

# Dispositionalism as an Aesthetic Analysis of Music and Causation<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The objective of this research is to develop a philosophical account of the connection between music and causation, or to evaluate which causal theory best explains why music induces aesthetic emotional responses. According to the research, there are various ways in which music aesthetics explain these problems, including whether musical properties, music as expression, or causation in music, should be used to explain them. According to the researchers' analysis, the most plausible explanation is that of causation in music. In the next part, the dispositionalist theory—which holds that the experience of musical beauty depends on latent disposition to manifest at the time of perception—is defended by the researcher. In the last section, the disposition explanation is found to still have several issues, including a) if the disposition is conditional or categorical, b) whether it manifests in an essential or Humean way, and c) whether it is manipulative. In order to demonstrate that causation in music is categorical and needs to be explained along Humean dispositionalism, the researchers investigate these problems and offer a novel theory known as "non-predictive dispositionalism." The new theory also argues that the manifestation of these processes is non-predictive and weakly manipulative, which is more in line with the reality that listeners' emotional responses to music can differ from one another.

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## Introduction

### 1. Background and Significance of the Problem

Human emotions and moods are influenced by music. Researchers in neuroscience have examined how the brain processes emotions in a way that makes listening to music enjoyable. It was discovered that dopamine is released in response to music (Blood and Zatorre, 2001). These chemicals are released in a manner analogous to that of drug use. Thus, it appears that music is like a drug (Ball, 2013). It is evident that listening to music can have a cause-and-effect influence on emotions, evoking particular emotional reactions in listeners. Based on what has been said, the researchers wonder whether there is a philosophical basis for these things and, if so, what sort.

Regarding this matter, however, some philosophers contest that the idea that music can elicit emotions is misinterpreted, arguing that impartial assessments of pure music do not demonstrate a causal connection that is required to elicit feelings (Hanslick, 1891). Further analysis of this claim indicates that it most likely stems from the perception of pure music devoid of any powerful emotions (Budd, 1985: 28). Moreover, according to some academics, music portrays feelings that people can relate to but does not directly affect people (Robinson, 1994: 13). However, there are differing viewpoints on this matter. It is reasonable to argue that music has instead the power to possibly evoke strong feelings. According to some research work, this possibility must be investigated by providing a comprehensive explanation of the biological traits of the human body that are thought to be connected to the emotional component (Bashwiner, 2010). According to some scientists, studies on how music affects the brain can reveal whether a particular feeling is brought on by music (Juslin, 2011: 114–116).

The philosophical topic of causation in music has been addressed from two perspectives. The first is the view that music is an organized sound (Kania, 2024), which investigates causation in terms of the type of sound that is considered music. Because of this description, other sounds with organizational qualities, such as the human voice, may be

regarded as music. Furthermore, most music philosophers continue to explore pure music, or music without words. The second type focuses on the topic of music's influence on the listener's emotions, which is the study of music's aesthetic causation, with the causation theory used to explain this. This research article's objective is to address the second view.

## **2. Research Objectives**

1. To investigate and scrutinize the issues of music and causation, as well as the reasoning behind the aesthetics of music.
2. To introduce and defend a novel theoretical framework that addresses the causal explanations of music.

## **3. Research Method**

The philosophical research method employed in this research article involves the examination of the line of reasoning of philosophers who provide justifications and solutions to specific philosophical questions. The researchers subsequently present philosophical argumentation to evaluate the validity and soundness of those lines of reasoning, as well as to provide arguments in support of the researchers' proposed new theoretical framework.

## **4. Scope of Research**

This research study is qualitative in nature and is classified as documentary research. The research commenced with the collection of data from philosophical writings that were relevant to the theories of causation, including those on the philosophy of music, in order to analyze the issues that are the subject of the research questions.

## **Aesthetics of Music**

The study of beauty, mood, and emotions related to music is known as aesthetics of music. What exactly makes music important and beautiful has been questioned. According to Stephen Davies, the aesthetic qualities of music are the power of music at work when it comes to the expressive aspect of music, which includes the listener's emotional perception and interpretive experience (Davies, 1980). An alternative academic interpretation highlights that music's beauty possesses realist qualities, meaning it is independent of human judgment and dependence. According to Srinivasan (2002), there exist theories that explain beauty in this

manner; these ideas are referred to as "Beauty as the Quality of an Object." Contrastively, subjectivist philosophies maintained that beauty was the reaction of the observer to art. Put another way, people are the ultimate judges of beauty, and beauty is dependent upon their level of enjoyment. Subjectivist theories align with Srinivasan's (2002) definition of beauty, which is "Beauty as the Feeling of Pleasure." The question of music's aesthetics has, however, been approached from a variety of perspectives., For example, it is explained that there are musicologists who have described music from a "narrative perspective," while others have approached it from the standpoint of "music as drama" (Levinson, 2004).

