

Autonomy, Genius, and the Sublime

by
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Abstract

There has long been a link acknowledged between human autonomy and works of artistic genius, sublime works which are recognised as being somehow divine in nature. It is the purpose of this paper to study this link. In the introduction, I shall discuss what is meant by autonomy, and how it is that we may define a special kind of autonomy as it relates to artistic geniuses and their sublime artistic creations. I shall also define what is meant by the sublime, or divine artistry, in literature using both ancient and modern sources. In part two, I shall examine a renaissance view of the ancient link between autonomy and the divine in *The Tempest* by Shakespeare; itself a sublime artistic work by an autonomous genius. In part three, I shall investigate a nineteenth century view of the link between autonomy and the divine, as seen in Lord Byron's sublime work *Manfred*. I shall then adapt the definition of the sublime in literature to apply to music, and show how the composer Robert Schumann managed to express Byron's work in a sublime piece of music. In part four, I shall compare the lives of two autonomous musical geniuses of the classical period of music, Mozart and Beethoven, for the purpose of showing the differing degrees of autonomy between the two composers.

Key Words: autonomy, genius, the sublime, divine artistry

Part 1: Introduction

The subject of human autonomy is, by its nature, paradoxical. What is it that we mean when we say that an individual is autonomous? In its simplest sense, human autonomy may be viewed as the planning and execution of any action. For example, I command my hand to pick up a pencil, and the action takes place. This kind of autonomy is one that all humans practice daily. But such simple actions become automatic. When I answer the telephone and have to take a message, my hand automatically picks up a pencil. In other words, many things we do daily may result from a practiced

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behavior which is now autonomic, a reaction of the body to outside stimulus. Animals with the most primitive of brains are capable of this kind of learned response. We need, therefore, a more specific description of what we mean by human autonomy.

My daily routine starts with a cup of coffee and a cigarette. So familiar is this pattern to me that I can hardly say that I have any choice in the matter. There is no autonomy in my making a cup of coffee and lighting a cigarette. But suppose for a moment that I have been worried about my health, and I decide that I should stop drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes. Here, I must exhibit truly autonomous actions. I must choose, against my comfortably automatic learned behaviors to make a cup of tea, instead of coffee. It will require extreme discipline for me to fight my body's demand for nicotine by not lighting a cigarette. As a nicotine habit in the form of smoking cigarettes is arguably the most severe of addictions, it is likely that my willpower will fail me and I shall go against my conscious wishes by lighting a cigarette anyway. In a sense, I must go against what is natural and easy for me to do, but I do so for a good reason: improved health. This comes closer to what we mean when we speak of human autonomy: the power of our will over our circumstances, our routines, and our environment. All humans can and do exhibit this kind of autonomy. But this kind of autonomy raises some new questions: Just how much of what we do is really autonomous? How often is it that we behave in a truly autonomous way? Do we really wish to be autonomous? Truly autonomous behavior requires effort and sacrifice. It also carries with it the risk of failure.

It can be argued that autonomy is in some ways undesirable. For example, I would not want to be in complete control of my autonomic nervous system. What would happen if I forgot to breathe? What would happen if, in a moment of despair, I chose not to breathe? There are many tasks my body performs which I should not desire to control consciously, for my own good. It can further be argued that autonomy is in many cases simply impossible. Should I wish to leave for work five minutes later than usual, no amount of effort on my part will change the train schedules, and nor should it. Human beings live in societies, and must therefore willingly give up control over countless aspects of daily life. It can be argued convincingly that the technologies we have developed to better our lives have also enslaved us. One need look no further than the clock or wristwatch for ample proof of this. We no longer plan our own work schedules. Rather, our work schedules are planned for us so that an institution may run more effectively. We are willing to sacrifice our control over how we plan and spend our time in order to provide better economic conditions, and the comfort and security that a society ensures. In other words, what I may desire as an individual may be at odds with the good of the community in which I live and work. In this light, it is understandable that autonomous behavior can be undesirable. The greater needs of the community come (as they must) before the desires of any individual.

It may be that the only real autonomy that we have is expressed in our free time, the

time in which we have no duties that are necessary for the operation of our community. But in our free time, how much of what we do is truly autonomous? Can we call sitting in front of the television with a beer an autonomous act? Perhaps so. But is this kind of autonomous act toward any good end or purpose? Probably not. And so it is that we may apply a narrower and more specific meaning to the term “human autonomy.” Here, I shall explore a view of autonomy as expressed by James Liotta in 1976; autonomy as it applies to geniuses and their sublime artistic creations (10–14).

