On experiencing music from within*

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Abstract

Experiencing the emotion in a piece of music "from within" involves imagining feeling that emotion, but just what does one imagine, and why? It has been suggested that one imagines, of one's experience of hearing the sounds, that it is one's feeling the emotion. This suggestion, it is argued here, is unworkable. A better idea is that one imagines oneself to be expressing one's emotion in the sounds of the music. But imagining, by itself, is subject to few constraints; it is possible, with enough effort, to listen to an anxious piece of music, and imagine oneself expressing one's joy through it. To vindicate the idea, then, the constraints under which one imagines when one listens "from within" must be described. It is argued that one imagines feeling (e.g.) sad, when listening to sad music from within, because one begins by imagining one's hearing the sounds to be one's perceiving one's own behavior, and then allows this imaginative episode to unfold involuntarily. An imagining that one feels sad is then generated, in part, by an offline-running of one's disposition to infer what emotion one feels from internal perceptions of one's behavior.

1 Introduction

When one hears an emotion in a piece of music, one may be experiencing the music, in R. K. Elliott's terms, either "from without," or "from within" (Elliott 1967). When listening from without, one hears the music "as if someone were expressing his emotion in and through the sounds" (Elliott 1967, 119). One imagines that the sounds one hears are someone's (some fictional person's) expressive behavior, and that that behavior expresses an emotion that that person is feeling. Hearing an emotion in music "from without," therefore, is correctly described (more or less) by the

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hypothetical persona theory of emotions in music (Levinson 1996, 2006; Robinson 2005). But what of emotions heard when experiencing music from within? This question is both harder and more urgent, since listening from within is, arguably, the more common mode of listening (Walton 1994). Kendall Walton suggested, in a 1994 paper, that hearing an emotion in a piece, when listening from within, involves imagining feeling that emotion. In more detail, he claims that one imagines, of the auditory experience one has while listening, that it is one's feeling the emotion (Walton 1994). This paper will argue against that claim, and defend an alternative suggestion: experiencing music from within involves imagining the sounds that make up the music to be one's own expressive behavior. As before, hearing a piece as sad, when listening from within, involves imagining being sad; but it does not involve imagining anything about one's auditory experiences. Existing discussions of this idea (e.g. Budd 1985; Walton 2015) leave a core question unanswered: why, when listening this way, does one end up imagining feeling one emotion rather than another? According to the answer proposed here, the process that results in one imagining being sad engages the same abilities at work when one comes to know, in reality, that one is sad.

2 Walton: imagining about experiences

In "Listening with Imagination" Kendall Walton claims that music "sometimes gets us to imagine feeling or experiencing exuberance or tension [or some other emotion] ourselves," and that what we imagine is connected to what we hear:

Anguished or agitated or exuberant music not only induces one to imagine feeling anguished or agitated or exuberant, it also induces one to imagine of one's auditory experience that *it* is an experience of anguish or agitation or exuberance ... One imagines experiencing the emotion, and one imagines one's experience of the sounds to be one's experience of it. (Walton 1994, 55)

Walton says that his description "has much in common" with Elliott's "sketchy" characterization of experiencing music from within (55); we may take Walton to be discussing the same kind of listening, and offering a precisification of Elliott's

sketch. On this account, then, experiencing music from within involves making your auditory experience an object of your imagining, as a stick is an object of you imagining, if you imagine it to be a sword.

This account of experiencing music from within cannot be correct, however, for a simple reason: there are no auditory experiences, and so listeners cannot make such experiences objects of their imaginings. The "no experiences" thesis may be controversial, but the arguments for it are good. To start, an ordinary use of "experience" must be distinguished from a technical use (Hinton 1973); it is the technical use that appears in Walton's account. For an example of the ordinary use, consider "Skydiving last week was an amazing experience." This sentence is about what one has done, or what has happened to one, but is not about anything distinctively "inner" or mental. This is evident from the fact that reference to experiences can be eliminated; one may say the same thing with "skydiving last week was amazing." That is the ordinary use of "experience." The technical use of "experience," by contrast, does purport to refer to mental things; and using the word (or a close cognate) is essential to what is said.