However, because the issue of music aesthetics from the perspective of musicologists who explain music as narrative or drama will focus on the mechanism of composing music, the use of musical elements such as notes, melodies, chords, rhythms, and so on, as well as the composer's intention for the musical piece, it is beyond the scope of the researcher's study. When considering music from the standpoint of an aesthetician, it usually starts with a fundamental understanding of what music is. This kind of viewpoint encompasses the ideas that music is a property, that music is an expression, and that there is causality in music. However, in keeping with the goal of this study, the researchers will solely address music aesthetics from the standpoint of an aesthetician.

Aestheticians who characterize music in terms of musical properties regard musical properties as aesthetic properties that are contingent upon human experience. This is significant because human experience dictates the beauty of sound or the form of beauty. In his essay "Of the Standard of Taste" (Hume, 1889), Hume asserted that it is natural for us to refer to a standard of taste to ascertain aesthetic value. Kant (1914) sees aesthetic judgments as intrinsically universal and necessary, which are products of the common sense within the human mind. They are not objective property, as many individuals would consider beauty to be real property. It is natural for us to anticipate that others will concur with our assessment. According to his line of arguments, he may believe that the expression "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" does not accurately represent the individual's perspective on beauty. Rather, it illustrates the way we engage in discussions regarding aesthetic judgments.

According to empiricists, aesthetic value is derived from experience (Shelley, 2017: 13). In other words, aesthetic experience is intended to foster comprehension and admiration, which encompasses the object's aesthetic attributes. The object itself is valuable and significant for the

purpose of acquiring experience, a unique experience that can only be obtained from the object. The value of an aesthetic experience is realized when we encounter an object in its accurate state, in a manner that is consistent with its non-aesthetic properties. It is possible to assert that the aesthetic experience of music, to a certain extent, represents an attempt at comprehension when we examine the aesthetic value of music from an empiricist perspective. Moreover, to appreciate music is to perceive its aesthetic properties, which include its melodic quality or specific emotional responses. This type of experience is exclusively achievable through the listening of music under appropriate circumstances. (However, this argument is in accordance with the theory of disposition that will be developed upon in the subsequent section).

The issue of aestheticians' perception of music as expression pertains to its association with emotion; nevertheless, there are some inconsistencies. Music stimulates the emotions of the observer, as Juslin (2019) stated; however, the sound we perceive is the expression of emotion. This matter continues to generate controversy. In his book ***Musical Meaning and Expression*** (Davies, 1994), Davies addresses this issue. His perspective is that the act of listening to music is an expression of emotion, and the expressive force of music evokes an emotional response in the listener. His conviction was that music's capacity to articulate emotions was inherent. This is what renders music valuable, even though the listener's emotional response occasionally appears as a form of melancholy. The researchers agree with Davies' viewpoint, particularly that music is a representation of emotion. Because, when compared to other art forms, we can categorize music's feelings more readily and obviously. There is also a paradox in that even if we are aware that the music represents melancholy, we would choose to listen to it to perceive the beauty of the music via that sadness. This is compatible with Kania's (2024) statement that music has more philosophical puzzles than other art forms. However, the purpose of this study is to find an explanation for how music influences listeners' emotional responses. As a result, the analysis that music is an expression, or an emotional expression does not bring the researchers to the planned explanation.

The final approach is to elucidate music by considering its causation properties, or the nature of causation in music. In the direction of causality, the relationship between music and the listener is evident. In other words, the listener will undoubtedly experience specific emotions or sentiments each time they listen to music. This demonstrates that music has the capacity to induce specific responses from the listener. As Juslin & Sloboda (2013) observed in their article

Music and Emotion, there are specific elements of music that evoke similar responses in various audiences. Consequently, the researchers determined that the most plausible explanation for music was to regard it as having a causal nature, as evidenced by the examination of the aesthetics of music.

