

JAZZ-PHILOSOPHY FUSION

Abstract:

In this paper I describe and provide a justification for the fusion of jazz music and philosophy which I have developed; the justification is provided from the perspectives of both jazz and philosophy. I discuss two of my compositions, based on philosophical ideas presented by Schopenhauer and Derek Parfit respectively; links to sound files are provided. The justification emerging from this discussion is that philosophy produces ‘non-argumentative effects’ which provide suitable material for artistic expression and exploration. These effects – which are often emotional – are under-recognised in philosophy, but they do important philosophical work in demarcating the kinds of truths we want to discover, and in sustaining our search for them. Jazz-Philosophy Fusion can help to increase metaphilosophical self-consciousness about these effects, while also helping to counteract any undue persuasive force they may achieve. Jazz is a particularly suitable medium because it has independently developed a concern with philosophical ideas; because of strong parallels between jazz and philosophy which explain their mutual openness to fusions, and because improvisation very effectively facilitates the direct audience engagement essential to inducing these effects.

Author Biography:

James Tartaglia is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at Keele University, UK. He is also a jazz saxophonist and composer, who won the soloist prize in the Daily Telegraph Young Jazz Competition, 1991, and studied at Berklee College of Music in Boston, USA, 1992-3, with saxophonist George Garzone. He is the author of *Rorty and the Mirror of Nature* (2007) and *Philosophy in a Meaningless Life* (2016); editor of *Richard Rorty: Critical Assessments* (2009); and co-editor (with Stephen Leach) of *Mind, Language, and Metaphilosophy* (2014) and *Consciousness and the Great Philosophers* (2016). He has recorded five jazz albums, most recently *Jazz-Philosophy Fusion* with his band *Continuum of Selves*, as part of his project for the current APRA Foundation Berlin ‘Multi-Disciplinary Fellowship’. The project website is: <http://www.jazzphilosophyfusion.com/>

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I

In this paper, I will reflect philosophically on the Jazz-Philosophy Fusion which I have developed. My interest in this particular fusion is explained by the fact that I was a jazz musician long before I became an academic philosopher. My career in philosophy had nothing to do with music until very recently, but nevertheless I recorded a string of jazz albums between 2002 and 2014 which experimented with the idea of adding some philosophy into the musical mix. The culmination of these experiments is my 2016 album *Jazz-Philosophy Fusion* with the seven-piece band *Continuum of Selves*.

The key to making this work musically has been finding a formula for integrating the philosophy, which I have achieved with a particular combination of singing and acting. By using vocals, a composer can channel the broad and vaguely demarcated conceptual

expressiveness of instrumental music into something more conceptually fine-grained. By this, I mean that although the composer may, within a cultural context, be able to secure widespread, or perhaps even universal, consent to the judgement that their piece of music is sad, for example, they would never be able to secure anything like the same level of agreement over whether it expresses the sadness of, say, a jilted lover as opposed to that induced by poverty. There may often be no artistic need for such a high level of conceptual specificity; but whenever there is, as when philosophical ideas are the focus, vocals are required. The reason, I think, is that purely instrumental music cannot express conceptual distinctions of such specificity; at least not without the development of musical conventions quite unlike our own. Even if the sad music was written by a jilted lover with the intention of expressing the particularities of their sadness, the intention would not be made manifest to the listener. Add some words, however, and the listener may hear the sadness of the music as that of a jilted lover; the particularities of the music are invested with this conceptual significance. Whether or not instrumental music is capable of a more powerful expression of emotion than words, vocal music is able to make that expression more conceptually precise by stipulation.¹ That is, the music may be made to appear to be expressing something particular; and if there is an appearance / reality distinction to be made here, it is not clear to me that it would be of aesthetic significance. If the concepts expressed verbally fall under the broader type of the emotion expressed musically, then the expression can combine. If they do not – tragic words to a jolly melody, for instance – then something else happens; we might hear this combination as sarcastic, for instance.

My primary concern in this paper, however, is not with how the music works, but rather with whether it has any credible justification. What value could this particular fusion, or indeed other similar fusions of academic thought with performance art, possibly have? My commitment has in no way immunized me from the thought that it sounds pretentious from the perspective of jazz, and pointless from the perspective of philosophy – harmless fun, perhaps, but evidently serving no serious purpose. I shall try to persuade you that this is not the case.

II

I will now provide a more concrete idea of the fusion I have developed, by describing two compositions: ‘Schopenhauer’s Blues’ and ‘Teletransportation’. The former, from my 2014 album *Kooky Steps*, was the first experiment in this genre which I considered largely successful; the latter is to be found on my latest album, *Jazz-Philosophy Fusion*, where the concept is fully developed. Through considering these compositions, the potential of this fusion will emerge, and by the end of this section my justification will be on the table.

