevitably goes beyond anything conveyed unequivocally by the music.

At this point it is common for the defender of music's expressive profundity to invoke the idea that music presents emotions too subtle and individual to be named. As a result, the truths conveyed by music are ineffable and are all the more important for not being expressible in language.⁹ I will not pursue here my objections to such claims. I think that, typically, instrumental music expresses only a limited range of the most general emotions by presenting the dynamic profiles of their normal behavioral expressions.¹⁰ Music is very detailed, however, in the particular means by which it generates these emotion-characteristics. They are embodied in complex, highly specific musical sequences. The sadness expressed in Mozart's and Tchaikovsky's music differ in the note sequences that realize them. Yet there need be no corresponding, phenomenal difference in the kind or quality of sadness in the two cases. Specificity in the means or manner of expression is not necessarily matched by specificity in the emotion expressed. I suspect that the temptation to talk of music's ineffability is stoked by the mistaken assumption that differences in notes must map onto indescribably subtle differences in emotional content. In any event, I agree with Kivy that our reports of what is conveyed by music's

expressiveness tend to the banal because what is communicated lacks depth and detail, not because it is profound but otherwise inarticulable.

I think the second line of argument fares better than the first against Kivy's approach (though there is nothing against combining the two, as Levinson does). This second approach, recall, hopes to cash talk of musical profundity in terms firstly of what is achieved in the treatment of the piece's contents and form and secondly of some indirect connection between these musical events, processes, features, or whatever and matters that are significant in the human realm. Several philosophers locate a crucial source of music's value, not in its direct connection with the extra-musical, but rather, in its abstractness and independence from the real world. Malcolm Budd thinks that much of the value of music lies in the treatment of its abstract form, which resembles social and dramatic processes, such as dialogue, conflict, and resolution. Though abstract, it can be 'about' other abstractions, such as similarity and difference, the unification of diverse materials, the harmonious reconciliation of multiplicity within a unity, and so on.¹¹ In a similar vein, David A. White suggests that a musical work is profound when it is unified, both in its parts and as a whole. He writes: 'Concepts such as unity, whole and part, identity and difference are essential elements in the articulation of profundity precisely because these concepts are necessary to any account that purports to describe reality ... The work is, of course, not intended to be a sort of musical metaphysics. But if introducing concepts of wide generality can help account for certain prominent features in the experience and organization of the work, then this account articulates profundity by showing how the work can be approached as a simulacrum of reality.'¹² R. A. Sharpe observes that music provides a paradigm of order in an uncertain world, and can have a dialogic character.¹³ Alan H. Goldman claims that music creates an alternative world of pure tones in ideal space. As such, it allows for 'the purest meeting of minds.' 'Music itself represents the purest kind of Hegelian overcoming of matter by mind, of objectivity by subjectivity ... Thus, music is not only another world. It is a world that can be completely satisfying and fully revealing of the creative power of other minds. Its peculiar value lies in the purity of its revelation of the human spirit.'¹⁴ And, though he criticizes Budd and finds more to value in music's expressiveness than the contribution this make to

the piece's formal development and coherence, Levinson stresses the importance of the mutual interaction and dependence between form and content, both at the local and the global level. 'What one finds intrinsically rewarding in the experience a good piece of music offers, and what perhaps most importantly determines its artistic value, is its very particular wedding of its form and content ... Above all, however, one enjoys and finds intrinsically rewarding the fusion of how it goes and what it conveys, the precise way in which what it conveys is embodied in and carried by how it goes.'¹⁵

Proponents of this second approach agree with one of Kivy's desiderata for an account of musical profundity: they look to the specifics of the music. Too few of those who find the meaning to life, the universe, and everything in Beethoven's late quartets get round to mentioning anything distinctive to the quartets' musical contents and form, yet these are supposed to be the source of the insights achieved. By contrast, both Levinson and White provide painstaking discussion of particular works to back up their views. That is on the plus side. On the negative is a general vagueness about the manner of music's contribution to our understanding of the metaphysical notions that are mentioned. In other words, we are back to the earlier complaint that, even if music can direct our focus to humanly important notions, it is not clear that it can clarify our understanding of them as such. What exactly does the music convey about sameness and difference, or about unity, that is profound? The connection between what is in the music and philosophical speculation on the nature of identity, say, seems too attenuated to allow that the music directs and accounts for that speculation, even when it is inspired by listening to the music and is profound. Alternatively, if one replies that one learned from the music that a movement with themes thus and so, a structure and development of this distinctive kind, etc. can unify apparently contrasting musical ideas into a satisfyingly complete manifold, then one has not answered the problem that floored Kivy in the first place, which was to reveal how the materials of music can touch on matters worthy of great concern and that go to the heart of human life.

