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Reflections on “John Henry”: Ethical Issues in Singing Performance

Singers, as public performers, have a variety of obligations. They have obligations to composers and lyricists, to musical and performance traditions, to their fellow musicians, and to audiences. Some of these obligations—to show up on time prepared to perform—are professional, and many are aesthetic. What of their ethical obligations? There is a small philosophical literature on the ethical obligations of musicians, but the focus has been on musicians’ obligations to composers, and singing has not been paid special attention. My main concern in this article is with singers’ ethical obligations to their audiences when they perform songs with words.¹ I argue that in some cases singers have duties to audiences, both in their choice of material and in the details of their performance. In the first part of this article I speak generally and in outline about singers’ ethical obligations to their audiences. In the second part, I illustrate and test these claims through extended consideration of a single example—the American folk song “John Henry.” I hope to show how different approaches to performing the song embody and reflect different values. In the third part, I draw out some implications for my position, including implications about authenticity, cultural appropriation, and the project of finding connections between moral and aesthetic sensitivity.

1

In its broadest and one of its more ancient understandings, “ethics” is the search for the best way to live. Today its significance is often taken to be a good deal more narrow, not to say legalis-

tic. When I discuss the “ethics of singing” I mean ‘ethics’ to be taken in a very broad sense. The choices singers make rarely extend to the morally right or wrong, still less often to good versus evil. I assume that singers, generally, do not seek to offend or disrespect their listeners. I set aside those cases where it is clear that, for aesthetic or political reasons, disrespect is exactly what is intended. The kind of moral violations that singers can make are more commonly violations of moral sensitivity. But what may begin as a sin of omission, if discovered and left uncorrected, becomes something else: a tangible moral failing, not to say a flaw of character. My thesis is that to perform a song in a morally sensitive manner requires moral deference, a notion I borrow from Laurence Thomas.² When a song is valued by a group, whether for musical or for extramusical reasons, a morally sensitive singer must try to understand why the song has the significance that it does, and must shape the details of his or her performance so as to respect or honor that significance. If the singer does not, then he or she risks giving offense. My project is partly descriptive and partly normative. I believe that singers already do consider the moral implications of the songs they sing and of their choices in performance, and part of what I am doing is to make explicit the kinds of things they may consider. The normative part of my project is to increase awareness in audiences and singers about the moral implications of specific performance choices in singing.

In choosing what to sing and how to sing it, singers must consider not only their current or initial “live” audience in a specific performance, but also possible future listeners who may hear the

performance in a recording. In some instances, the audience to which a singer has obligations encompasses those for whom the song performed has a cultural or communal significance, whether they are in the present audience or not. This is easiest to see if we consider that much-derided category of songs, national anthems. A poor public performance of a national anthem does not offend merely for aesthetic reasons, and it does not offend merely those in the singer's initial audience. It may rightly offend those in the national group who receive a report of the poor performance, whether they ever hear it for themselves or not. Similarly, the report that a racist joke has been told may offend those who have not heard the specifics of the joke. The special status of national anthems is part of what accounts for the aesthetic power that intentionally disrespectful or irreverent performances can have. I am thinking here of the Sex Pistols' "God Save the Queen" and Jimi Hendrix's performance of "The Star-Spangled Banner" at Woodstock.³ Calculatedly disrespectful renditions of national anthems are transgressive. Such overstepping of boundaries can be a source of aesthetic power and value, the desire to "épater les bourgeois" being a running motif in art since at least the Romantic era.⁴

National anthems, like other symbols of the state, have a special legal status. But other songs may be similarly meaningful to and significant for racial, cultural, or national groups, without having such official status. These songs, and the concerns they raise, have been largely overlooked by philosophers (especially analytic philosophers), who have tended to concentrate on art music and to treat art as divorced from social and political factors. Here are some examples of the types of songs I have in mind: "Gens du pays" has been called the unofficial national anthem of the Quebecois; hymns and Christmas carols have a special resonance for Christians; Americans may have a special connection to songs such as "Georgia on my Mind," "The Yellow Rose of Texas," "My Old Kentucky Home," and "Shenandoah"; for the Irish, a song called "The Foggy Dew" set to the tune of the traditional English ballad commemorates the Easter Uprising of 1916; certain spirituals including "We Shall Overcome" and "Go Down Moses" became important to those in the 1960s civil rights movement.⁵