<https://soundcloud.com/user-241922195-515388198/schopenhauers-blues>

‘Schopenhauer’s Blues’ is a minor 12-bar blues, taken at a slow tempo, which begins with philosopher Dagmar Wilhelm reading a passage, in German, from *The World as Will and Representation*. As this reading begins, the band plays the melody. It is a well-known passage, in which Schopenhauer despairs at the futility and cruelty of life, and illustrates it in the kind of case which, he thinks, makes this most evident; that is, in the lives of (non-human) animals (Schopenhauer 1844: 354). In the second part of the passage, he gives the

¹ It might be argued that music expresses finer-grained emotional qualities than language can express. My point here concerns only conceptual content, however.

example of turtles in Java dying in agony as they are ripped apart by wild dogs, who are themselves sometimes ambushed by tigers; it is a scene of horror that is repeated year after year, and for Schopenhauer, a microcosm of life in general. By the time the passage has finished, the solos are well underway; they alternative chorus-by-chorus between saxophone, trombone (UK jazz luminary Annie Whitehead) and guitar, and at this early point in the composition, both the solos and reading are subdued and mournful.

When the initial German reading finishes, actress Sonja Morgenstern asks in a matter-of-fact manner: ‘what was that? Can you read it to me in English?’ Wilhelm obliges, while the solos continue, becoming a little more animated now. At the end of this reading, Morgenstern’s character (‘Sunny’) is shocked by what she has just heard – now she can understand it – and urgently asks Wilhelm’s character (that is, Schopenhauer) to read it again: ‘just the bit about the turtles’. Schopenhauer shows evident satisfaction in doing so, as the solos become more intense. Repeatedly, Sunny asks to hear the passage again and is obliged; every time she sounds more distressed, Schopenhauer sounds more vindictive, and the solos become more agitated. Eventually, when the ideas have fully sunk in, Sunny can take it no more and breaks down emotionally. The music has reached breaking point too; the regular tempo and chord sequence are replaced with a series of sustained chords which the soloists collectively improvise over with intensity. The last thing we hear is Sunny’s desolate sobbing.

What led me to write this composition is my view that Schopenhauer’s pessimism is absurd. I use the word ‘absurd’ advisedly, in that I think it exhibits that classically absurd juxtaposition of grand intentions backed up by evidently shaky foundations; like a clown in his best suit taking a pratfall. Similarly, I think, Schopenhauer’s indictment of all of life (and indeed, all of reality) was based upon some highly questionable metaphysical speculation and weak arguments. You may well not share my view on this, which extends to all the similar negative appraisals of life I have come across in philosophy, right up to contemporary so-called ‘anti-natalism’; and also to similarly universalist positive appraisals. Here is not the place to back this up (but see Tartaglia 2016a).

However given this assessment, Schopenhauer’s position strikes me as absurd; it has this *effect* on me. Schopenhauer, I think, was trying to have an effect on his reader when he wrote this passage; it is not a disinterested exercise in academic reasoning, but rather a vivid illustration designed to induce the pathos in his reader that Schopenhauer himself evidently felt. Of course, it was illustrating a position he had argued for; but here, in this passage, he was trying to have an *effect*. So I tried to imagine somebody being affected in the way he intended. By selecting Morgenstern’s rather pathetic character, this is taken to extremes, so the result is explicitly absurd. Thus the music is designed to have the effect on the listener that Schopenhauer’s pessimism has on me; the potential for this effect is subtle enough to be overlooked, but the music makes it obvious. Schopenhauer is given the kind of effect he wanted – Sunny is successfully persuaded that life is every bit as dismal as he thinks it is – but by getting far too much of this effect, he is given the one I wanted, namely absurdity. The quality of Schopenhauer’s argumentation has no part to play in producing this effect, which results from the juxtaposition of a philosopher illustrating his cosmic conclusions with a sad tale about turtles, with Sunny’s bombastic, musically-fuelled response. But it draws attention to the fact that to justifiably elicit *that* kind of response – which on the face of it such conclusions might well warrant – then the support for those conclusions would have to be very good indeed.

<https://continuumofselfes.bandcamp.com/releases>

‘Teletransportation’ is a song in AAB format, followed by harmonically free but structurally arranged improvisation, and then a reprise of the song extended by a 24-bar (7-7-10) sequence that serves as the coda. The format and accompaniment are standard for a jazz song, even though the chords are unusual; and it has a suitably ‘catchy’ melody. The improvised solos are ‘time-no-changes’ (regular tempo but no set chord sequence). During the solos, actress Morgenstern performs and the instrumental soloists respond.

The theme of the piece is Derek Parfit’s teletransportation example (Parfit 1984), which he uses to test his neo-Lockean account of personal ‘survival’ (Parfit’s more flexible replacement for identity) through psychological continuity. A teletransporter scans your body when you operate it, then destroys your body and creates an exact physical replica at another place. Psychological continuity is all that is required for survival, according to Parfit, and since this is preserved in the replica, he regards teletransportation as a possible form of transport. Travelling this way would worry him, he admits, but he dismisses this as irrational; like the nerves you might feel in looking through the window at the top of a sky-scraper (ibid.: 279). Similarly, any concern we might feel for our ‘old’ body is dismissed as no different in kind from the irrational sentiment we might feel for the token wedding ring we wore at the ceremony, as opposed to a microphysically type-identical replica (ibid.: 286).