Now experiences (when the word is used technically) are typically thought to be knowable in a special way: if I am having an experience, then I must be able to know I am having it by introspection. But a series of philosophers going back to G. E. Moore has observed that I am not able to know any such thing, because the mind is "transparent" (Moore 1903). In Michael Tye's version, "In turning one's mind inward to attend to the [alleged] experience, one seems to end up concentrating on what is outside again, on external features or properties" (Tye 1995, 30). If you stand before a red wall in normal light, you can know by looking that there is a red wall in front of you. But there is no other act, one of "looking inward," that you can perform that would reveal a visual experience to you; attempt to perform such an act, and you end up attending again to the wall and its color. But if no experiences are revealed through any such act, then that is because none exist to be revealed (Byrne 2009).

In reply, one might deny that experiences are known through introspection, and say that auditory experiences are just mental representations that result from information-processing in your auditory cortex (other conditions could be added).

Experiences would then be unobservable things, postulated by a theory of mind, for which one could have only indirect evidence. And (the reply continues) if experiences so-construed really exist, then they are available to be objects of acts of imagining.

But this revision does not save Walton's account. Maybe we *could*, under the right circumstances, make these "auditory experiences" (mental representations not knowable through introspection) objects of our imagining. But it remains true that we *don't*. When experiencing music from within, we do not imagine, of some unobservable theoretical thing that we can only know through inference, that it is our feeling sad.¹

3 Constraints on imagining

Another problem dogs Walton's suggestion. With the right effort, you can imagine almost anything about almost any object. It is common to imagine a stick to be a sword; but if need be, the stick can be imagined to be a train, or a town, or the Eiffel Tower. What goes for sticks goes also for auditory experiences. Transparency arguments aside, if I can imagine the experience I have when listening to the Adagio of Beethoven's Hammerklavier Sonata (a very sad piece) to be my feeling sad, I can also imagine it to be my feeling happy, or frustrated, or angry. What's to stop me?

The response might be that imagining it to be my feeling sad is a particularly natural or easy thing to do. But Walton does not discuss why this should be so. A

¹A referee asks if Walton's account could be defended by taking the objects of imagining to be, not experiences conceived in one way or another, but the listener's hearing the music. To avoid the objections raised in this section, this defense would require also removing reference to experience from the content of the imagining: rather than imagining of something that it is one's experience of an emotion, perhaps one imagines of something that it is simply one's being sad, or happy, and so on. The proposal, then, becomes this: one hears sad music from within if one imagines, of one's hearing it, that it is one's being sad. But this proposal is too far from the spirit of Walton's own suggestion to count as a revision of it. And how does one imagine, of one's hearing a piece of music, that it is one's being sad? The most natural way is to imagine that it is one's perceiving the bodily changes that are characteristic of sadness—which is close to the theory to be developed below.

good account of listening to music "from within" should say something about how or why we usually, or normally, end up imagining feeling certain emotions, and not others, when listening to some particular piece of music in that way.

4 Imagined self-expression, I

In *Music and the Emotions* Malcolm Budd discusses (without endorsing) a more promising suggestion about what experiencing music from within is. Experiencing, from within, a piece of music with emotion E in it is "make[ing]-believe that I feel E and that I am expressing my E in the sounds of M" (Budd 1985, 135).² In doing this one does not make one's auditory experiences an object of one's imagining; the "no experiences" thesis is not a problem here. But the music still gets in to what is imagined: the sounds that make up the music are imagined to be one's behavior—behavior expressive of E.

Walton endorses a similar idea in "Thoughtwriting":³

Listeners sing along with music as they hear it, or tap their feet, or sway with the music, dance, or march. [...] Listeners also remember previously heard melodies and, on later occasions, hum or sing, or just think them, or tap out rhythms.

In "performing" music in these ways, listeners are likely to be using the sounds (the sound types, anyway, or tokens of the types they hear) to express their own feelings or emotions, or feelings or emotions they try on, ones they experience at least in imagination. (Walton 2015, 70-71)

In the last sentence Walton suggests that sometimes, when one hears a sad piece from within, one actually becomes sad; and sometimes, one just imagines being

²Budd declines to endorse this suggestion largely because he disputes a further claim R. K. Elliott made about listening from within: that one value of listening from within is that, in doing so, the emotion is "expressed...in a specially adequate manner" (Budd 1985, 135). The present paper makes no further claims about what accounts for the value of listening from within.