Some of these songs are traditional or folk songs. The categories "folk music" and more gen-

erally "folk art" are highly contested. Attempts to define them tend to show up the limits of our categories rather than to be genuinely informative. However, there is one quality of the folk song, as traditionally defined, that is relevant here: folk songs are ontologically thin.⁶ Their lyrics are malleable; verses may be sung out of order or dropped; melodies and rhythms may vary from one region to the next, or even from one singer to the next. Instrumentation is flexible—the song may be sung a cappella or with whatever accompaniment is available. Folk musicians, like jazz musicians, generally have much more freedom and flexibility in their performance practices than do musicians who engage with art music. Whatever freedom singers have in their performances comes with responsibility. For the rest of this article, I will focus on genres in which the singer has, relatively speaking, a wide scope of choice in performance. The ethical issues in singing performance are easiest to see here. I leave open the question of to what extent these considerations might be extended to song performances in other genres.

To sing a song in a morally appropriate manner requires moral deference. The idea behind moral deference is both simple and reasonable: the morally significant experiences of others will sometimes be opaque to us. There is no perspective from which any and every person will always be able to grasp the experiences of another. Even with sincerity and goodwill, we must not assume that we are always fully capable of grasping another's experiences—the challenges, pain, and anxiety that he or she has undergone or continues to experience. To believe otherwise, to assume that such understanding can always be achieved, is to be guilty of moral hubris. Thomas offers two reasons why our capacity for imaginative reconstruction of another's experiences is limited. First, we can never be the subject of another's experience; even a complete description cannot convey the subjective element of an experience. Second, we do not live with the memories of another's experience, and these memories do not continue to shape our lives.

Moral deference is the appropriate attitude to take when trying to understand others who have been subject to social injustice. Although anyone can suffer a misfortune, and any misfortune can challenge our capacities for imaginative understanding, some misfortunes are tied to membership in what Thomas calls "diminished social

categories." Members of diminished social categories are constituted by others not to see themselves as full and equal members of society. Such constitution can be explicit—think of the heckler who told Hillary Clinton to “iron my shirts” while she was campaigning for the Democratic presidential nomination. Or it can be subtle: one example is what U.S. President George W. Bush has called the “soft bigotry of lowered expectations” in grade-school classrooms that shape a child’s view of himself and his place in the world.⁷ The misfortunes tied to membership in a diminished social category are particularly difficult for people not in such categories to understand, and moral deference is thus more acutely required with respect to them.

What is it to behave with moral deference, to adopt it as an attitude? While the rationale for moral deference may be easy to grasp, its actual tangible constraints and obligations are not. Thomas is disappointingly brief in his discussion of what, specifically, moral deference requires of us. Very suggestively for my purposes, Thomas invokes the notion of “bearing witness.” Moral deference is to be made concrete by thinking of what it means to bear witness to another’s moral pain with her authorization. This entails that one has gained the trust and confidence of another to speak informedly and with conviction on her behalf about the moral pain she has endured. One will be able to convey what was salient for another in the way that it was salient for her. One will refrain from using another’s moral pain as a means to convey one’s own moral perspective or pain. To be able to bear witness to another’s pain effectively and with conviction requires a preliminary stage, and this stage is at the heart of what it means to practice moral deference. It is to earn the trust of another and listen to her story, picking up on emotional nuances and nonverbal behavior, and through such active listening to have insight into how another’s life has been emotionally figured by these experiences.

Before continuing, I want to address a worry about my use of the concept of moral deference. Is everyone obliged to adopt an attitude of moral deference? To practice moral deference is to acquire a new set of sensibilities about what it is to live as an oppressed person in an unjust society. Like any new sensitivity, it comes with increased vulnerability, in this case vulnerabilities to the pain caused by social injustice. Thomas warns that it

is “not an activity for the faint of heart.”⁸ So it would seem that, because of the great demands it makes on us, moral deference cannot be a general social obligation. At the same time Thomas also insists that a studied refusal to engage in the moral learning at the heart of moral deference is a manifestation of oppression and even “adds insult to injury.”⁹ I suggest that moral deference is best seen as akin to a Kantian imperfect duty. According to Kant, we have a duty to help others, but because we cannot possibly help everyone who might require it, this duty is imperfect only. So while we have a perfect (that is, exceptionless) duty never to treat another person merely as a means, our duty to help others does in fact admit of exceptions. We are not obliged to help everyone who asks it of us.¹⁰ Similarly, we might have an imperfect duty to develop some moral sensitivities, including the attitude of moral deference. As a matter of practical fact, given constraints of time and psychological stress, it would be impossible to develop moral sensitivity to every individual and group who deserves it. Yet it is incumbent upon us to develop moral sensitivities to some individuals and groups, inasmuch as we desire to be treated with moral sensitivity ourselves.¹¹