The lyrics to the verse, sung by Jessica Radcliffe, provide an explanation of how teletransportation works as given from the perspective of a travel agent working for a teletransportation company. The ‘salesman’ explains the process and assures his potential customer that it is perfectly safe. The music here is brooding and mysterious; an effect achieved through a combination of diminished and augmented chords, the full resolution of which is continually delayed until the onset of the chorus. In the chorus, the music significantly lifts to an emotionally charged melody, as the lyrics switch to the perspective of the customer, also sung by Radcliffe. This customer misses her boyfriend, and has consequently been considering teletransportation as a means of reuniting with him. Having now heard what it involves, however, her reaction is:

It’s going to kill me dead
Then replicate what’s in my head
When he sees that new girl [i.e. the replica] look in his eyes
He’ll love her, he will.

He’ll never mourn my death
Intoxicated by her breath
I’m not teleporting in your machine
I’m not suicidal!

Unperturbed by this, the salesman proceeds to offer more reassurances in the next verse, such as that he himself teleports regularly; and he then proceeds to ‘demonstrate’ the safety of the machine by teleporting across the room before her eyes – ‘I haven’t died, I’m just the same’, he tells her. She remains unconvinced.

In the solos, the actress, Morgenstern, takes up the perspective of an onlooker to the situation. At first, she is awe-struck by the technology. This turns to excitement when she considers its possible application to her own life. She then considers the customer’s reaction and is annoyed by it, since it provides a potential obstacle to the exciting prospects she has just been

considering. She initially dismisses the customer's reaction as irrational, given how carefully the salesman explained the process, and indeed, *proved* its safety by teleporting. But then she becomes more pensive (as does the music) and wonders if perhaps the customer has a point; perhaps the machine would indeed kill her. She rehearses some reasons for thinking this, until, without addressing them, she finally turns angrily on the customer and resolves that she herself would be happy to teletransport; this ends the solos and brings back the singer for the next verse, in which the salesman continues his efforts at persuasion.

In the final, extended chorus, the customer elaborates on the nature of her misgivings, and then proceeds into the coda, where the emotional urgency starts to steadily increase. This is achieved through the use of upwards modulations and truncated 7-bar (as opposed to conventional 8-bar) sequences. She tells the salesman exactly what she thinks of him and his machine (that he has been 'blinded by science' and is 'dying, not travelling'), while also bemoaning her separation from her lover. The release comes at the end of the final 10-bar section, when after giving a categorical 'no' to the salesman, she decides to 'take a plane'.

My sympathies are with the customer. I reject Parfit's position; I think it is rooted in an implausible and badly motivated conception of mind originating from Ryle (Tartaglia 2016b; see also Tartaglia 2012). The composition, however, does not properly engage with the arguments; although unlike 'Schopenhauer's Blues', it does contain some basic argumentative considerations on both sides. Argumentatively, in fact, both sides are fairly evenly matched, but the music is on my side: the customer gets the best tune, the love-theme adds to our sympathy, and she gets the last word. Neither the salesman nor onlooker is a sympathetic character. My intention in setting things up like this can be explained in the following manner.

Parfit's teletransportation discussion is unusual for two reasons. The first is the nature of the example, because in the unlikely event² that the technology was ever to be developed, then metaphysical speculation would become a matter of life and death. Parfit's position is that there is no fact about personal identity which could make it the case that you either regain consciousness in the new body or die, and consequently that once we know the manifest facts of the case, we have every reason to regard it as a case of survival. He could be wrong, however, which leads us to the second reason.

The idea of teletransportation worries Parfit. 'Fear' is a word that frequently recurs in *Reasons and Persons*, and as Douglas Hofstadter has observed, 'Parfit's willingness to face and to share his self-doubts' is 'extremely rare'; he finds it 'wonderfully refreshing' (Hofstadter 2007: 310). Teleporting would make Parfit afraid, but he dismisses this fear as irrational because he has faith in his reasoning. However there is another kind of fear at work; not the imaginary one facing the prospective teleporter, but the real fear Parfit feels about ordinary, inevitable death. His theory helps him to allay this fear:

My life seemed like a glass tunnel, through which I was moving faster every year, and at the end of which there was darkness. When I changed my view, the walls of my glass tunnel disappeared. (Parfit 1984: 281)

By abandoning the notion of personal identity, Parfit's fear of death is revealed to be rooted in the illusion of self; he embraces a kind of Buddhism (ibid.: 502-3).

² Perhaps impossible (Wilkes 1993), but like Parfit I am unconvinced.