## Philosophical Explanations of Causation

The philosophical theory of causation should be employed to investigate the causal impact of music on the listener. Aristotle, the Greek philosopher who inspired this concept, addressed four causes in Physics, Volume 2, Chapter 3, and Metaphysics, Volume 2. Aristotle (1984) elucidates the four causes by using a sculpture as an example: material cause, formal cause, efficient cause, and final cause. A carved stone is a stone that has undergone a transformation from a standard stone to a carved stone. Therefore, the stone is a material cause. The formal cause of this transformation was the structure of the carved stone. The mechanic who transformed the stone into a sculpture is referred to as the efficient cause. The final cause of this transformation is the master's desire to become a master of the art, as evidenced by the stone-carving master's desire. The true constitution of things, according to Aristotle, can be comprehended through an understanding of their ends and the transformations that lead to them. The final cause is, therefore, the most significant factor for Aristotle.

The Aristotelian concept of fourfold cause is fundamental to understand the beginnings of causation theory. However, it is difficult to apply the concept to describe abstract processes because Aristotelian causal analysis may not explain causation, which is primarily questioned in this case regarding a listener's emotional response to music.

David Hume later defined causation in his renowned book *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, stating:

...we may define a cause to be an object followed by another, and where all the objects, similar to the first, are followed by objects similar to the second. Or, in other words, where if the first object had not been, the second never had existed. (Hume, 1900: 79)

Hume's definition of causation demonstrates a conjunction, not a necessary connection, between cause and effect. It is further analyzed by David Lewis that this definition can be

divided into two components. The initial statement is as follows: "we may define a cause to be an object that is followed by another," Hume refers to this statement as a form of causation known as regularity, which is the foundation of the "regularity analysis." The latter one "if the first object had not been, the second never had existed" is further emphasized by Lewis himself as "Hume's other words" which demonstrates the counterfactual nature of causation (Lewis, 1973: 556). That is, the absence of an antecedent precludes the existence of a subsequent event, which is in direct opposition to the existence of an afterthought. This interpretation is the foundation of the "counterfactual analysis of causation" (Lewis, 1973: 557). Both categories of causation demonstrate that there is a degree of necessity between cause and effect, as Hume stated in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Hume, 1739: 407), "According to my definitions, necessity is an indispensable component of causation." From Hume's empiricist perspective, causation is an occurrence that arises within our minds because of the association of ideas or groupings of ideas. It is probable that we anticipate the regularity of a pattern in a situation if we frequently observe and recognize it.

Hume's perspective on causation is to refute the notion that causes produce effects. He is an empiricist, which means that all information can be verified solely through experience. The explanation he provides is that we observe the effect that something causes, but we are never able to discern the cause that is responsible for the effect. We are simply witnessing the same event occur once more, anticipating that the outcome will be similar in the future.

However, this is precisely what Hume referred to as "regularities" that are solely the result of our habits. For instance, we observe that paper ignites and flames when it is in close proximity to a fire. We have observed this repeatedly, to the point where we have come to the conclusion that paper always burns when it is subjected to fire. However, if we inquire as to whether it is feasible for paper to be exposed to fire without igniting, we can confidently respond in the affirmative and visualize that the paper is not consumed by the fire. We may hypothesize that this is due to the paper's moisture content. It is evident that Hume's explanation of causation is a reduction of the theory of causation to the concept of serial causation. Additionally, this type of explanation does not address the scenario in which the paper does not ignite, as well as numerous other scenarios. We must always bear in mind that the outcomes of certain causes may not always be as anticipated or as expected. Nevertheless, Hume's theory of causation is regarded as a significant foundation upon which subsequent philosophers have

expanded and introduced a concept that further elucidates causation: the counterfactual, or INUS.

From the concept of Hume's causation as the regularities, we can explain the causation of music using Hume's framework, which states that the emotional response of listeners to music is merely a continuous occurrence. That is, we repeatedly see that when people listen to music, they will experience certain emotions, so we assume that music is the cause of the result, which is the emotional response. However, Hume's framework still cannot fully explain one important point of causation in music, which is that listeners experience different emotional responses when listening to music, or even when the same listener listens to the same music at different times. Therefore, the researchers still need to find a concept that can explain causation in music that covers all the cases mentioned above.

## **Dispositionalism**

Since the 20th century, a concept of causation has been proposed that covers things that Hume did not explain, namely dispositionalism. This concept was developed from the theory of consideration of causation in causal properties. Azzano and Raimondi (2022) consider that to consider the disposition, it is necessary to consider the issue of property, which is divided into two sides: the positional side and the categorical side. Some philosophers consider that positional and categorical can be clearly separated, with many different views. The first group is the categoricalists who view all properties as categorical, whereas dispositionalist view it as having at least some of the dispositional properties in objects. The latter view is that structural or geometric properties are categorical, while properties such as fragility or the ability to dissolve are dispositional properties. Those who view categorical properties are more likely to express their characteristics rather than having to wait for the emergence of a certain dispositional situation.