II

I now turn to how moral deference might be manifested in a song performance and how different performances reflect different ethical and aesthetic values through a consideration of the American folk song “John Henry.” John Henry is the semilegendary railway worker who won a contest and outperformed the steam drill that had been brought in to replace him; but he died as a result. I have chosen this particular song both because of its enduring popularity and because of the hold that the character continues to have on the American popular imagination. “John Henry” has been called the most frequently recorded American folk song, and it is estimated that nearly one hundred new versions have been recorded since the mid-1990s alone.¹² The song straddles a number of traditions, being both one of the first songs to be called “the blues” and one of the first recorded “country” songs. Versions have been recorded by Leadbelly, Paul Robeson, Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Johnny Cash, Van Morrison, and Bruce Springsteen, among others. Alt-country musicians

Gillian Welch, Joe Uehlein & the U-Liners, and the Drive-By Truckers have also recently recorded the folk song or written an original song based on the legend of John Henry. Librarians at the Library of Congress estimate that John Henry is the most intensively researched character in American folklore.¹³ In addition to the song, he has been the inspiration for statues, novels, posters, paintings, films, stage dramas, academic studies, and a parody in *The Onion* satirical newspaper.¹⁴

When a figure has been of enduring relevance to a wide variety of people, it seems safe to say that a number of factors contribute to his status. Certainly, John Henry has meant many things to many people. Various versions of the song place his origin in different states within the U.S. and even in the British Isles. Although no version of the song that I have come across mentions his racial identity, he is widely understood to be African American. John Henry is a symbol of physical strength and endurance, of exploited labor, of the dignity of a human being against the degradations of the machine age, and of racial pride and solidarity. During World War II his image was used in U.S. government propaganda as a symbol of social tolerance and diversity. Yet it does not follow that John Henry is a cipher or that he can mean anything to anyone.

There is much controversy among historians and folklorists about who exactly John Henry was, where he lived, on which rail lines he worked, and why he died. Although he worked for a railway and has often been pictured driving rail spikes into ties, his work was actually more like that of a miner. He was probably a member of a crew doing the difficult and dangerous job of blasting through mountains, hammering holes where dynamite charges could be laid. The earliest versions of the song are slow and rather stately hammer songs; death and escape are frequent themes. A “hammer song” is a type of work song used by both miners and railway trackliners to regulate the timing of their hammer blows. They are slow because working too quickly would lead both to exhaustion and to a lack of precision in the hammer blows, putting the shaker—the worker who held the chisel or drill—at risk.

I would argue that the theme of work, and in particular of the dignity of physical work, possibly even in the face of social injustice, is absolutely crucial to John Henry’s legend, to his enduring appeal, and to the folk song itself. John Henry is

defined by the work he does; he is, primarily, the “steel driving man.” The song’s lyrics stress his great strength and physical courage. The miners and railway men who first sang the song, taught it to their coworkers, and carried it with them to new job sites found in John Henry’s exploits a reflection of their own values and ideals. Much like blue-collar workers today, they saw hard work as conferring dignity and marking a moral boundary between themselves and others.¹⁵ Note the prominent lyrics found in many versions of the song. When John Henry’s captain tells him about the steam drill, he replies:

A man ain’t nothing but a man
But before I let that steel beat me down
I will die with this hammer in my hand¹⁶

The theme of the dignity of work is also indicated in a curious verse shared by many versions of the song. When John Henry is too sick to work, or in some versions after his death, it is said:

Well they called John Henry’s woman
Yes they called for Julie-Anne
Well she picked up the hammer where John Henry lay
And she drove that steel like a man, Great God!
And she drove that steel just like a man

Here, working and driving steel “like a man” is clearly meant as commendatory; neither is there any disapproval indicated at the subversion of gender roles. John Henry’s legacy is that he inspires and enables others to work. One historian has speculated that this passage refers to the “race work” that women had to do in the absence of male members of the community, who died young or were jailed in disproportionate numbers by the racially biased laws of the Reconstruction period.¹⁷ (The same historian believes that the historical John Henry was himself a victim of such laws.) Whether Julie-Anne does the literal work of driving steel or this passage is best interpreted as a metaphor, her work helps support the community and is valued by it.