In order to conquer his real fear, then, Parfit must dismiss his imaginary fear of teletransportation; since they have the same root cause. He wants to dismiss the real fear, but dismissing the imaginary one disconcerts him; the reason for the disanalogy, I think, is that in the case he imagines, the fear has practical consequences – it might save his life – but since fear of inevitable (rather than avoidable) death does not, the benefits of losing it have no attendant downside. This disanalogy raises the stakes for his reasoning about the imaginary case, then, and explains why it gives him pause. For he is using it to test his commitment to his theory in the real life situation, the one that matters to him; if he would stake his life on it in the imaginary case, then he must truly believe it, and hence can be consoled by it. Parfit passes the test by dismissing the imaginary fear as irrational, without considering that it might rather be a reasonable product of recognising the possibility that his reasoning is faulty; perhaps due simply to an oversight, but perhaps due in part to the unwitting influence of the lure of consolation. However any such doubts would subvert his overall narrative of reason triumphing over irrationality. Echoing the Buddha, he admits that his view is very hard to believe; but he tells us he has managed it (*ibid.*: 280). In imagination, at least, Parfit is prepared to stake his life on this view. Given the anxieties on display, I do not find it much of a stretch to read the book as just as much an attempt to persuade himself that he believes his theory, as it is an attempt to persuade us that it is true; in any case, the former clearly plays a leading motivational role.

Given this motivation, the imaginary fear was unlikely to be presented sympathetically; and indeed it is not. Parfit certainly gives it an argumentatively fair hearing, in that he diligently looks into the arguments for why it might be rational. But as with Schopenhauer, Parfit's sole authorial intention here is not with disinterested argument; he uses this vivid example to reveal his own anxieties and induce similar ones in his reader. Right from the outset, these anxieties are presented as an obstacle to his position; one which reason must overcome, if it is not to lead us inexorably to Parfit's bleak vision of life as an accelerating conveyor belt leading to doom (*cf.* Nozick 1989: chapter 2).

My composition seeks to redress the balance, by presenting these philosophical fears in a positive light. The 'parted-lovers' theme injected into the melody does much of the work, by reminding us that the imaginary fear of death the thought experiment trades on is rooted in fear of what might be lost by opting to teletransport. The onset of irreversible 'darkness', as Parfit puts it, is not what concerns the young lover so much as never seeing her boyfriend again and being replaced in his affections; and if we include all the other things we care about in life, these concerns may well amount to much the same thing, with fear of death simply the inevitable flip-side – and a rather trivial one in the grand scheme of things³ – of a natural affirmation of life. Of course, if Parfit is right then she has nothing to fear anyway; but that does not detract from the fact that the fear he endeavours to place before the reader can be presented positively. This could be done in a research paper, but without original arguments, there would be little content to it. Jazz-Philosophy Fusion is under no such restrictions, however. Jazz songs deal with conceptual themes, feelings and emotions, but they also have purely musical content; put together, this can become art. Simply placing Parfit's thought-experiment before us, and like him, using it to affect our thoughts and feelings, provides the music with a new and more sophisticated kind of conceptual content than the themes of love, joy, and sadness which jazz songs typically deal with; while also doing valuable

³ For most of Parfit's readers; not for a terminally-ill child or someone living in a war zone.

philosophical work. Parfit clearly finds such work valuable, or he would not write as he does. What is that work?

Philosophical ideas can affect us; they can make us think about ourselves and our world in new ways, arouse intuitions we did not know we had, induce passion, excitement, satisfaction, as well as feelings of wonder, mystery, fear, anger and even horror (c.f. Thacker 2011). There are of course many exceptions. Nevertheless, much philosophy, and certainly most of the acknowledged classics that make up its traditional canon, can produce these effects; and the two examples I have been discussing are patently intended to affect readers who think them through. Some philosophers even provide bibliographic details, so that we can see how the ideas affected their own lives (e.g. May 2015). In short, philosophy is certainly not always, and perhaps not even mostly, presented disinterestedly; and the same can be said for its reception. Notice how philosophers nowadays often tell you what they ‘want to say’ (an idiom deriving, I think, from Wittgenstein); this unusual turn of phrase has become something of a nervous tic within the profession. Of course, the aim may be a disinterested determination of truth, and once we get into the arguments, I myself would not deny the possibility of this. But it is very often an effect, sometimes intentionally produced, that draws us into the arguments. These effects instigate and sustain philosophical thought, and hence do important work; not in guiding us to the truth, so much as in determining the kinds of truths we want to discover, and in motivating and sustaining our search for them. These effects are a suitable theme for artistic expression.

That philosophical ideas often affect us emotionally, and in other ways,⁴ is hardly surprising given what they typically concern, namely human life and its place within reality. Neither is it surprising that philosophers would cultivate these effects to inspire their audiences and get them thinking. A lecture or text may produce these effects in a more or less inspiring way, depending on the philosopher. A musical or otherwise artistic presentation, on the other hand, has a natural advantage in this regard.

Now both philosophy and art typically present a point of view; in philosophy this is almost always the case, and much of the great art we admire expresses authorial intention. When combined, then, it seems an uncontroversial default to do likewise, as I have done in the two compositions discussed. For example, Parfit says that his view is very hard to believe. This is not what I have found in teaching it for over a decade; I have found that initially, at least, the majority of my students cannot see a problem with teletransportation, and until contrary considerations are raised, learning more about his view simply adds to the attraction. I think they react like the onlooker in my composition: they see the potential benefits, imagine seeing a person exiting the teletransportation process who looks the same, and are persuaded. By putting this thought-process into an unsympathetic character, the composition both invites deeper thought on the matter, and steers the listener towards the point of view I am sympathetically presenting.