Mumford (1998: 64) raises the question: Is fragility a property that exists, rather than a tendency that it can or will occur in certain circumstances? Of course, the property of music is in the dispositional direction; that is, it is a property that must wait for sufficient readiness to occur for the manifestation of disposition. It is similar to the property of fragility or solubility, so it is not a categorical property. Kistler (2010) says that we cannot speak of disposition without

talking about what causes its manifestation. Mumford (2011) refers to a subject as a definite state or condition that creates the possibility of its manifestation. He saw that subjects were related to conditional sentences that were counterfactual. He gives the example of the sentence “Something being fragile is somehow related to the conditional that if it is dropped, it will break” which shows that the antecedent of the conditional points to triggering the disposition and that the following points out the manifestation of disposition. That is, fragility is an immanent existent thing. This fragility is activated when the glass is dropped and breaks. Fragmentation allows the ability to manifest itself, which is fragility. This view is consistent with Ryle's (1949) claim that disposition is not a state of being or something must be happening at the moment, but something that appears when an event occurs, known as manifestation. So, for here example, a person who is a drinker does not mean that at that time he is drinking alcohol. But the disposition of being a drinker will manifest itself when he drinks it. This characteristic is similar to music that has the disposition of arousal. When we say that music has such a disposition it does not mean that the music is stimulating at the time, but that the disposition is only manifested when the listener listens to the music. This is because, of course, what must follow is the undeniable emotional response of the listener, which is the manifestation of the disposition. However, regarding what is being dispositional, there is still some debate regarding whether it should be categorical or conditional.

Mellor (1974) holds that all properties are related to conditional characteristics. His example is triangularity that can be explained in the light of conditional characteristics. This is consistent with Ryle (2009) stating that disposition is the opposite of categorical properties. That makes it possible to have disposition without having to have a state, which, if the form of conditional analysis is correct, disposition is not a self-contained property. The conditional analysis can be argued to hold that there is nothing more of a disposition than a conditional truth of antecedents. Then what follows may be some event or condition, but it will not be a disposition. But if that were the case, the disposition would have no meaning.

Armstrong (1996: 15-18) differs from Ryle on account of disposition. He held that a disposition can be realized only by a definite condition, and this definite condition is the categorical basis of the disposition. Molnar (2003) views that disposition is being directed toward independent manifestation. For example, we can see solubility from its manifestation of dissolving, or we will see the disposition of fragility from the manifestation of breaking.

Armstrong thinks that all conditions need a truthmaker. And if the conditional is true, every disposition must have a categorical basis. Mumford states that if there are categorical properties together with a law of nature that governs the causal relationship between those properties. It shows that there is a categorical property that gives something to the disposition. This means that all genuine properties are categorical, and none of them are non-dispositional.

From both perspectives on disposition, it can be said that we can look at music through the lens of disposition. It is conditional in that the music causes the effect, namely the emotional response of the listener. But if that is the case, is it true that the effect of the cause must be the same? That is, every time music is listened to, listeners who are listening to the same piece of music will experience the same emotional response. This contradicts the reality that listeners listening to the same piece of music will experience one emotional response, but different emotional responses.

This analysis is consistent with the categorical model of disposition which is the view that music has a disposition that can express itself freely when there is sufficient preparation. For example, Mr. A listened to sad music last year. The result of listening to the music that time was that Mr. A felt that the music was sweet and beautiful. Later this year, Mr. A listened to the same piece of sad music, but the results of listening to the music this time were different from the previous times. That is, Mr. A cried because Mr. A had just been heartbroken. It can be seen that the same piece of music, even if the listener is a foreigner, may show different results. Listening to the music a second time after Mr. A's heartbreak caused the disposition in sad music, which is to be able to induce the listener to feel sad when they are ready enough, and that disposition eventually manifested itself. This manifestation is consistent with the Humean denial of necessity. connection, and view such relationship as a causal process in the way it manifests itself.