³Walton explicitly links the way of listening he describes here to experiencing music from within a few paragraphs later; see (Walton 2015, 72).

sad. For simplicity, we may ignore the first possibility, and focus on the following proposal, common to Budd and Walton: to hear a piece as E (e.g., sad) from within is to (i) imagine being sad, and (ii) imagine expressing one's sadness in the sounds of the music.

The problem with this proposal is not so much falsity as incompleteness. An account of experiencing music from within should shed light on why certain pieces (like the Beethoven Adagio) are heard as sad, others are heard as joyful, and so on. The proposal as stated does not answer this question.

The problem, in fact, is a re-run of the second problem for the idea in section 2 (that one imagines one's auditory experience to be one's feeling sad). I can listen to Mozart's "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik" (not a sad piece) and, with the right effort of will, imagine I am sad, and am expressing my sadness in the music. Again, what's to stop me?

The response, again, might be that imagining the music to be my expressing my sadness is not a particularly natural or easy thing to do. But why this should be so, neither Budd nor Walton says. The balance of this paper attempts an answer.

5 The epistemology of emotion

If we want to know how people come to *imagine* they are sad, when they listen to certain pieces of music in a certain way ("from within"), it will help to know how people come to *know* they are sad, in ordinary circumstances. Imagining is, after all, in many ways like "offline" believing (see, e.g., Currie and Ravenscroft 2002). So the mechanisms that produce an imagining that one is sad are likely to overlap those that produce a belief (or knowledge) that one is sad in ordinary circumstances—the mechanisms will just have been run offline.

To understand the epistemology of emotion some facts about the nature of emotion will be needed. Philosophers and psychologists disagree about what emotions are, but this much is safe: feeling an emotion involves having certain thoughts and undergoing certain bodily changes.⁴ Feeling sad, for example, involves having

⁴Scarantino and de Sousa (2018) survey the debate. In some cases, e.g. anxiety or depression, it has been denied that any thoughts are constitutive; for this reason these conditions are sometimes classified as moods rather than emotions. While

the thought that something bad has happened. If someone is sad that there is no chocolate, then they have the thought that there is no chocolate, and evaluate that absence as bad.⁵ (The bad thing need not be bad for the sad person; you can be sad that a friend has stubbed their toe.) That is the thought component of sadness. The bodily changes that are characteristic of sadness are familiar: a sluggish heaviness in your limbs and face, a slowing of your heart rate, a hunching of your shoulders, crying (of course); the list could be continued. Not all of these happen whenever you are sad, but each time some of them do, to some degree. What's more, the thoughts and the bodily changes constitutive of an emotion are not independent, or separate. Instead, the bodily changes are a response to the (content of) the thought. If one is sad, one (i) has the thought that such-and-such, where such-and-such is evaluated as bad, and (ii) has sluggish limbs, or is crying (etc), and, moreover, (iii) has sluggish limbs (etc) *because* such-and-such.⁶

If this is a (partial) account of what emotions are, then how does one come to know what emotions one is feeling? Since there are no experiences (section 2), it cannot be that one comes to know one is sad by introspecting an experience of sadness. Instead, coming to know one feels a certain emotion involves coming to know, by perception, that one is doing some of the things that are characteristic of that emotion.⁷ If you are sad, and your sadness on that occasion manifests in

they are relevant to our topic (plenty of music is anxious), I set them aside here. In any case, it is the bodily changes component that is central to the theory defended in section 6.

⁵"Has the thought that X" is meant to be weaker than "believes that X." To qualify as a belief a thought must be sensitive enough to your evidence, and be able to influence some range of behaviors. Whether the thoughts that emotions involve meet these conditions is controversial (see e.g. Larmaque 1981, Walton 1978, and Carroll 1990). (In the case of someone being sad that there is no chocolate, the conditions for belief are surely met: the person will agree that, and be willing to assert that, there is no chocolate—marks of belief if not knowledge. The controversial cases are things like phobic fears. Thanks here to a referee.)

⁶This last claim is mildly controversial; Prinz (2004), for example, holds that the bodily changes are not a response to the thought, but instead constitute having the thought. These differences will not matter here.