The aim is not the absurd one of winning the argument with music. Winning the argument would require a balanced exposition followed by a refutation; or if you have less faith in the power of argument (Rorty 1989: 8ff.), the presentation of a more attractive alternative. For either purpose, music would be an irrelevance, and most probably counterproductive. The aim is rather to artistically express the extra-argumentative effects of philosophical ideas,

⁴ Causing us to think about our lives and world differently is not necessarily an emotional effect; but such effects need not result from argumentative persuasion either.

whether sympathetically, or unsympathetically; in these compositions I have attempted the latter by reversing their original intention. The artistic justification is to provide new and suitable material for expression, and hence to refresh art-forms and generate new artistic products. The philosophical justification is, at a minimum, to provoke further reflection, while providing the option to steer a favoured course for that reflection; just as any ‘opinionated’ introduction to philosophy might (cf. Armstrong 1989).⁵ However, a more substantive justification is to be found in the potential of this approach to counterbalance non-argumentative, emotive methods of persuasion in philosophy; rather as the recent emergence of experimental philosophy has provided a counterbalance to baseless claims to the intuitive high-ground.

III

My thesis, then, is that the potential value and hence justification for Jazz-Philosophy Fusion is as follows.

From the perspective of jazz, the non-argumentative effects produced by philosophical ideas provide novel and largely untapped material for artistic exploration. These effects can have an emotional impact, and since the expression of emotion is a central element of jazz, it can reinforce and mould these effects for artistic purposes. Moreover philosophical ideas provide a new and interesting conceptual resource for jazz, which can be employed in lyrics and integrated in a variety of other ways into the music, injecting it with new conceptual significances. Such ideas can provide inspiration for improvised solos, which can react to or emulate their effects, as can be heard on my recordings.

From the perspective of philosophy, the justification is to produce non-argumentative philosophical effects – just as traditional textual expositions of philosophical ideas often do – which inspire, shape and sustain philosophical inquiry. Just as with traditional expositions, these effects can be presented in such a way as to steer the inquiry in a favoured direction. An artistic presentation has the advantage of being able to produce these effects in a fresh, direct, accessible and memorable fashion. And by drawing attention to the non-argumentative nature of these effects, it can increase metaphilosophical self-consciousness, and thereby – simply in virtue of the format of presentation used – aid in countering any undue persuasive force these effects may achieve.

I shall now proceed to consider some questions and objections that might be raised; starting with the obvious one.

- *Why jazz?*

Philosophy has been mixed with other types of music. Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* has been set to classical music on more than one occasion, for instance (Eyres 2001).⁶ Moreover, other, non-musical art-forms could also be fused with philosophical ideas – and in the case of literature, poetry, film, plays and conceptual art, there is obviously a substantial track-record

⁵ Though I cite Armstrong’s book (because of its subtitle), I do not think it is at all exceptional; most introductory texts in philosophy are like this to some extent.

⁶ Since the two settings mentioned in the article cited, there has been another by Balduin Sulzer. The justification of composer Anthony Powers, according to this article, was to do justice to the *Tractatus*’s poetic and, in his view, anti-philosophical intent. The latter has nothing to do with the justification offered for my fusion, but I shall return to the former below.

of this occurring. Such fusions might be justified along the lines I have suggested, or in many other ways. However, my concern here is with jazz.

Jazz musicians have often expressed a strong interest in philosophy; I first took note of the word ‘philosophy’ when I encountered it on the back of an Ornette Coleman record, for instance. And the interest has sometimes been mutual; not just through work on jazz in philosophical aesthetics (e.g. Hamilton 2000), but also along the lines that interest me here. The philosopher Andrew Bowie, for instance, is a jazz saxophonist like myself, and historical musicologist Tomas McAuley works on the mutual interplay between music and philosophy (see McAuley 2015 for his reflections on Bowie’s work). Coleman once participated in a pioneering event of Jazz-Philosophy Fusion with Derrida, the former improvising on saxophone while the latter read a philosophical text; though this intriguing collaboration was apparently cut short when the audience jeered Derrida off the stage (Ramshaw 2006)!⁷ Less peripherally to jazz, however, it is not hard to see the philosophical connotations of the interest in spirituality which became a driving force in the more progressive jazz of the 1960s. The idea that the music had a wider significance than that to be found in everyday life – that it was not simply entertainment, but was rather reaching for something ineffable – inspired much of this music, and the concomitant engagement with religions and philosophies (particularly Eastern) that went on among its creators; John Coltrane being a particularly influential example.⁸ The futurist mysticism within which Sun Ra cloaked his music presents another clear indicator of jazz taking a decidedly philosophical turn at this time. And nowadays it is commonplace to find jazz musicians displaying an interest in philosophy. Vocalist Kurt Elling, for instance, who draws extensively on poetry in his lyrics, can be found discussing Kantian noumena on his website; and saxophonist and composer Steve Lehman has some of his distinctly philosophical articles available to download in the ‘scholarship’ section of his website.⁹