Liotta’s view is that creative geniuses display autonomy in order to achieve works of true genius. We may define a genius as a unique person who can discover or create something never before imagined. The genius can see better and farther than can others in his field, and then finds, in happy cases, a way show the others what he has seen. The genius of science or mathematics can discern patterns and connections in nature where none had been seen before, and then express these patterns or connections so elegantly and simply that they then become obvious (after a time) to others in his field. A genius in the arts and humanities can inspire us through his new and unique ideas and creations. Such a genius may use forms which are already known, but extend them in unexpected and beautiful ways. A particularly striking example of this may be seen in the classical sonata style as developed by Beethoven in his final years. An artistic genius may create new forms of expression, such as can be seen in the serial music of A. Schoenberg. Whatever the case, the genius sees or senses more than the ordinary person, and expresses his experience in such a way that the ordinary person (perhaps not of his own time, but rather of a future generation) can share in the experience. There is ever a risk, however, that the genius may not be recognized in his own generation, and he may even be considered a crank. It may take quite some time for others in his field, followed by humanity as a whole, to catch up with him. The genius may be misjudged and scorned by his contemporaries. The genius must take the risk of being alienated by society. Thus the artistic genius, in order to create, must be autonomous to the degree that he is like a god within his own art.

And so it is that we may form a link between genius and autonomy. Again, autonomy is defined as it is by Liotta, namely, that the traits of the autonomous individual include strong self-control, and “unique or different” behavior which is “for a good reason...directed at a meaningful goal or end” (12–13). In other words, the genius uses his autonomy in such a way that he may go against convention in order to express something new and meaningful. For an artistic genius, this would mean an artistic expression which is so beautiful as to be considered sublime or divine. In this light, it is instructive to see how “the sublime” is traditionally defined. In order to do this, we may take Abrams’s views of “expressive theory” in the Romantic Period and compare it to what the first century writer and critic Longinus had to say on the subject of “the sublime,” or, as it may be stated, the relationship between great artistry and the divine.

The Sublime: Great Artistry and the Divine

Some elements of expressive theory, as explained by Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, can be seen in Longinus's *On the Sublime*. In expressive theory, the use of language is of primary concern ("the elements of diction; especially of figures of speech"), but we must discern whether the poet is uttering genuine emotion and imagination, or whether he is "deliberate[ly] aping poetic conventions" (Abrams 23). Longinus clearly agrees that the use of language is important, and a great deal of *On the Sublime* is devoted to technical aspects of language use; fully thirteen chapters (XXX–XLIV) (Longinus 30–91). As to Abrams's comments about the sincerity and genuineness of a poet's expressions, we also find Longinus in agreement. For example, Longinus complains of turgidity, and "all swellings which are hollow and unreal" (Longinus 57). Abrams tells us that "poetry is defined in terms of the imaginative process which modifies and synthesizes the images, thoughts, and feelings of the poet" (Abrams 22). Longinus is in agreement with this view also, when he says that the imagery found in poets "admit[s] an excess which passes into the mythical and goes beyond all that is credible" (Longinus 71). In expressive theory, lyric poetry is considered to be of the highest order, whereas other forms, such as the narrative, are inferior; "plot becomes a kind of necessary evil" (Abrams 23–24). Longinus expresses the same sentiment when he states that *The Odyssey* is inferior to *The Iliad*, the former being more wholly narrative, including many sections of mere story-telling which are in no way sublime (Longinus 64). In expressive theory, a distinction is made between born poets and made poets. The natural (or born) poet creates superior poetry in the sense that his works will contain more inspired human feeling than will the works of the made poet (Abrams 24). Here again, Longinus is in agreement, where he contends that the properties of sublimity in poets "are in most cases native-born," and again where he states that "great natural genius" is of the greatest import in the creation of sublime works (Longinus 60–61).

**Part 2: Autonomy and the Sublime:
A Renaissance Point of View**

Autonomy and the Sublime in Shakespeare's "The Tempest"

It is clear that the genius Shakespeare understood the above-mentioned definition of autonomy. Throughout *The Tempest*, Prospero shows himself to be an autonomous individual. In his life before arriving at his island, we learn that Prospero assigns the governing of Milan to his brother, so that Prospero may have the time to spend on his arcane studies. Prospero risks the usurpation of his dukedom in order to improve his mind, and this free choice in fact leads not only to the loss of his dukedom, but also to his being marooned on an island. When, fortuitously, the ship containing Prospero's enemies passes by the island, Prospero, by his art (magic), sets into motion a chain of

events that will in the end resolve all conflicts amicably, ensure that his own heirs will one day occupy the throne of Naples, and restore to Prospero his rightful place as duke of Milan. Perhaps Prospero's most striking act of autonomy comes at the end of the play, where he chooses to give up his formidable magical powers before returning to his rightful position in Milan: he reverses his original choice, now choosing to rule rather than to study his arcane art. Prospero acts autonomously for what he sees to be good reasons, learns from his mistakes, and is not afraid to make changes and take responsibility for his actions; a truly autonomous individual.