⁷See e.g. (Laird 2007), which presents experimental evidence for this. The account developed here also draws on, and resembles that in, (Byrne 2018).

a sluggishness in your limbs, and you know you are sad in the ordinary way (you have not learned it from your therapist), then part of how you came to know you were sad was your perceiving that your limbs were sluggish, through your sense of proprioception.

Of course, one may have sluggish limbs without being sad; one may have just taken a muscle relaxant. The same is true for other behaviors and bodily changes that are characteristic of sadness, as one may verify by chopping some onions. So inferring *I am sad* from *my limbs are sluggish* does not always preserve truth. But we are not disposed to make this inference under all circumstances. Sometimes we know or suspect that something other than a bad event has caused us to undergo bodily changes characteristic of sadness. If one knows that one's crying is caused by some onions, one will not infer that one is sad. But absent knowledge or suspicion that circumstances are unusual, we are disposed to infer *I feel E* from *I am doing or undergoing X*, where X is a behavior or bodily change characteristic of E.

Sometimes knowledge that circumstances are unusual is absent because one knows, instead, that circumstances are normal: one knows, for example, that one is crying in response to a breakup, or a disappointment at work. Other times, knowledge that circumstances are unusual is absent because one is simply ignorant: one does not know what is causing one's tears. One often still infers that one is sad in this second case, and that inference often produces knowledge. We often know we are sad without knowing why.

To emphasize a point already made, if one infers what emotion one is feeling from internal observations of behavior and bodily changes, then in making this inference one must recognize, if only implicitly, which emotion that behavior and those changes are characteristic of. One must know, possibly without being able to clearly articulate that knowledge, that sluggish limbs are characteristic of sadness, rather than of some other emotion, or no emotion at all.

To sum up, coming to know you feel some emotion involves

1. Knowing (through perception, including proprioception) what you are doing, understood broadly to cover things like *crying* and also bodily states like *your limbs feeling heavy*; and

2. Recognizing whether what you are doing is characteristic of sadness, or anger, or some other (or no) emotion.

6 Imagined self-expression, II

The previous section's account of how one comes to know one feels E may now be applied to the question of how, when listening, "from within," to a piece of music with an emotion E in it, one comes to imagine feeling E.

Return to the suggestion that hearing a piece as E (e.g., sad) from within is (i) imagining being E, and (ii) imagining expressing one's emotion in the sounds of the music. The problem, again, was that one can, if one tries, perform act (ii) while listening to a piece with any emotional character, or no emotional character at all.

The solution is to amend the account, so that listening from within involves imagining in a certain way. Needed here is a distinction between stipulative imagining and involuntary imagining. If I hold up a cup you know to be empty, and ask you to imagine that it is full of water, and you do so, then your imagining is stipulative; through an effort of will you have made it so that you imagine that the glass is full. Suppose now that I turn the cup over, and that as I do so you find yourself imagining that water is pouring from the cup. In doing this you have allowed the imaginative scenario to unfold without any further direct input; it is an episode of involuntary imagining. One may stipluatively imagine, of some sounds, that they are an expression of one's sadness, or joy, or anxiety, or whatever. But whether one will involuntarily imagine any of these things, depends on how the imaginative episode got started.

Most imaginative projects start out with stipulative imagining, and then proceed involuntarily, with occasional further stipulative imaginings inserted. Importantly, an initial stipulative imagining need not feel jarring or require effort. Staring at the clouds, you may notice that one resembles a unicorn, and then you may begin imagining your seeing the cloud to be your seeing a unicorn. This is a stipulative imagining, even if the transition from the noticing to the imagining is effortless and natural.

⁸See (Williamson 2020); he uses "voluntary" where I use "stipulative."

Return to listening from within: if one listens from within to a sad piece, one will imagine feeling sad, and imagine the sounds to be one's expressing one's sadness. But both of these imaginative acts are involuntary, consequent on an earlier act of stipulative imagining. To improve and complete this account of listening from within, then, we must say what the earlier stipulative act is, and explain why it leads to imagined emotions and imagined expression.

The stipulative imagining one performs, when listening from within, I claim, is imagining, of one's hearing the music, that it is one's perceiving one's own behavior.