There are some striking affinities between jazz and philosophy which might explain this. Both are rooted in a tradition of canonical figures and movements. Think Armstrong, Parker and Coltrane in the case of the former, and Plato, Descartes and Wittgenstein in the case of the latter; this progression from classical to modern to avant-garde happened considerably more rapidly in the case of jazz, in line with its development in the turbulent 20th century. Of course, you could make a similar analogy with other art-forms, such as European classical music and painting, but my point is that the existence of this affinity places philosophy, in this respect at least, on the side of art; this is unusual for an academic discipline. Now philosophers since Kant have hoped to transform philosophy into a science that can leave its canonical figures behind in favour of piece-meal progress (a recent example is Williamson 2007), but the situation remains – and I think is unlikely to change – that it is perfectly legitimate to refer back to distant historical figures in philosophy, as it would not be in science. In short, both jazz and philosophy progress by building upon and re-thinking their traditions. It is not clear to me that any other approach would be either practicable or desirable (in the case of philosophy, see Crane (MS), Tartaglia 2016a, Tartaglia 2016c); and attempting to do so would jeopardise their audiences.¹⁰

⁷ Derrida’s interview of Coleman survives, however; Murphy (trans.) 2004.

⁸ For discussion of how music can relate to transcendence, see Stone-Davis (ed.) 2015.

⁹ <http://kurtelling.com>; <http://www.stevelehman.com> [accessed 9/10/15]

¹⁰ Some philosophers welcome this latter prospect; see Soames 2003: 460. But if philosophy becomes primarily a non-spectator sport taking place in isolation from the rest of culture, then the lack of overt practical applications with which to justify its existence (in stark contrast with science) does not bode well for its future health.

Another striking affinity is to be found in the schisms which arose in both philosophy and jazz, when they progressed into recognisably avant-garde territory; schisms which remain deeply entrenched to this day. I am referring to the Analytic / Continental split in philosophy, and the Modern-Mainstream / Free split in jazz. The opposing sides view each other with exactly parallel types of suspicion; namely that Continental philosophy / Free jazz is bullshit, or that Analytic philosophy / Modern-Mainstream jazz is sterile. You might think of this as the result of differing reactions to the potential of breaking traditional rules; that is, whether such developments are viewed as liberating, or as constituting a lapse in discipline which threatens incremental progress. In any case, the typical result of such splits is that the radical faction tends to win the day, relegating the conservative one to the status of nostalgic throw-back.¹¹ This has not happened in either philosophy or jazz, however; Analytic philosophy and Modern-Mainstream jazz can both be fully cutting-edge, with this status apparently unthreatened by the existence of *prima facie* more radical approaches. Jazz and philosophy have both produced entrenched and sustainable schisms, and this is unusual.

The reason for the split in philosophy might be put down to geography, as the labels ‘Continental’ or ‘Anglophone’ suggest; but like most I do not think this gets to the heart of it. A more promising explanation, or at least part of one which relates to the analogy with jazz, is to be found in differing conceptions of the aims of philosophy. Continental philosophers tend to put more store in the aim of finding new ways of looking at the world, and in refreshing and producing discourses. Analytic philosophers, on the other hand, tend to favour refining and building on traditions and methods which they think provide our best prospect of determining how we should look at the world. Similarly in jazz, Free jazz experiments and seeks new forms of expression, while the Modern-Mainstream looks to create a seamless progression in the music by extending harmonic sophistication and technical facility beyond what has previously been achieved. The conservatives are typically unimpressed by the criticisms of the radicals, e.g. Heidegger’s critique of traditional metaphysics and epistemology; or Coleman’s complaint that if required to improvise over a predetermined harmonic sequence then he might as well write out his solo. Similarly, the radicals are typically uninterested in the complaints of the conservatives, since to refute them would require them to abandon their real concerns; by writing an analytic defence of their work, or proving that they can play ‘legitimately’. Consequently, these two factions proceed in their aims independently, unencumbered by the criticisms of the other; the difference between their aims makes this both possible and desirable.

What explains these affinities, I think, is that the nature of both jazz and philosophy is to some extent an open question; both are readily recognisable (on the whole), but notoriously difficult to define. Both are rooted in their histories, but those histories leave space for different conceptions of how they should proceed. This has allowed two alternative approaches to arise within each tradition; each sufficiently grounded in a shared history to count as a continuation of that history, but sufficiently different to be able to continue relatively independently of the other. They do intermix, of course; Analytic and Continental philosophers sometimes use each other’s ideas, while Modern-Mainstream jazz now often incorporates sonic effects developed in Free jazz, and may even utilise some free improvisation.¹² But their self-conceptions and motivations are different enough to keep them

¹¹ E.g. classical music, visual art, architecture, literature, poetry.

¹² The influence of the Modern-Mainstream on Free jazz is less apparent; although Free players typically attain much greater technical proficiency nowadays than was once the case.

essentially apart, facilitated by a certain indeterminacy of conception in their shared histories of organic development; and also a good dose of mutual suspicion.