If I am correct, and the dignity of work is at least an important aspect of what has made the character of John Henry and songs celebrating him of such enduring relevance, then how should such considerations affect a singer’s performance? How can singers who have taken on the requisite moral deference to understand the reasons

for the song's importance make this understanding clear in their performance? I argue that such understanding is manifest in the singer's choices regarding which version of the song to sing, which verses are sung and which are omitted, which verses begin and end the song, the accompanying instrumentation, and vocal approach. This last aspect, vocal approach, is particularly important as it is by this means that a singer expresses his or her attitude to the material sung—whether he or she adopts an attitude of irony or sincerity, for example.

Turning now to specific recordings of "John Henry," we can discern at least two broad approaches to the song's performance. The first is shared by Leadbelly, Pete Seeger, and Bruce Springsteen, among others. In this approach, the song "rocks out." The tempo is relatively fast. The performers, it is clear, are having a great time. In Seeger's live version the audience even sings along. In the second approach, for example, that of Paul Robeson and Valentine Pringle on Henry Belafonte's *The Long Road to Freedom: An Anthology of Black Music*, the tempo is slower and the emphasis is on the song's lyrics rather than rhythm or melody. The song is explicitly and self-consciously *performed* for us. In the case of Pringle's performance on the Belafonte anthology, the musical arrangement is explicitly stylized. There is no attempt to recapture how the song might have sounded when sung by miners or trackliners. The notion of "authenticity" as recapturing a purported past is rejected in favor of an ideal of how the song might sound in an exemplary performance.¹⁸

The approach to the song taken by Pringle and Belafonte on *The Long Road to Freedom* contrasts sharply with the approach taken by Springsteen on his self-produced album *We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions*. Springsteen, in his liner notes, stresses the unstylized, "authentic" character of the performances. He tells us that he had only recently met most of the musicians he plays with and had not played with them until the day they started recording, in the living room of his house. He continues:

This is a LIVE recording, everything cut in three one-day sessions ('97, '05, '06) with no rehearsals. All arrangements were conducted as we played, you can hear me shouting out the names and instruments of the players as we roll. This approach takes the listener along for the

whole ride, as you hear the music not just being played but being *made*. So, turn it up, put on your dancin' and singin' shoes, and have fun. We did.¹⁹

Sophisticated listeners will take Springsteen's characterization of the project with good humor, but also with some skepticism. The musicians he performs with on the album are seasoned professionals; whether they had seen the arrangements or rehearsed together beforehand or not is really beside the point. The enjoyment they derive from playing together does not diminish their musical accomplishment or their professional status. The performance captured over those three days and offered to us is no less a *performance* for also being a documentary of a bunch of people having fun. I suspect that Springsteen stresses the unrehearsed, spontaneous, and joyful character of his project out of an attachment to an ideal of rock-and-roll "authenticity." But authenticity in this case, while arguably a value, makes it difficult to hear the song as expressing other kinds of values. People who sound as if they are having fun are hardly the best suited to be telling a story of a man driven to his death by overwork. On the other hand, such a performance may remind us of the joy that is found even in a life as difficult as John Henry's.

Pringle's version is different in a number of additional ways from Springsteen's and from other versions under discussion. It begins with this verse sung by a male chorus:

Well every Monday morning
When the bluebirds begin to sing
You can hear those hammers for a mile or more
Oh you can hear John Henry's hammer ring, Lord
You can hear John Henry's hammer ring

While other performances include this verse, few begin with it. The verse is in the present tense; the implication is that you can still hear John Henry's hammer. He was not killed in the contest with the steam drill, after all. Another distinctive element of Pringle's performance is that the musical accompaniment mimics and so recalls the hammer blows in earlier work-song versions of the song. Pringle's attitude to the material, like Robeson's, is reverent. He does not particularly sound as if he is having a good time; rather he sounds as if he is telling us something important, something that he wants us to hear. And he sounds as if he is moved by what he is telling us. I also find it significant that Pringle ends with this verse:

Oh they took John Henry to the graveyard
 And they buried him in the sand
 And every locomotive come rolling by
 Said, "There lies a steel driving man, Lord.
 John Henry was a steel driving man."

The effect is similar to that of the first verse. We know that John Henry has not been forgotten. He, and the example he set, live in memory.