I have a third take on music's profundity that avoids some of the obvious problems with the first two. Like other philosophers in this area, I

will present my case through examples. Unfortunately, no examples strictly entail the theory they are supposed to illustrate. Kivy is likely to agree with his opponents on a list of the most plausible candidates for musical profundity, but not with claims for the actual success of these candidates in achieving profundity. As a result, argument by example, unless it is handled very carefully, is bound to beg the question. Nevertheless, views about the nature of music and what it can do are unconvincing in the absence of model cases. How, then, is one to advance the discussion? I do so by beginning with examples that have nothing to do with instrumental music, yet which come from a realm that is no less self-contained and detached from real-world concerns.

In 1956 in the Rosenwald Chess Tournament, Donald Byrne came up against the thirteen-year-old Bobbie Fischer. Fischer had played badly so far in the tournament, while Byrne was more experienced and probably expected to win. Byrne played white and, after his seventeenth move, appeared to have an overwhelming advantage. One of Fischer's unprotected knights was under attack and his queen was threatened by a bishop. The queen could not both defend itself and guard the endangered knight (see Example One).

[EXAMPLE ONE GOES ABOUT HERE.]

[CAPTION TO EXAMPLE ONE FOLLOWS]

Example One. Black (Fischer) to play. Rosenwald Tournament, 1956.

Fischer's response must have jolted Byrne. He retreated his white bishop to a square (K3/e6) where it too could be taken. Byrne captured the queen. In another seven moves, Fischer had removed a rook and both bishops of his opponent. Instead of resigning, as is customary, Byrne gave Fischer the satisfaction of completing the game with checkmate at move forty-one. In post-game analysis, Fischer was able to demonstrate that all of white's replies to his seventeenth move were losing ones.

Fischer's coup was a masterpiece of tactical calculation. He saw his way through all the complications to clearly winning positions in each variation. But in chess, genius in strategy is no less important than tactical

brilliance. It was strategic judgment and skill that were displayed by Raoul Capablanca when he faced Frank J. Marshall in 1918. The opening was the Spanish game (or Ruy Lopez), the most used and analyzed in grandmaster chess. As black, Marshall introduced an innovation on move 8. He had nursed and prepared the novelty for years, holding it back in order to spring it on Capablanca in revenge for the humiliating drubbing he received from the Cuban in an exhibition series they played in 1909.

Marshall gambitted a pawn, for the loss of which he would obtain positional pressure and attacking impetus. If he took the pawn, Capablanca would have to refute over the board moves and combinations analyzed at length and leisure by his opponent. And if he declined it, Marshall would be no less well prepared for what eventuated, would have gained ground, and would have scored a major psychological victory. Capablanca understood the situation. He said after the game that he realized the attack would be 'terrific' if he accepted the gambit pawn, which he did. He defended superbly against the storm that followed and, by move 25, had neutralized black's pressure. He preserved his material advantage and with it obtained a winning game. Marshall resigned on move 38.

The Marshall gambit, as it is now called, remains playable to this day. Though it is not guaranteed to produce a sustainable advantage, neither has it been refuted. Unlike Fischer, Capablanca did not see his way through to a forced win, though footnotes show he set tactical traps that Marshall was able to sidestep. But Capablanca did show deep judgment and sustained calculative ability in out-thinking his opponent on that day, and he did all this under the pressure of the occasion and in game time. His play was a masterpiece of strategy, I claim.