These similarities make jazz and philosophy prime for a fusion. For both are progressive disciplines rooted in their histories, and these histories leave them open to new influences, approaches and modes of expression. A readiness to embrace new influences is a sign of health in both, and can be readily seen in the many examples that have already occurred. Productive jazz-fusions have been developed with European, Indian, and many other classical and folk musics, as well as with rock, samba, calypso, fado, medieval plainchant ... it is hard to think of a major musical idiom that jazz has not been fused with. Jazz itself was born of a remarkable fusion that once took place in America, so perhaps this is unsurprising; but the variety of idioms it has embraced for its own purposes is certainly very unusual, and arguably unique.

Similarly philosophy is exceptional in its breadth of interest, such that it can reflect productively on other academic disciplines, artistic endeavours, religious and political life, and practically any area of human concern; while remaining recognisably philosophical. Unlike jazz, it emerged – in the shape in which we now recognise it – not from fusion but fission; as sciences and other fields of learning gained their independence, leaving a core set of concerns that could be traced back to the Greeks and other ancient cultures (Tartaglia 2016a; 2016c). These concerns – with knowledge, reality and right action – were so wide that they remained applicable to these fields, such that there can be a ‘Philosophy of X’ for a very extensive range of Xs. No other academic discipline is like this. Of course, our concern is not with thinking philosophically about jazz, but with jazz as a form of performance philosophy. But philosophy has been incorporated into art before – there is plenty of philosophy in Shakespeare, for instance (McGinn 2006) – and its breadth of concern makes it particularly suited to this.

Jazz and philosophy are both notably fusion-happy. The fusion is viable for philosophy, because philosophy produces non-argumentative effects which are suited to artistic expression. It is viable for jazz, because jazz has already progressed in such a way as to demonstrate an openness to, and concern with, philosophical ideas. It is perhaps inevitable that such fusions would be more enthusiastically embraced by the Continental and Free sides of the schisms mentioned, given their greater concern with experimentation. However it does not have to be like this; the use of non-argumentative effects in philosophy, as well as interest in philosophical ideas in jazz, is common-currency to both – and in my compositions, I have drawn freely from all sides.

The interest in philosophy that has arisen in jazz is not confined to how artists describe their inspiration and the significance of their work. It has also appeared in attempts to fuse jazz with poetry (see Page 2012). There have been numerous attempts at this, with the best-known being Charles Mingus’ ‘The Clown’. In more recent years, artists such as Steve Swallow, Kurt Elling, Jayne Cortez and David Murray have dedicated albums to jazz-poetry fusion. Now philosophy is not poetry, of course, but they do sometimes cover similar territory; and it seems to me that what I have been calling the non-argumentative effects of philosophical ideas might well be described as a kind of *poetic* effect. Causing people to think about their lives and their world differently, and inducing emotional responses in them as they do so, are typically thought of as poetic effects. If this is right, then the fusion I am suggesting might be thought of as an organic development for jazz, taking it to the source of ideas it has explored through the mediation of poetry (or religion).

Now improvisation is, of course, the most distinctive feature of jazz. Since philosophical ideas are refined and perfected in texts, rather as musical ideas are refined and perfected in compositions, this might suggest that jazz provides an unsuitable platform for presenting philosophy. But philosophy is not only read; it is also spoken and discussed. This remains a crucial component of the discipline and in ancient times was considered more crucial still. Talking has a directness that focuses the mind. It has unpredictability, borne of responsiveness to the situation; we must follow it in real time in order to keep up, with little opportunity to stop and revisit an idea. We can become personally engaged; and when the aim is to engage our interest with non-argumentative, poetic effects, this is essential.

Jazz improvisation has this same immediacy: the immediacy of talking. For talking is typically a form of improvisation; public readings are a comparative rarity. In day to day life, we mix stock phrases with more or less original thoughts, and frequently say things we have never said before; just as jazz musicians do.¹³ In jazz, as in talking, the ideas transfer directly from creator to listener, as can any emotion they are imbued with. In speech-acts, displays of intense passion are comparatively rare, and rarely something we want to witness. But in jazz they are commonplace and typically desirable; we can be compelled by them without being overly disturbed, since we are insulated by their status as art. By incorporating improvisation into the musical expression of non-argumentative philosophical effects, then, jazz can directly engage us, just as a lecture or philosophical debate can; but it can do so with considerably greater intensity, and with the potential to sustain those effects while they are artistically explored.

Improvisation is at the heart of jazz, but not philosophy; although philosophers do improvise when they talk. Nevertheless songs are at the heart of jazz too, and songs can be given philosophical lyrics. Moreover, through the use of an actor, philosophical ideas can also be integrated into improvised solos in a natural and seamless manner, as my work has hopefully demonstrated; thereby providing improvising soloists with an unprecedented source of inspiration. This is an addition to, rather than a replacement for, the purely musical sources of inspiration available to the improviser within other kinds of jazz.

- *This is a clear case of dumbing-down, which detracts from the seriousness of philosophy. Monty Python successfully pointed out the absurdity of combining music and philosophy with their ‘Philosopher’s Song’, and the matter should be left at that.*

It all depends on the music and the words. Combining philosophy with music has great potential for producing an absurd effect, since philosophy is associated with profundity, and music, often, with levity. However music can of course be serious; so this effect is by no means inevitable. There is an element of humour in the compositions I have discussed, but there are others on the *Continuum of Selves* debut album, *Jazz-Philosophy Fusion*, which lack this. One composition, ‘Dream, Death, and the Self’, after the monograph of that name by J.J. Valberg (2007), simply aims to musically evoke the rather ethereal mood that some of the ideas in that book can produce.¹⁴ And I can detect no humour in the classical settings of the *Tractatus* mentioned earlier.