A few clarifications before continuing: First, just as there is more than one way to perform a song well, there is more than one way to perform a song with moral deference, and indeed more than one way to practice moral deference more generally. I do not believe that every morally appropriate performance of "John Henry" will sound like every other or that each will share features with the performances I have discussed here. There may be ways to sing "John Henry" with moral deference that I have not imagined. Second, a singer whose performance seems to express moral deference has not necessarily adopted it as an attitude. In this case there are no necessary and direct links from performance to character. He or she may be singing the song in a certain way for purely aesthetic reasons. Such a situation is analogous to that of a non-Russian-speaking baritone who has learned his part in *Boris Gudnov* phonetically, but does not understand the literal meaning of the syllables he sings.

III

Memory is at the heart of Thomas's notion of moral deference. The persistence of memory is what makes moral deference necessary, and what makes it possible. The memory of past injustice shapes an individual's responses in the present. Adopting an attitude of moral deference means recognizing that the memories and experiences of others are always, in an important sense, opaque to us. Since a community's memories are so often captured and transmitted through its music, it seems especially appropriate to practice moral deference with regard to that music. But does every community deserve moral deference, whether generally or toward its music? Must we be respectful of any community's attitudes and memories, if they are expressed in songs? For example, a British friend tells me that, past adolescence, he could not sing the national anthem without

irony. Other friends who formerly sang in church choirs have expressed their discomfort at having to sing hymns with sexist or militaristic lyrics ("Be Thou my battle shield, sword for the fight"). The easy way to answer this worry is to note that Thomas limited the recipients of moral deference to those in diminished social categories. It is arguable whether British imperialists or paternalistic Christians would qualify. The more extended way to answer this worry is to argue that, in making the decision to adopt moral deference as an attitude, the agent must also decide to whom moral deference is owed. If I am correct, and moral deference is plausibly seen as an imperfect duty, then one need not adopt an attitude of moral deference toward every deserving group. So just as it is up to individuals to decide toward which groups moral deference should be adopted, it is also up to singers to decide which songs to sing and which songs to avoid performing, and how best to perform the songs that they do.

However, the position I have put forward has implications beyond the ones already indicated for singers. First, the vexed issue of "authenticity" or cultural appropriation, more broadly construed: nothing has been said about the racial identity of the singers under discussion, or about their proximity to a tradition.²⁰ Musicologists and historians have undermined the idea that real and essential differences underlie the histories of "black" and "white" American music.²¹ The idea of authenticity being secured through proximity to a tradition is a useful one in cases where the tradition itself is relatively delimited and of living memory. In the case of the song "John Henry," the tradition is sufficiently broad and varied that every singer I have mentioned can claim to be an heir and to have proximity to it. Elements of the song can be traced to the British ballad tradition (Welshmen mined coal in the mountains near where John Henry worked), to the African American convicts and laborers who used the song to regulate their work, to blues musicians such as W. C. Handy, who published the first sheet music for the song, and to the musicians involved in the folk music revival.

The notion of authenticity or "keepin' it real" is likely to remain part of the discourse of popular musicians and their fans, despite its philosophical shortcomings.²² This is perhaps as it should be. The kind of authenticity under discussion—fidelity to a tradition—makes sense only within a social group

to whom the concept is important and who can be in a position to pronounce on questions surrounding it. In the end it is really up to fans of, say, hip-hop to decide whether Eminem or Insane Clown Posse or P. M. Dawn are truly authentic. But for philosophers and other scholars interested in the intersections between art and social identity, the notion of moral deference is much more powerful and fruitful than the concept of authenticity. If I am correct, then whether a singer shows appropriate moral deference or not should be evident to all those who have familiarized themselves with the material in question, know something of its possible importance to an audience, and listen attentively. Membership in a specific social group or fan base is neither necessary nor sufficient.