Chess fails Kivy's conditions for profundity. It is not obviously about anything and certainly is not about anything that goes to the moral heart of human life. Of course, some will claim that chess is about struggle, conflict, mortality, and the rest. But either the connection between chess and such perennially important themes is too tendentious, or chess fails to say anything meaningful about these topics even if it brings them to mind. Kivy, I think, would be bound to hold that chess fails his analysis, just as

instrumental music does. In particular, neither Fischer's move nor Capablanca's strategic play could be profound on Kivy's account. Yet I maintain that these abstract, intellectual achievements are profound in their way. And I would say the same of some complex mathematical proofs, for instance, though their profundity may be harder for most of us to appreciate because we lack the background skills to follow what was done.

How should the account of profundity be modified to accommodate examples of these kinds? It is true that chess moves are not about the powers of pieces, or about the possibilities of the position, or about the end of beating the opponent. They presuppose such things, but do not refer to them. In Kivy's terms, they are not about anything, not even their own rules and materials. But I have already indicated that Kivy's 'aboutness' criterion, which requires reference to a subject of abiding human importance and predication of something insightful about it, sets an inappropriate standard. It is sufficient that profundity is shown or displayed in an activity or judgment. Profundity might be revealed or exhibited in the manner of doing something, such as playing chess or proving a theorem, without being enunciated self-consciously or requiring linguistic expression. According to standard dictionary meanings, the profound has great depth and, in human activity, demonstrates great knowledge or insight. Fischer's tactical move and Capablanca's strategic play surely reveal these qualities in graphic form. These players penetrated further into the positions than their expert opponents and their play was far-sighted. The skills displayed were not merely those of the master craftsman, which are algorithmic even if they have been honed to perfection. Chess of this kind, play that is exceptional even by the standards of the best grandmasters, relies on imagination, originality, and a deep (though not necessarily articulable) understanding of the principles and potentialities of the game as well of the particular position.

Yet is Kivy not correct to insist that the profound must take some matter of human importance as its topic? Yes and no. It should connect with such a subject, certainly, but it need not take anything as its topic. If poetry is sometimes profound and pushpin never is, this is not because poetry sometimes takes significant matters as its subject, whereas pushpin is about

nothing as such. Rather, it is because poetry, like chess and music, has the potential to engage the mind and spirit more fully and intensely than pushpin, whatever, if any, topic it addresses. In Kivy's terms, chess is not itself a subject of human importance, but the games just described illustrate to a jaw-dropping degree the inexhaustible fecundity, flexibility, insight, vitality, subtlety, complexity, and analytical far-reachingness of which the human mind is capable. That is something on which to marvel. And, because of the wider evolutionary consequences of our intellectual and imaginative capacities, that demonstration is of significance, even where those who display such capacities are not also trying to say anything about the competence they bring to our attention.¹⁶ Understanding our own human natures is of considerable importance, and those natures are revealed sometimes in the way chess is played, for instance.¹⁷ Indeed, the separation of the realm of chess from the practical, real world might have the consequence of making more salient the cognitive potentials manifested in chess, just because those manifestations are abstracted from the practical situations and consequences with which they are ordinarily meshed. Kivy is correct to think that the profound goes beyond what is merely skilled or intense, but he underestimates the variety of ways in which what is of human significance and value can be exhibited.

Obviously, I mean to claim that purely instrumental music can be profound in something like the way that chess can be. Like chess, instrumental music is valued for itself, not merely as a means to other things, and it creates its own, autonomous world. Of course, the mental powers needed to compose great music are not all the same as those that suit a player for chess (although Philidor is one person who achieved eminence in both areas). In music, being able to unify the whole economically, and being clear and elegant, are much more relevant than is calculative power, say.¹⁸ The crucial similarity, though, is this: in creating the very greatest music, composers display to an extraordinary degree many of the general cognitive capacities seen also in outstanding chess; namely, originality, far-sightedness, imagination, fertility, plasticity, refinement, intuitive mastery of complex detail, and so on. And as in chess, they cannot rely merely on following rules or statistical norms to see them through to success.

I now offer some examples that I regard as revealing musical profundity in a manner similar to those taken from chess.