The Analogy between Artistry and the Divine as Expressed in "The Tempest"

It is clear that Shakespeare was well aware of the traditional analogy between artistry and the divine. Prospero, by virtue of being an adept in his Art (his magical powers), has the power of a god on and around his island. He is able to raise storms and command spirits to do his bidding. In *Ion*, Plato (through Socrates) compares the inspiration of the Muse (divinity) to a magnet. An inspiration can be passed on to a poet, who, under the guidance of the Muse, can then express it so that others may be affected, so that all may be drawn to and share in the inspiration (Shafer 15–16). We may view Prospero's actions in this light. By way of his art, Prospero attracts those who pass near him, and is able to alter the ways in which they think and act, and inspire them to see things differently. Sir Philip Sidney said that "the poet is analogous to God because the poet creates a second nature" (Shafer 16). Prospero is analogous to God, in that he can bow the forces of nature to his own will and for his own purpose, thereby creating on his island what may be called "a second nature." Plato said that order is made out of chaos, which is surely a divine act (Shafer 17). Prospero does precisely this, first by creating a scene of chaos in the form of a storm, and then, by his art, drawing order from the chaos: the resolution of conflicts, the improvement of the villains, the favorable betrothal of his daughter, and his return to his rightful place as Duke of Milan.

While it is clear that Prospero is in control of Ariel, the latter may be seen as Prospero's muse (in Plato's sense), for without Ariel and his legion of spirits, Prospero would be unable to create the order he envisions. Finally, as Dobrée mentions, we see "forgiveness, call it grace if you like" in *The Tempest*. The bestowal of grace is, in Christian thought at least, the most generous gift God gives to sinners. But in *The Tempest*, it is Prospero who bestows grace upon those who have sinned against him. Prospero, the artist, the autonomous genius, is analogous to God.

"The Tempest" as a Work of Sublime Genius

The play *The Tempest* itself may be seen as a sublime work by the genius Shakespeare, using the ancient standards of Longinus. Longinus specifies that there must be an orderly arrangement of a work as a whole (Longinus 56). *The Tempest*, as a whole,

shows such an orderly arrangement, in the sense that it is circular: Prospero is deposed, Prospero grows in power, Prospero brings order by setting things right, and finally, Prospero regains his rightful place. We may also detect a linear order to the play, from chaos to order. Longinus insists that technical expertise in the use of language is essential to sublimity; clumsy usage is not permissible (Longinus 56–59). Shakespeare’s use of language in *The Tempest* is expert and devoid of clumsiness. Longinus tells us that “nothing trivial, or undignified, or low” can be allowed in a sublime work (Longinus 66). While it is true that in Act III scene ii Shakespeare uses some puns which suggest excrement and urination (lines 19–20, spoken by Trinculo and Stephano), these puns are spoken for comic effect by low characters (Shakespeare 86). Longinus would forgive these puns, however, as he states that laughter is also a passion, and may contribute to the sublime (Longinus 87). Longinus allows that “vulgar idiom is sometimes much more expressive than ornamental language” in that vulgarisms may add realism and credibility, “a touch of common life” (Longinus 81). We see such a permissible vulgarism in *The Tempest* in Act IV scene i, where Prospero warns Ferdinand against the consequences of breaking Miranda’s “virgin-knot” before the nuptials (Shakespeare 97–98). Certainly, a father’s referring to his daughter’s “virgin-knot” to his future son-in-law must be considered vulgar, but rings credible, and would therefore be no offense to Longinus.

While much of what is spoken in *The Tempest* goes beyond what may be said naturally in real circumstances, Longinus tells us that, in the sublime, there should be speech which “surpasses human standards” (Longinus 86). Descriptive lists of images, according to Longinus, must be placed in ascending order of importance (Longinus 91). Such correct usage may be seen in Gonzalo’s description of his ideal society in Act II scene ii (Shakespeare 67–68). Longinus insists that the choice and arrangement of words and rhythm must be pleasing to the ear, but also inspiring; the words must never seem stale, but rather capture our full attention (Longinus 88–89). Numerous examples in *The Tempest* show Shakespeare’s mastery in these regards. Longinus states that “a figure is best when the very fact that it is a figure passes unnoticed” (Longinus 73). One example of such a figure from *The Tempest* is where, in Act IV scene i, Ferdinand avows that no temptation “shall melt/Mine honor into lust” for Miranda (Shakespeare 68). The use of the word “melt” goes by unnoticed, and yet it serves to compare Ferdinand’s honor to a strong metal which cannot be softened by the fire of lust. It is comforting to know that if there are lapses of greatness in this work, Longinus allows that we cannot expect from great writers a uniform level of excellence throughout a work (Longinus 83). Longinus would certainly not disqualify *The Tempest* on the basis of any lapse in excellence. Longinus contends that a sublime work will be one that has stood the test of time, that it will appeal to people of various walks of life over many generations (Longinus 60). On this basis, as well as the bases mentioned earlier, it is safe to assume that Longinus would indeed consider *The Tempest* to be a sublime work.