The importance of attentive listening brings me to another implication of my position. Here I shift from discussing singers to discussing their audiences. Many philosophers have tried to identify the links between moral and aesthetic sensitivity, between listening to the "right" music or reading the "right" books and having the "right" sort of character.²³ I doubt that any of these attempts has been successful. My position might help us to see why. It is not a matter of the "right" aesthetic sources, but listening and attending in the right way. Moral deference can be adopted by fans of any musical genre or form of aesthetic expression. It does not depend on cultivating one's tastes to appreciate "higher" art forms or genres. At the heart of moral deference is thinking about *others*—their struggles, their experience in an unjust society; thinking about one's *own* aesthetic or moral sensitivity is fundamentally at odds with adopting an attitude of moral deference. This focus on the pain of others, both historically and currently, whether expressed through art or more plainly in the course of daily life, is one way in which we can attend "in the right way." This is not to say that listeners are always and in every instance obliged to listen with moral deference. This is probably not psychologically or practically feasible, given the epistemic burden that underlies sensitive listening. Yet moral sensitivity, at some times and in some instances, behooves those who listen to music as well as those who make it. Adopting an attitude of moral deference—finding out which songs might be important to which audiences, thinking about why certain material has the significance that it does, and what kind of performance best honors this significance—will increase our sensi-

tivity as listeners. If we listen well enough it will also increase our moral sensitivity more generally, and such a result could only be to the good.²⁴

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1. Hence, I mean to exclude scat singing and purely instrumental pieces called "songs."

2. Laurence Thomas, "Moral Deference," *The Philosophical Forum* 24 (1992–93): 233–250.

3. The Sex Pistols did not perform the British national anthem, but an original song with the same title and some of the same lyrics. Hendrix did not, of course, sing the national anthem; he played it on the guitar. Still, some of the power of his performance derives from its being a performance of the national anthem, whose lyrics were presumably known by those in the audience.

4. On this see Daniel Jacobson, "In Praise of Immoral Art," *Philosophical Topics* 25 (1997): 155–199. The topic of ironic performances of songs raises special difficulties that I cannot pursue here.

5. For an exception to the general neglect that such music receives, and a discussion of several examples, see Philip Alperson and Noël Carroll, "Music, Mind, and Morality: Arousing the Body Politic," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 42 (2008): 1–15.

6. On the ontological "thinness" of some traditional music, see Stephen Davies, *Musical Works and Performances* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

7. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/onpolitics/elections/bushtext071000.htm> (accessed January 12, 2008).

8. Thomas, "Moral Deference," p. 247.

9. *Ibid.*

10. See Immanuel Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001), pp. 31–33.

11. I do not know whether Thomas would develop his position in this way, and I do not claim that he would.

12. Scott Reynolds Nelson, *Steel Drivin' Man: John Henry: The Untold Story of an American Legend* (Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 172. I have relied on this book for information about the history of the song and the use of the "John Henry" image.

13. Nelson, *Steel Drivin' Man*, p. 2.

14. "Modern-Day John Henry Dies Trying to Out-Spreadsheet Excel 11.0," *The Onion*. http://www.theonion.com/content/news/modern_day_john_henry_dies_trying (accessed December 20, 2007).

15. See Michèle Lamont, *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration* (Harvard University Press, 2000).

16. All of the lyrics in this article have been transcribed from the version sung by Valentine Pringle on *Long Road to Freedom: An Anthology of Black Music* (Buddha, 2001).

17. Nelson, *Steel Drivin' Man*, p. 107.

18. Belafonte makes this clear in his interview with Michael Eldridge in *Transition* 92, <http://www.transitionmagazine.com/articles/remains.htm> (accessed June 6, 2008). The interview was reprinted in *Da Capo Best Music Writing 2004*, ed. Mickey Hart (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2004).

19. *We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions* (Sony, 2006). Liner notes by Bruce Springsteen.

20. This is the approach taken by Joel Rudinow in his very influential article, "Race, Ethnicity, Expressive Authenticity: Can White People Sing the Blues?" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 52 (1994): 127–137.

21. On such issues see Lee B. Brown, "Marsalis and Baraka: An Essay in Comparative Cultural Discourse," *Popular Music* 23 (2004): 241–255; and Mike Daley, "'Why

Do Whites Sing Black?' The Blues, Whiteness, and Early Histories of Rock," *Popular Music and Society* 26 (2003): 161–167.

22. Davies sorts out some of the complications and confusions behind the notion in his *Musical Works and Performances*.

23. See, for example, works by Roger Scruton, Martha Nussbaum, Colin Radford, Mathew Kieran, and others.

24. For discussion of and comments on earlier versions of this article, I am grateful to an anonymous referee for this journal, Joseph Agassi, John Carvalho, Ted Gracyk, Ian Jarvie, Rebecca Kukla, Richard Manning, Erum Naqvi, Alex Neill, Ira Newman, and audiences at the Carleton University Philosophy Department colloquium and the ASA Eastern Division annual meeting for 2008.