The first movement of Béla Bartók's Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta is a fugue. The subject begins on the note A. Subsequent entries are always at the interval of the fifth; at E, B, F-sharp, etc. for the ascending entries, and at D, G, C, and so on for the descending ones. As students of music theory are taught, there is a circle of fifths. Successive fifths cycle back eventually to the starting pitch, and the return begins when the tritone is reached and passed. Bartók's fugue mimics the theory books. It climaxes at measures 56-7 when both the ascending and descending entries converge on the note that lies a tritone from the opening A, E-flat. At that moment, the dense, harmonically complex texture dissolves into the stark clarity of octave unisons, played fortissimo. The cycle is reversed in measures 58-77, which involve inversion of the subject, stretto entries, and compression to the point of structural collapse. The fugue theme, having now returned to its opening note of A, is presented simultaneously in its original and inverted forms through measures 78-81, and fragments of its beginning, again in original and inverted forms, echo each other through measures 82-85. These fragments end variously on F and C-sharp. How can the circle be completed, with a resolution on A? Bartók achieves this in the final three measures. He presents what was the second phrase (stated first at measure 2) of the fugue subject, stated simultaneously in its original and inverted forms. This motive follows naturally from the fragments that precede it, since these were based on the first phrase of the fugue theme, and it achieves closure because instead of being left hanging, it proceeds to the A that is its natural conclusion.

Here is the miracle. The closing three measures not only draw the movement to its close, they recapitulate and thereby summarize the whole movement's structure. The two voices move in contrary motion from A, settle simultaneously on E-flat, the tritone, and then reverse the process until they converge in unison on the final A (see Example Two).

[EXAMPLE TWO GOES ABOUT HERE]

For another case, take the first movement of Beethoven's Third Symphony, 'Eroica'. At 691 measures, it was of unprecedented length. The coda (beginning at 553) was also far more extended than was standard. It rivals the (unrepeated) exposition. Moreover, the final sixty-four measures hammer with hardly any relief on tonic and dominant chords. To understand why the movement has these relative dimensions, and why it ends in triumph and apotheosis rather than in banal monotony, it is necessary to go back to the unexpected C-sharp in the fifth measure of the opening theme (see Example Three). This note sets in motion a dramatic progress that inevitably requires distortion of the expected proportions. However, Beethoven does not abandon the guiding principles of first movement sonata form, but instead, he plays on tensions generated between that underlying formal pattern and the substance of his musical ideas.

[EXAMPLE THREE GOES ABOUT HERE]

The theme's C-sharp is melodically unexpected, because it blocks the symmetrical continuation that is anticipated. It 'shuts down' the theme by excluding the four-bar second phrase that would normally balance the first. It is also tonally ambiguous, though in the opening statement the tonic key is immediately restored and affirmed. When the theme returns at 15, the C-sharp is absent but so too is the second phrase, and this is again the case at 37, where the C-sharp is notated enharmonically as D-flat, passing to C. With the recapitulation (398), the theme returns with the notated C-sharp, but it here again functions as a D-flat in a chromatic progression from E-flat to C. That C heralds a modulation to F, followed quickly by one to D-flat, with the theme's opening arpeggio sounded in both tonalities. In other words, the tonal instability implicit in the theme's C-sharp is brought into prominence at the beginning of the recapitulation, just when one would expect a stable tonic key. Meanwhile, the balancing second phrase is still withheld, so the melodic uncertainty of the opening is recapitulated along with the theme. The coda begins with a celebration of tonal chaos: successive major chords on E-flat, D-flat, and C (555-60), which descent recalls the theme's first appearance in the recapitulation (at 398-407; see also 42-3). The theme's opening arpeggio is treated sequentially (564-77), which recalls similar passages in the development (at 178-87 and 338-60) but with

this important difference: the tonal stability at 565-72 makes it easy to hear what follows the repeated first phrase as an answering second. At last, melodic closure is near to being achieved, but in the key of C, not the tonic E-flat. That oversight is corrected when the theme achieves its final, triumphant version (see Example Four). Not only is a second, melodically and tonally unambiguous phrase supplied, but also an inverted variant provides a counterpoint. Meanwhile, the key could not be more firmly anchored in the tonic, where it remains until the end.