**Part 3: Autonomy and the Sublime:
A Romantic Point of View**

Autonomy and the Sublime in Byron's "Manfred"

It may be instructive to look at autonomy as seen through the eyes of the 19th century poet, Lord Byron, himself an autonomous genius. The eponymous character in Lord Byron's *Manfred* shows the attributes of a supremely autonomous individual, and one cannot help but see that the character Manfred is an expression of Byron's own highly autonomous nature. The autonomy of Manfred is shown not only in the dramatic action of the play, but also in the sublime qualities of the language that the genius Byron used.

Byron's character Manfred shows his autonomy in many ways throughout the poem. He can call up spirits (forces of nature, really), to do his bidding. In Act I, scene i, he asserts his control over the spirits first with threats (written charms which the spirits fear), and when this does not work, uses the power of his mind, sheer will-power, (thoughts of the "the strong curse which is upon my Soul") to make the spirits manifest themselves (Byron 126). Manfred's attempted suicide in Act I scene ii can be seen as an autonomous action (Byron 132). The hunter who interferes and prevents the suicide remarks on Manfred's boldness and relative uniqueness in achieving such a high peak on the mountain (Byron 133). In Act II, we learn of the sin which sets Manfred apart from other men: incest. The autonomous Manfred has broken the ultimate sexual taboo. Further asserting his independence, Manfred warns the hunter against following him when he leaves. In Act II, scene ii, Manfred refuses to submit himself to the Witch, who promises that she can help him if only he will swear his obedience to her (Byron 141). In Act II, scene iii, Manfred refuses to bow before the powerful Arimanes, and is instead bold enough to suggest that Arimanes and Manfred bow down together before God (Byron 145). When the shade of Astarte appears, only Manfred has the power to make her speak (Byron 148). In this scene, one of the spirits remarks with admiration on Manfred's extreme autonomy, saying that Manfred "mastereth himself, and makes/His torture a tributary to his will" (Byron 148). In Act III, scene i, and again in scene iv, Manfred even rejects the help of God by steadfastly refusing the Abbott's offer of absolution (Byron 149–153, 156–157). Finally, Manfred refuses to be led to Hell by his own guardian spirit, saying that he will yield only to Death (Byron 157–159). The editor Frank D. McConnell, in a foot note, tells us that we should interpret the word "genius" as "guardian spirit" in line 81 of Act III, scene iv (Byron 157). But I wonder if this spirit is not really a metaphysical aspect of Manfred himself. If this were so, we could see Manfred using his autonomy to master his own darker self. These examples show us a man who makes all his own choices, takes responsibility for his actions, and will be controlled by no other force. Manfred is completely autonomous. If in our definition of autonomy, we require "a good reason" or motiva-

tion for autonomous actions, we can see that Manfred does indeed have good reason. He seeks oblivion in order to end his pain, and wants to speak one last time to Astarte.

The dramatic and poetic qualities of the verse are affected by Manfred's autonomy. When asserting his power over spirits, we see arrogant, exclamatory language, with dramatic pauses, such as in Act I, scene i line 40 "Who is undying, -Rise! Appear! - Appear!" or line 49 "I do compel ye to my will, -Appear!" (Byron 126). When Manfred is alone with his thoughts, his language flows lyrically, particularly in his appreciation of beauty. A striking example of this can be seen in Act III, scene iii, where he is saying farewell to the setting sun (Byron 153). When Manfred argues for his autonomy against the Abbott's offer of absolution, we see a mixture of such things as: curt, bitter language ("Old man, there is no power in holy men"), graphic imagery as when he compares himself to Nero ("would have staunch'd/The gushing throat with his officious robe"), and desolate imagery, as in his description of the fiery wind "of the most lone Simoom" (Byron 150-153). In short, we see that Manfred, in his autonomy, uses a range of expressive language: from the most curt and forceful demands to the most sublime lyricism.

Schumann's Sublime Musical Interpretation of "Manfred"

So far, this paper has been devoted to the field of literature, but the general definition of what is sublime in literature may be applied to music as well. Let us review the basic principles of what makes a work of poetry sublime, but state them more generally so that they can apply to music (or any other art form for that matter). First, there must be great attention paid to technical details. As Stanislavsky once said of acting, there is freedom in technique. Next, there must be a sincerity and genuineness of expression. There should be nothing turgid or hollow in the work. The "imaginative process...modifies and synthesizes the images, thoughts and feelings" of the artist (Abhams 57). There is almost always a link between sublime works of art and native-born genius (Longinus 60-61). Using this generalized definition, surely Schumann's musical interpretation of Byron's *Manfred* in the overture to his composition of the same title fits these criteria.

Byron's *Manfred* had an extremely profound effect on Robert Schumann, the musical genius who composed a melodrama based on the poem, only the overture of which is commonly performed in our time (Shafer 32). I will show how Schumann expresses Byron's poem musically in the overture to his composition, and how it is that Schumann manages to convey Manfred's autonomy through sublime music. Significant is the fact that Schumann chose to use a sonata form for his overture, as we know that Schumann, being the autonomous individual that he was, was very much in favor of breaking away from classical forms (Schonberg 170). But it is not so surprising that Schumann decided to use such a clearly established musical form when we consider that he was using Byron's work as model, which is in the clearly recognizable form of a

play, with its acts and scenes. The sonata, by its very nature, lends itself to the exploration of themes, usually two, but in the case of Schumann's overture, three.