¹³ Some find fault with stock phrases in jazz (e.g. Hamilton 2007); in doing so, it seems to me that they favour an artificial notion of improvisation, over the natural one which jazz typically utilises.

¹⁴ The recording of this composition is available on the same link as for ‘Teletransportation’, above.

The intention is patently not to substitute traditional presentations of philosophy with musical ones. It is to musically express the non-argumentative effects philosophy produces. So unless you think that the employment of these effects, by the likes of Parfit, or practically any philosopher attempting to engage and inspire their audiences, constitutes dumbing-down, then I see no substance to this objection.

- *It's unfair. You are simply parodying positions you disagree with. And the philosophers you are parodying are the ones who try to emotionally engage with their readers; do you want to discourage this and thereby make philosophy even drier than it already is?*

A central motivation of the experimental philosophy movement is to provide a check on the use of intuition in philosophy (Knobe and Nichols (eds.) 2008). For example, it has often been claimed in debates about free will, that the intuitive default position is that free will is incompatible with determinism; this arguably puts compatibilists on the back-foot, and helps to motivate the typically more metaphysically extravagant accounts of free will proposed by incompatibilists. Empirical evidence that most people's intuitions are in fact compatibilist, then, promises to undermine this line of argument, while dissuading philosophers from giving undue argumentative weight to their own, untested intuitions (ibid.: chapter 5).

Jazz-Philosophy Fusion is not trying to discourage the use of non-argumentative philosophical effects, however; and there is no reason to think it would do so. On the contrary, it is trying to bring attention to their existence and importance to the discipline. It provides no argument against them, and does not seek to parody them; even my parody of Schopenhauer is not directed at his use of these effects, but rather at his position. The aim is to celebrate these effects artistically, and to make philosophers more self-conscious about their employment of them. It is in this latter intention only that it shares something with the aims of experimental philosophy. For by drawing attention to them, it reveals their non-argumentative nature. This might be thought of as an aid to self-awareness for philosophers, who often aim for and are moved by these effects, despite conceiving themselves as engaged in a more disinterested intellectual venture. The effects are valuable, for they draw us into philosophical territory and sustain our interest. But we should not allow ourselves to be persuaded by them. Artistic presentations can bring this to our attention; by reversing the effects, for instance.

- *Jazz is an autonomous art-form with a history. It does not need philosophy artificially superimposed upon it in a misguided endeavour to lend it intellectual weight. This simply detracts from the purely musical values it has organically developed, and which provide its only legitimate criteria of assessment.*

Jazz certainly does not *need* philosophy. It has its own power which can transcend and make irrelevant any concepts imposed upon it; Billie Holiday's recordings of the 1930s, in which she worked with some of the tritest lyrics imaginable to produce great art, demonstrates this beyond a shadow of a doubt. However jazz can nevertheless *have* philosophy; it is one of many sources it is free to draw upon. This combination can produce one of the many chapters in its history. It may be inspired by the philosophy it incorporates to take new directions; but that will not affect musical assessment of whether the result is good jazz.

IV

Jazz-Philosophy Fusion has been my topic. I have found one way of doing it which I think is viable, but there could be others. All of the compositions on the album *Jazz-Philosophy Fusion* could be stripped of both their complex arrangements, and the acting in the solos, such that only the songs and chord sequences remained. The result, however conventional and mainstream the performance, would still be Jazz-Philosophy Fusion. The acting element, which allows the philosophy to be more thoroughly explored, and which inserts the philosophy directly into the improvisation, is inevitably more suited to a progressive jazz style. But the songs themselves could be performed in almost any jazz style, with the result still being that of inspiring jazz with non-argumentative philosophical effects. They could be presented in ‘lead-sheet’ format, like any other jazz song, and thereafter given any number of different treatments.

Although I have not attempted this, perhaps an original argument could be presented musically; though I suspect the music would have to be heavily if not entirely composed, and it is unclear to me what the point would be. Nevertheless, I do think that an original work of philosophy could be presented for the first time with coordinated music intended to express its non-argumentative effects; and this is what I shall attempt with my next monograph and album. Regardless of how this turns out, however, I think the particular justification I have offered is already substantive, whether or not the philosophy is already extant, and that it has wider application to other possible fusions of art and philosophy. Non-argumentative effects are an important but overlooked part of philosophy, without which it would lose much of its appeal; and they are effects that can be given artistic expression to good purpose.

Now you might uncharitably read this paper as a risible attempt at self-justification. I prefer to think of it as a manifesto. For you do not have to be both a jazz musician and philosopher to produce this fusion; you could be a philosopher who collaborates with jazz musicians. If this idea interests you, I am sure you would find many musicians out there who are just as eager to get involved as the musicians on my project have been.

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