## **Music and Causation Analyzed through Non-Predictive Dispositionalism**

Handfield (2008) introduced the Humean approach to disposition to challenge the essentialist perspective on disposition, which necessitates fundamental causal power. Handfield posited that causal power has been regarded as possessing distinctive modal characteristics that are both original and irreducible and are frequently characterized by a necessary

connection. The issue of asserting that causal power is foundational remains ambiguous. Nevertheless, the existence of this fundamental causal power is regarded as contradictory to Humean philosophy, which rejects the necessity of connection. There is also the perspective that any natural properties are essential powers or possess the characteristics necessary to confirm a specific power. In this case, the action of natural properties is conveyed in a rule-based manner. Therefore, it will possess a necessary truth value that is indicative of the way one considers the necessity of connection. Naturally, this is the antithesis of the Humean perspective. The Humean concept of dispositionalism can be used to elucidate the origin of music, as previously mentioned. In other words, music and its audience exhibit distinct variations. Music has the capacity to evoke emotion, whereas the listener's disposition is palpable. Consequently, the connection between the observer and music is not a necessary one. In fact, Humean theorists would argue that causal power is still entangled with explanations by necessary connection, a position that is contradicted by Humean dispositionalism. However, in my opinion, it is feasible that music may possess causality, despite the absence of a necessary connection between the observer and the music.

It has been asserted that music possesses a disposition that can induce arousal, and the listener's disposition can be perceived when the listener is in an appropriate state and listens to music. In other words, the disposition will manifest itself when there is sufficient readiness, resulting in an emotional response or feeling from the recipient. However, it is evident that music possesses a causation characteristic that induces an emotional response in the listener. It demonstrates the causal influence of music. Nevertheless, the music and the listener continue to possess their own distinct and autonomous natures. Furthermore, the emotional response of the listener is a factor that may result in many listeners experiencing the same or a similar emotional response to a similar piece of music. However, it is inevitable that a minority of individuals, or even a single individual, will not exhibit the same affective response as the majority. Even if most individuals exhibit similar emotional responses, this does not necessarily imply that the intensity of the emotions that arise as a result of listening to music is consistent across all individuals. Alternatively, the affective responses of the same listener may differ if they listen to the same piece of music at different times. This demonstrates a disposition that is weakly manipulative, indicating that it lacks the capacity to impose a strong or violent effect. For instance, Miss A, Miss B, and Miss C are three individuals who listen to music that induces a sensation of tranquility. Miss A experiences a sense of tranquility and beauty when she listens

to this music. Miss B is in a state of relaxation and desires to take a nap after listening. Miss C listened and promptly transitioned to a different genre of music. The various effects or emotional responses to music, which are the manifestations of disposition, are weakly manipulative in nature and cannot force all listeners to feel calm.

Tallis (2014) defines the notion of causation as manipulability, which is a way of thinking about causes as the handles that make things happen. He believes that humans' causal awareness permits them to understand how to manipulate causes to happen or not happen, such as using a match to light a fire or water to dissolve sugar. However, it can be observed that manipulation is not always what we believe. This has a weakly manipulative nature, comparable to music, in which a vast number of listeners in a concert hall may react emotionally in the same direction. However, the feelings that develop do not have to be the same or felt equally.

Additionally, it is possible to observe that the dispositions' manifestation would be non-predictive. Nevertheless, what is the nature of this non-predictive attribute? David J. Rapp's (2022) novel theory of causation in entrepreneurship served as an influence on this concept. The researchers employ his concept to elucidate how the same individual can experience distinct emotions when listening to the same music at various times, and the listener can recall distinct sensations on each occasion. The same is true of entrepreneurial strategies that are counterproductive and intended to attract individuals by developing products. Initially, a person might keep an indifferent attitude toward the product; however, her sentiments will evolve over time. She continues to recall the distinct emotions that accompanied those two occasions. The non-predictive manifestation that the researchers propose in this context is such that the outcomes of listening to music cannot be accurately predicted. The listener's expectation of the music may not be as accurate as anticipated, regardless of the change in genre. Thus, it is rather difficult to predict.

Jonathan Bennett compiled and translated René Descartes' correspondence. In a letter to Marin Mersenne (Letter to Mersenne, 18.iii.1630), Descartes described the impact of music: the same piece of music that elicits laughter in some individuals can also cause them to weep (Bennett, 2017: 13). Schaefer (2017) supports Descartes's concept, positing that it is associated with the manner in which music triggers personal memories. The researchers are of the opinion

that Descartes's theories are partially accurate, and also believe that music has the potential to evoke a variety of emotions.

## Conclusion

The philosophical argument for the relationship between music and causation, which explains how music can evoke aesthetic affective responses, can be elucidated by a new theory known as "non-predictive dispositionalism." This novel theory demonstrates that causation in music is categorical. Therefore, it is an intrinsic property that must be explicated by Humean dispositionalism, which conceives of disposition by denying the necessity of connection. A manifestation of the disposition of the music and the disposition of the consumer is the emotional response of music listeners. That is, the disposition of music that tends to evoke emotion and the disposition of listeners that tends to experience it. These processes are weakly manipulative and non-predictive when music consumers experience varying emotional responses.

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