

March 5, 1981

I would like to make some comments on Professor Kivy's consideration of the concept of animism in Chapter VII. My comments will be divided up as follows: 1) animism and the "natural language" of the emotions, and 2) animism, theology and music criticism.

1. Animism can be defined as the tendency of men to ascribe personal characteristics, including emotive expressiveness, to non-human objects. Kivy employs the concept of animism in Chapter VII in order to distinguish his theory of musical expression from Langer's. The basic difference between the two theories is that for Langer, music is symbolic of, because it is isomorphic with, the emotive life in general, while for Kivy, music is expressive of, because aspects of its structure resemble the behavioral structures expressive of, particular emotions. How can we know, however, that a piece of music is expressive of a given range of particular emotions, rather than of other things it may resemble, and how can we pick out the former from the latter? First, it must make sense to say that the expressiveness of the music resembles an expressive behavior pattern, and it must not make sense to say that the expressiveness of the music resembles anything else (a logical criterion). Secondly, we, the listeners, as beings capable of understanding our own and others' expressions of emotions, must be able to understand similar emotive expressiveness as if it were projected onto non-human objects, such as Saint-Bernards' faces or musical patterns (an empirical criterion).

The listener's animistic tendency is thus the empirical condition enabling him to recognize the particular emotions of which a piece of music is expressive. Kivy argues, though, that animism not only enables us to recognize the expressiveness of particular emotions, but also allows the expression theory to dispense with the need to regard music as a "language" of emotions, (first and last paragraphs of Chapter VII, Section 3). But is this language the same as the "natural language of the passions" referred to in Chapter III, Section 3? If so, and if Kivy is now rejecting such a language, is he not throwing an essential element of his cognitive speech theory of musical expression out the window? I think that Kivy appears to reject a natural language of the emotions in his discussion of animism, because not to do so would be to admit that such a language refers to the objective existence of expressive properties in non-human things prior to our animistic projections.

Perhaps there is a way out of this problem, such that Kivy's theory can retain both its animism and its objective expressive properties. It might not be outrageous to claim that the animistic tendency makes use of a language of emotions, rather than circumvents it. Both could be regarded, to use Heidegger's terminology, as equiprimordial [&] elements of a hermeneutical circle of the understanding of expression. Priority can be given either to animism or to language, as the context of explanation demands. For example, in The Corded Shell, priority is given to icon, pattern, and natural language as vehicles of expression at the end of Chapter VII, Section 1 and Chapter III, Section 3, where

cognitive recognition is at issue. But then priority is given to the animistic tendency to read the conventional into nature throughout Chapters VIII and IX, where cross-cultural diversity of interpretation is at issue.

2. Professor Feldman suggests that animism or anthropomorphism is a prejudice to be overcome in music criticism as well as in theology. What he seems to object to is the tendency of theologians and music critics to lapse into autobiographical description in talking about their respective subject matters, or to slide unknowingly into talking about their own subjective states as animistically projected onto the Deity or music, rather than about truly objective properties of the things themselves. Professor Kivy offers two counters to this objection. First, music critics have less interest than theologians in avoiding animism, because the former regard emotive expressiveness as essential to the concrete richness of music, while the latter are concerned to exclude attributes inappropriate to God's essence (or incompatible with religious dogma). Secondly, emotive description of music does have a referent in publicly and cognitively recognizable expressive properties in the object, while emotive description of God does not.

I think that Kivy's rejoinders to Feldman could be supplemented by the following considerations. The subject matter of theology, to take Feldman's example as a case in point, does not by its nature exclude the ascription of properties expressive of emotions. The exclusion of expressive properties from God's essence is by stipulation or convention, in conformity

with the requirements of scripture or religious dogma. The God of Maimonides is, like other divinities, a culture-specific entity, the range of whose attributes depends as much on the prescriptions of religious tradition as on those of logic. In theology no less than in music criticism, then, whether one ascribes expressive properties to the object is a matter of culturally and historically conditioned rules of convention, not merely of universal principles of logic.

If the argument above makes any sense, it would be interesting, though somewhat beyond the scope of this paper, to inquire into its consequences for theology. Kivy has argued that music critics have good reasons for ascribing expressive properties to music, while Feldman has claimed that the theologian has equally good reasons for not ascribing expressive properties to God. I have argued that the theologian may indeed have good reasons for doing this, but not reasons based on logic alone as Feldman-Maimonides argue, but rather reasons in part based, as are the reasons of the music critic, on convention. If this is so, then the theologian may also have good reasons, based on convention, for ascribing expressive properties to God. Such a divinity will not, to be sure, be the God of the Hebrews, but there are many other candidates in the history of religion to choose from. The Greek gods come immediately to mind. Each god is expressive of an emotion or range of emotions. In the words of Hegel,

Individualities, objectively beautiful, are the gods of the Greeks. The divine Spirit is here so conditioned

as to be not yet regarded as abstract Spirit, but has a specialized existence - continues to manifest itself in sense; but so that the sensuous is not its substance, but only an element of its manifestation.¹

Translate "Spirit" as particular emotions and "the sensuous element of its manifestation" as expressive properties, and we have a cognitive theory of divine expression. If there is a virtue in regarding music as expressive of emotions, perhaps there is also a virtue in regarding one's divinities as so expressive. Nietzsche claims that there are grounds of psychic utility for ascribing emotive expressiveness to divinities as well as to music:

Rhythm was meant to impress the gods more deeply with a human petition, for it was noticed that men remember verse much better than ordinary speech Above all, men desired the utility of the elemental and overpowering effect that we experience in ourselves as we listen to music: rhythm is a compulsion; it engenders an unconquerable urge to yield and join in; not only our feet follow the beat but the soul does, too - probably, one surmised, the soul of the gods as well!²

Here we see a pronounced animistic tendency in both musical and theological description, with a heavy tinge of arousal theory, however. The point is that emotive description in theology is no more inappropriate, in some contexts, than emotive description in music criticism.

Good work, A

Notes

1. Hegel, G.W.F., The Philosophy of History (Sibree trans.), New York, Dover Publications, Inc., 1956, p. 244.

2. Nietzsche, Friedrich, The Gay Science (Kaufmann trans.), New York, Vintage Books, 1974, pp. 138-39.