The three themes Schumann uses are not so very different in nature (unified, as they are, by their highly chromatic nature) as to suggest more than one character, but rather they suggest the different moods of one character. Seen thus, the three main themes that make up the material for the overture represent different aspects of the character Manfred. It is possible to relate the thematic material to the character Manfred as he emerges in Byron's poem. In the first theme, we hear something of Manfred's mysterious powers and his inner restlessness (bars 26–28), followed immediately by the demanding and forceful aspect of Manfred in the strong dotted rhythms (bars 29–30), and the energetic, restless arpeggios following that (bars 35–38). These forceful, restless, and energetic elements appear often in the development section, dominating the music wherever they appear. The second theme has a troubled, yet sweet and mysterious quality, which conveys the sense of longing which is present in Byron's character. Dr. Steiner remarks that this melody was later used in the requiem section of Schumann's work. While the theme does have funerary overtones, we can also hear in it Manfred's longing for oblivion. The third theme is highly romantic in nature, with lush, chromatic accompaniment, which lends the theme a somewhat regretful feeling. It is here that we can hear Manfred's vision of Astarte, an echo of the tender, loving, and regretful language that Byron's Manfred uses when speaking of her.

In the development section of the overture (starting bar 81), we can, with a little imagination, hear the events which transpire in the poem when Manfred goes to the hall of Arimanes in Act II, scene iv of the play: Manfred's demands in the dotted rhythms and arpeggios starting in bar 81, and Manfred's questioning of Astarte and her enigmatic answers in the variations and fragments from the third theme between bars 96 and 114. One gets the impression that the vague answers of Astarte may in fact be a projection created by Manfred himself. If we view the three themes of the overture as aspects of Manfred (his autonomy, his control over events), we can conclude that Schumann, with his technical and artistic mastery of composition, has succeeded in showing Manfred as the autonomous individual we see in Byron's poem. Additional evidence of Manfred's autonomy in Schumann's work is shown by the fact that elements other than the three themes (and their fragments) are totally subordinate. For example, the trio of trumpets which are heard as new material in the coda at bar 258, to my mind at least, represent the Abbott offering absolution. But this new material remains weak and subordinate, merely the suggestion of the presence of another person who has no influence over Manfred. Schumann, through his native-born talent, manages to express a sublime work of literature in a sublime work of music.

**Part 4: Two Autonomous Geniuses of Classical Music:
A Comparison of Differing Degrees of Autonomy**

No one could doubt that Mozart and Beethoven created what must be considered some of the most sublime music ever written. Both men were highly autonomous in terms of Liotta's definition: autonomous for a good reason, in this case the goal being to produce sublime musical works. Both had the native-born genius which Longinus and Abrams speak of. Nevertheless, it is Beethoven who strikes us being the more extremely autonomous of the two men. The lives of these two composers provide us with a highly instructive comparison of two differing degrees of autonomy toward a meaningful goal. We shall see that the differing backgrounds of Mozart and Beethoven contributed to the difference in the extremity of their autonomy, which in turn affected all aspects of their private and professional lives.

Mozart and Beethoven both behaved autonomously in order to create the great compositions of which they were capable, compositions which were to be of great importance in the history of Western music and culture. But it is Beethoven who was the more autonomous, whose music had more impact on the musicians and other artists who followed him in the Romantic Period of the nineteenth century. I do not, however, intend to show that one composer was greater than the other, that the works of one were more sublime than those of the other. Such a debate is dubious at best, and in my opinion fruitless. If we trace the lives of both composers, from birth to death, we can see that Beethoven was the one who was more independent, less cooperative, and more extreme in his personal behavior (often to his own detriment), while at the same time more in control of his own life, and more responsible financially. I shall trace and compare events in the two composers' lives from what we know of their childhood years, their early lives as students and their relationships with their teachers, their public behavior, their personal relationships, their professional relationships with their colleagues and patrons, and finally, their music and approach to composition. We will find that Beethoven was, and in fact had to be, more extremely autonomous than Mozart was, or even could be. We shall examine how it is that their lives and times necessitated this difference.

Both Mozart and Beethoven showed signs of genius early in their lives, but it was Mozart who was to have the many advantages that Beethoven never had. As a child, Mozart had constant praise and approval, which he came to depend on, as well as contact with some of the greatest teachers and performers of the time. Mozart's father, Leopold, exploited his son's prodigy for profit, taking the young Wolfgang all over Europe, and even to London, to show the boy off to the aristocracy as a *wunderkind* (Woodford 9–68). Though Leopold may have been exploitative, it is also clear that he and Wolfgang had a deep and abiding love for each other, and furthermore that Wolfgang was a charming and lovable child who was “utterly obedient to his parents,” and

so dependent on his father that he never learned in later life to be practical in taking care of his own his business affairs (Woodford 48–49). We do, however, see a few signs of independence in the young Mozart when it came to matters of music, such as when he angrily pointed out his father’s mistakes while playing duets with him while in London (Woodford 43).

