

## Music, Morality and Social Imagination

Concerning the question if there is any connection between music and morality there is, on the one hand, a kind of romanticism that supports the idea in a quite vague way and on the other hand a widespread scepticism that denies any connection at all: Music, it says, like every kind of art, is something beyond morality. I want to make a (somewhat more precise) suggestion in what sense there *can* be seen a connection. We first have to focus the question, for example: Can music yield moral knowledge or understanding? – My claim to this question is: Music can support and cultivate a human capacity that is fundamental to moral understanding. I am going to argue for this in three steps, dealing with music, morality and imagination.

1. What is it to listen to music? Listening to music, I want to say referring to Roger Scruton, is to engage in an imagination and by doing so to fill the musical forms with psychological content.<sup>1</sup> Scruton explains this thesis thoughtfully with his theory of metaphors in musical understanding. There is a way to assert that music can open up some thought and emotions of another (even if fictiv) person.
2. A fundamental capacity for moral behaviour, I will hold, is the capacity to imagine what another person is feeling, or more generally, is experiencing. This is the capacity, to put it in one word: to sympathize. We need this capacity for two important things: First to grasp the concrete situation of the other person properly (a condition for being able to find out the appropriate behaviour). Second, to acknowledge other people as equal to us in the whole – a condition to judge them part of our moral community.
3. Accordingly to point one I want to suggest that music can be seen as a way to improve this capacity of imagination, in two ways. On the one hand people train their awareness and sensibility to other souls. This might be called the „structural“ side. On the other hand there is also an aspect with regard to content: Music may offer people new ways of feeling they did not know before. And this may open their view for other peoples life and needs.

So, I will conclude, if we can cultivate and enhance our capacity of social imagination by listening to music and if we believe in social imagination as an important condition for morality, then music can (at least indirectly) contribute to moral understanding.

---

<sup>1</sup> Scruton, Roger: *The Asthetic Understanding*. London 1983.