[EXAMPLE FOUR GOES ABOUT HERE]

Now we can see why Beethoven's coda is so extended. The first subject in sonata form usually is melodically complete and tonally unambiguous. Whatever vicissitudes it undergoes in the development, its recapitulation represents a return to order. The coda need not be long, since the thematic and tonal closure it emphasizes has already been achieved. By contrast, Beethoven's first subject is melodically incomplete and tonally unstable. At some times he stresses the incompleteness, at others the instability. Given what happens earlier, these tensions cannot suddenly disappear with the arrival of the recapitulation. No precedent for doing so is established in the preceding development. Indeed, the tonal instability associated in the development with sequential treatments of the theme's opening permeate the recapitulation, which is less secure than is common as a result. The movement's melodic and tonal tensions are finally resolved in the coda, and even at that late stage, this is done gradually. The fully articulated theme does not appear strongly in the tonic key until some seventy measures after the close of the recapitulation. The coda must be so massive, then, because it must achieve all the reconciliations and reaffirmations that would normally take place in the recapitulation. As I suggested at the outset, the coda (and with it, the movement as a whole) is prolonged as a consequence of the unexpected C-sharp played by the cellos in measure 7.

By way of conclusion and summary, let me compare my examples with Kivy's. Bach was a pedagogue, and the Well-tempered Klavier, the French Suites, the suites for unaccompanied violin and cello, Art of Fugue,

and like works, are studies in compositional and instrumental technique. In consequence, they are about the kinds for which they serve as paradigms. They are about the nature of the fugue and the suite, and about all the musical methods and styles they encompass. The composition of music, though, does not typically take in this ambitious sweep. Nevertheless, a fair amount is self-conscious in being about the potentials of the specific musical ideas and fragments of which it is comprised. This is true not only of Bach's contrapuntal pieces, taken in their particularity as individual works, but also of the first movement of Bartók's Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta. Its closing makes a quite deliberate reference to the structural principles on which the unfolding of the movement is based. Most music, by contrast, does its thing without referring either to what that thing is or to wider musical types and styles. This is true of Beethoven's *Eroica*. Within the piece, there is a working out of a balance between the nature of the materials and the exigencies of the form, but without self-reference. The composer might be unaware of the bases on which he makes his choices, relying on his intuitions and taste to select what will succeed, or he might be fully aware of and deliberately engineer the underlying relationships and processes that generate the effects he is after. Beethoven probably belonged to the latter camp, given the care he lavished on his creations and the long periods of gestation and experiment that led up to them. But that does not mean he set about establishing internal connections that his audience is supposed to appreciate as referring one part of the work or movement to others. While my Bartók example might be 'about' its own form, the same could not be claimed for the first movement of Beethoven's '*Eroica*'.

This does not matter, though. I claim that Bach's music is profound in displaying the depths and extent of his creative genius, and through that, showing more generally the elasticity, fertility, creativity, vision, and so on of the human mind. So, even Bach's contrapuntal music, in being about the potential of its own materials, is not about what makes it profound, which is what it reveals about its composer and, thereby, about the extraordinary capacities of human beings. The same is true of Bartók's music and of Beethoven's. Neither is about what it reveals regarding the mental capacities and potentials needed for its creation, but as I have suggested earlier, music's

greatest masterpieces are profound in terms of what they show, whether or not this involves reference and an equivalent to predication.

My central thesis is that some music is profound as some chess play is; namely, for what it exemplifies and thereby reveals about the human mind. So far I have stressed the cognitive and formal aspects of this, which is natural in drawing the parallel with chess. But music has far greater powers, for instance, in its expressiveness. Earlier I argued that music does not convey important truths about the emotions, but now it is time to incorporate its expressiveness into a wider story about its profundity. Music's expressiveness can contribute to and shape its formal character, and in that way may display the cognitive capacities I stressed earlier. More than this, the greatest masterpieces can be revealing of human capacities for representing, understanding, controlling, balancing, and reflecting on the emotions, and thereby exhibit the affective dimension of our nature, as well as our more purely cognitive side.¹⁹

Stephen Davies,
Department of Philosophy,
University of Auckland,
Private Bag 92019,
Auckland, NEW ZEALAND.
sj.davies@auckland.ac.nz