Beethoven did not have any of Mozart’s advantages. He had no such close personal and professional relationship with his father, Johann, and while Johann had tried to exploit the young Ludwig as a *wunderkind* comparable to Mozart, the attempt was not successful (Orga 21). Johann, hoping to profit by showing the world a second Mozart, even went so far as to punish the young Ludwig when he found his son attempting to compose. The abusive Johann wanted the young Beethoven to practice the keyboard and develop the technique necessary to impress rich and influential people (Orga 28). But the young Ludwig was no cooperative and charming young Mozart, and his skills on the keyboard were hard won, Johann having forced Ludwig to practice hard daily for hours at a time (Orga 28). The young Ludwig did not have the happy family life that the young Mozart had, and was, in the words of a certain Dr. Müller, “a sad, and taciturn boy” who spent much of his time alone (Orga 29). Ludwig simply did not have the character traits necessary to be a successful and charming *wunderkind*. Also, Beethoven learned to be financially responsible early on. When it became clear to the authorities that the alcoholic and irresponsible Johann could not be trusted to head the family any longer, Ludwig, at age eighteen, was officially declared head of the family, with half of Johann’s salary going directly to young Ludwig (Orga 36). Beethoven’s relationship with his father had become the exact opposite of Mozart’s relationship with Leopold. The differences in the early lives of Mozart and Beethoven, as well as their differences in character, were to have a great influence on their relative abilities to act autonomously later in life.

Mozart was a cooperative and attentive student. For example, when he was eight years old, he formed a close (one might even say “loving”) relationship with J.C. Bach while in London, and eagerly set out to learn the older man’s style of composition (Woodford 40). Later, in Italy (at age sixteen), he met and greatly impressed Padre Martini, who was considered to be “the greatest music scholar of the time,” by easily passing the difficult musical tests Martini had set for him (Woodland 59). It is significant that four years later when Mozart was back in Salzburg and his patron, the Elector Archbishop Colloredo (a boorish man with no musical sensibilities), criticized Mozart’s compositions, Mozart was so lacking in self-confidence that he wrote an obsequious letter to Padre Martini including examples of his compositions, in order to seek the old man’s advice and approval (Woodford 71).

One cannot imagine Beethoven showing such dependency on the approval of anyone, or ever lacking self-confidence in his work. He was, as opposed to Mozart, absolutely confident of his own genius and merit as a composer (Schonberg 113). For

example, when told by a friend in Vienna that the parallel fifths which appeared in some of his compositions were forbidden by the rules of classical harmony, and further told that all authorities agreed on this point, Beethoven dismissed the rule as nonsense (Schonberg 113). He even went so far as to work out one harmony exercise seventeen different ways to prove the traditional rules wrong, writing at the bottom of the page *Du Esel* (which is German for “you ass”) to show his contempt for the authorities of traditional harmony (Schonberg 113).

In public, there is no doubt that both Mozart and Beethoven behaved outrageously at times. Mozart made many enemies in Vienna with his frequent, boisterous criticisms of other composers working there at the time (Woodford 108). But it is also true that Mozart was free with his praise when he felt it was deserved, endeared himself to many people, and created many close friendships (Woodford 108). While he felt contempt for the aristocracy and hated being treated as a mere servant (as is evident from his private letters), he was careful not to offend patrons and was not above a little manipulative bowing and scraping to those in power, particularly toward the Emperor Joseph II (Woodford 98–101). Beethoven did not care what anyone thought, including his aristocratic patrons, from whom he expected, and got, treatment as an equal, not as a mere servant (Schonberg 113–114). In public, Beethoven did little to endear himself to others, and was frequently ill-dressed, aloof, drunk, and downright rude (Orga 159–160). Beethoven was independent, and did not have the great need for companionship and approval that Mozart had.

In their private lives, we see much more dependency on the part of Mozart. Mozart's dependency on his father, and the older man's considerable control over Mozart, can be seen in the letters Mozart sent begging his father's permission to marry (Woodford 93–94). While Mozart's marriage to Constanze Weber could be seen as an autonomous act, a revolt against Leopold, who refused to approve the match, it is more likely that Mozart chose to marry her because he felt a deep need for the support and encouragement of Constanze, as well as a desire for children of his own who would take care of him in later life. Leopold, being back at his post in Salzburg, was not in Vienna to take care of Mozart there. Mozart also became a Free Mason, and while we may view this as Mozart's endorsement of the new ideas of brotherhood and equality among all men regardless of class, it is likely that Mozart felt the need of a reliable group which would support him in times of need (Woodford 105–106). Mozart did in fact seek financial support from at least one Masonic brother, which I shall come to later.

Beethoven, while he did have some close and devoted friends, chose to isolate himself from society, and his reasons for doing so are made clear in the famous Heiligenstadt document, dated 6 October 1802, which was addressed to his brothers and to be read upon his death. In the document, Beethoven laments his deafness as the cause for what others see in him as misanthropy and aloofness (Orga 78–81). Beethoven felt that he could not allow the world to know that he was going deaf; his

fierce sense of pride would not allow it. Unlike Mozart, Beethoven did not seek to join any kind of brotherhood for support, and he even managed to alienate his most devoted friend and chronicler Schindler by way of a vindictive letter full of outrageous insults (Orga 157–158). Beethoven never married, and though it is true that he did propose marriage on more than one occasion, these proposals were always made to women who were quite simply unobtainable (Orga 96–105). Beethoven’s famous letter to the “Immortal Beloved,” which was found among his things after he died, is addressed to an abstraction, the perfect woman. A real woman could never have lived up to Beethoven’s expectations. I conclude this because all attempts to identify this woman have ended in failure. I believe Beethoven wrote this letter to an abstract construct of the perfect woman which he created in his own mind, and knew he would never find. Beethoven chose to live in isolation as a bachelor, dependent on no-one, and I believe he did so because a wife might prove to be not only a disappointment, but worse, a distraction from his work. He behaved in such extremes of temper that he was unable to keep a servant for any longer than six weeks at a time, and his lodgings were frequently filthy (Orga 121). Perhaps Beethoven’s most outrageous act was his attempt to gain exclusive guardianship of (and therefore absolute control over) his nephew Karl after the death of the boy’s father Caspar, and wrest the boy away from his mother by repeated court battles (Orga 167–170). It may be argued that this shows some dependency on the part of Beethoven, that he needed the emotional support of a loving “son.” But it is more likely that Beethoven simply wanted to recreate himself in Karl, forcing the boy to practice the piano long and hard every day, and placing the boy under so much pressure to do as Beethoven wished in all matters that, in the end, the boy attempted suicide (Orga 171). The boy was returned to his mother’s house after this incident, and Beethoven did not seek to get Karl back (Orga 171–172). What Beethoven could not completely control, he did not want in his life.

In their professional lives, we see autonomy in both Mozart and Beethoven, though Beethoven was certainly the more autonomous. Mozart, in his first truly autonomous act, went against his father’s wishes and gave up his position (and thus financial security) as a servant in the employ of the hated Archbishop Colloredo in May of 1781 so that he could take his chances in Vienna as a composer and pianist (Woodford 88). Mozart had put up with a great many personal insults from the Archbishop, and finally refused to address him as a superior any longer. Mozart’s refusal to behave respectfully to the Archbishop escalated to such a point that Mozart was sent on his way with a literal “kick on the backside” (Schonberg 101). This breaking with a reliable patron (however cruel and stupid that patron may have been), shows real courage, and Mozart was one of the first composers in history to risk going his own way in order to compose what he wanted, where he wanted (Schonberg 99). While it is true that in Vienna Mozart, like all composers who want to make a living, wrote music to order, “he could never write cheap music. Mozart never prostituted himself” (Schonberg 99).

Nevertheless, Mozart in Vienna still had to prostrate himself before the aristocracy to get commissions, and while he must have made considerable money from his many concerts as a piano soloist and music teacher, he died poor (Schonberg 99). In Mozart's final years, we see many pathetic letters written to his Masonic brother Michael Pluchberg, begging for enough money to get by on (Woodford 126–131). Mozart was simply not self-controlled enough to manage his money responsibly.

We cannot imagine Beethoven reduced to begging, and we see in fact the exact opposite. Beethoven demanded money and got it. One example is very enlightening: In order to keep Beethoven in Vienna, a contract was drawn up in 1808 by three of his patrons (Archduke Rudolph, Prince Lobkowitz, and Prince Kinsky), in which the three guaranteed a yearly payment of 4,000 gulden to Beethoven (Schonberg 114). When Lobkowitz went bankrupt and Kinsky died, Beethoven actually went to court to demand that the Kinsky estate and the Archduke make up the difference and uphold the obligations of the contract (Schonberg 114–115). Beethoven never begged for money, he demanded it and saw it as his right to do so. Beethoven was not above duplicitous and illegal dealings with publishers to make what he thought was fair money for his works (Orga 112–114). Also, he was responsible with his money, and had a goodly amount saved by the time he died (Orga 162).

As regards their musical compositions, we can see that Mozart was more flexible and cooperative, more sensitive to his listeners and performers than Beethoven was. Mozart produced many operas, the most significant being the three great Mozart/da Ponte operas. An opera requires that the composer be flexible, and work in cooperation with the librettist, the manager of the opera house, the orchestra, and especially the singers if he wants to see his work successfully performed. The composer must be willing to surrender some of his autonomy in order to accomplish this. We know from Mozart's own comments that he wanted to work cooperatively with da Ponte and others to ensure the success of the operas (Schonberg 106). While Beethoven loved opera, he only managed to produce one (Orga 90). Beethoven was, perhaps, too strongly autonomous an individual to work cooperatively and flexibly enough to produce any more than the one opera, *Fidelio*. We know that Mozart would alter or simplify arias, or compose them in such a way that they would suit a given singer's voice, in his own words, "as perfectly as a tailored suit of clothes" (Woodford 46). Mozart encouraged the singers and orchestra during rehearsals, rarely getting angry at mistakes, and always trying to maintain an atmosphere of good humor and cooperation (Woodford 113). In Mozart's instrumental music, we see a smooth and fluent style which, while not without difficult passages, rarely overtaxes the competent performer or listener. Beethoven, on the other hand, often wrote passages of extreme difficulty with no regard for the strain caused to the performer or listener. The *Hammerklavier* sonata is an extreme example of this, and is widely recognized as the most technically difficult work ever written for piano (Schonberg 118). Another example of

Beethoven's extremely autonomous nature was his insistence on conducting his own works even after he was stone-deaf, thus causing innumerable problems until the orchestra learned to ignore Beethoven's wild and out-of-time conducting, and instead watch the *Kapellmeister*, who discreetly got the orchestra to watch him without Beethoven's knowledge, thus preventing disaster in performance (Orga 131).

Mozart was a brilliant and prolific composer, and while it would be a mistake to say that composing was effortless for him, it nevertheless came more easily to him than it did to Beethoven. There are myriad accounts of Mozart virtually taking dictation while composing, quickly writing out fully completed works on paper with no revision or correction necessary (Schonberg 95–110). Beethoven, a much less prolific composer, worked hard on his compositions, making many plans and revisions, as is evident from his surviving "sketch books" (Orga 85). Add to this the fact that Beethoven wrote his most unique and powerful works while deaf, and we see a composer who was more self-disciplined and self-motivated than Mozart was. It is a curious fact that when Mozart was in times of personal crisis (particularly 1788 until his death), we do not hear his misery in his music; he could and did separate himself from the outside world when composing (Woodford 125). While this may show autonomy, independence from the outside world, it may just as easily show Mozart using composition as a means of escaping the depressing realities he could not face.

In Beethoven's music, we hear the force and passion a strong-willed man, and we get a sense of his powerful, independent character (Schonberg 121). Composing was no escape for Beethoven. It was, rather, a mode of personal expression for him. His latest works are not easy to listen to. Beethoven pushes the Classical forms to their very limit, often jarring the listener with sudden mood changes and complex harmonies. This is particularly true of his last three string quartets. The critic Schonberg says of the three that they "carry music to a height that actually seems to transcend music" (122). Beethoven challenges the listener to follow him far afield in his music, and the listener must exert considerable effort to keep up with him, particularly in the latest works. Beethoven was a visionary whose music was to have a powerful influence on the composers and other artists and intellectuals of the Romantic Period (Schonberg 122). We can only marvel at Beethoven's incredible force of character: to compose such works as have never been equaled in their brilliance and originality under the burden of total deafness. It is no wonder the Romantics saw him as a hero. He was.

The fifteen or so years between Mozart's birth (1756–1791) and Beethoven's (1770–1827) were significant ones. Mozart, born less than a generation earlier, nevertheless grew up in a different world from Beethoven, a world where men were not considered equals and musicians were the liveried servants of aristocratic patrons. He came from a loving, musical family, where he learned to be dependent, not just emotionally, but financially as well, relying on Leopold's good common sense and management skills. Mozart never became fully autonomous, and may not even have

believed that complete autonomy was at all desirable. If Beethoven had learned anything from his childhood, it was how to be independent and in control of his life. Mozart was to die just as Beethoven was reaching maturity as a composer in his first period, and by this time, the barriers between the classes were beginning to break down. For Beethoven, the ideals of the French Revolution were a deeply felt passion (Orga 61). The idea of individual expression is clear in his music. As the critic Schonberg puts it “Mozart holds himself in Classical restraint, while Beethoven bares his soul for all to see” (121). Beethoven was also the first composer ever to refer to himself as an “artist,” and boldly stand up for his rights (Schonberg 111). Had Beethoven been born fifteen or twenty years earlier, he might have been crushed by the aristocracy and put in his place, a broken man. How lucky we are that Europe had changed enough by the 1790s that such a forceful and autonomous genius of low birth as Beethoven could compose at a time when the concept of equality and individual rights had entered the public consciousness, as well as the consciousness of many patrons. Beethoven once wrote to a friend, “Strength is the morality of the man who stands out from the rest, and it is mine” (Schonberg 123). Here we see a strong and clear statement of Beethoven’s assertion of his own individual autonomy. While it is clear that we may see Beethoven as an individual who more fully embodies what we would call an autonomous genius, both Beethoven and Mozart exercised true autonomy to achieve their goals: the creation of sublime works of music.

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