Do we really ever imagine this? A fact Walton cites is evidence also here: our propensity to hum or tap along. There are more dramatic versions of this act. Rock fans, when listening to an especially powerful guitar solo (the one on Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven," or the one on Pink Floyd's "Comfortably Numb," maybe), often "air guitar" along. I suggest that they do this because they are imagining that they are making those sounds, and they are imagining their hearing those sounds (coming from the speaker) to be their hearing sounds they are making themselves; and they air-guitar because doing so facilitates this imagining. Similarly, listeners familiar with Phil Collins' 1981 hit "In the air tonight" find it hard not to air drum along with its famous break. They are imagining making those drum sounds, and also imagining their hearing those drum sounds (coming from the speaker) to be their hearing sounds they themselves are making, and this imaginative project is augmented by pretending to (and imagining one is) playing the drums. Of course, in other cases imagining that one's hearing the sounds is one's perceiving one's own behavior may not be directly linked to an instrument, or manifested in movements of one's hands or body. The melody in Variation 1 of Bach's Goldberg Variations leaps about, and I think that when I listen to it (from within), I imagine my hearing the melody leap about to be my perceiving myself leap about; but I do not imagine myself playing the piano.

So: one begins by stipulatively imagining, of one's hearing the music, that it is one's perceiving one's own behavior. One then allows this episode to continue involuntarily. Now when you engage in involuntary imagining, you tend to "develop" your imaginings in much the same way you (actually) make inferences from your

evidence. If you stipulatively imagine a cup is full of water and is turning, and you make no further stipulations, you will likely imagine that the water spills; similarly, if you know a cup is full and will be turned, you will infer that the water will spill. Here our disposition to infer *the cup will spill water* from *the cup is full and is tip-ping* is run offline: its input and outputs are imaginings, the imaginative analogues of beliefs, rather than beliefs themselves. In the case of emotion, when you perceive your behavior you use the recognitional ability described in section 5 to determine what (if any) emotion you are feeling; similarly, when you (stipulatively) imagine your hearing some sounds to be your perceiving your behavior, this recognitional ability will be run offline, and if it recognizes your behavior as characteristic of e.g. sadness, you will (involuntarily) imagine feeling sad.

For example, the (right hand) melody in Variation 1 of the Goldberg Variations leaps and races about effortlessly. If, therefore, one stipulatively imagines that one's hearing that melody is one's perceiving one's own behavior, then one thereby imagines (among other things) that one perceives oneself leaping and racing about effortlessly. Now if one actually perceived oneself doing such things (and circumstances were not unusual) one would infer that one is full of joy; therefore, if one *imagines* doing these things, one will go on to imagine that one is full of joy.

It might be objected that the behavior one imagines perceiving, when one imagines, of one's hearing Variation 1, that it is one's perceiving one's own behavior, is so unlike any behavior any human ever has, or is even capable of engaging in, that one's ability to know what one is feeling by observing one's own behavior will be unable to make anything of it. Feed that behavior as "input" into that ability, and it will, as it were, crash, or output only an error message. But this is to assume that the recognitional ability in question is looking for an exact match between the behavioral input, and some stored behavioral pattern. It is not. I have smiled many a sad smile, probably never the exact same one twice, but I can still recognize such smiles, when I perceive them from the inside, as characteristic of sadness. That is because, while they differ in detail, they are the same at some more abstract level of description. Similarly, while hearing Variation 1 is not exactly like perceiving myself leap and race in a joyful manner, these things are alike in a more abstract way, one that my ability to recognize emotions in my behavior is sensitive to.

To circle back to the beginning, the proposal in (Budd 1985), on which this one builds, says that listening to sad music from within involves imagining the sounds to be one's expressing one's sadness. So far the account developed here asserts only that listening from within involves (stipulatively) imagining one's hearing the sounds to be one's perceiving one's own behavior, and, as this imaginative episode develops, involuntarily imagining being sad. Nothing has been said about imagined expression. In the end, however, the act of imagined expression Budd mentions does occur. If one, in imagination, recognizes one's imagined behavior as characteristic of sadness, and (involuntarily) imagines being sad, then one must imagine that one's imagined behavior is a manifestation of one's sadness—that is, that through it one is expressing one's sadness.

Finally, a remark about the resemblance theory of musical expression is in order. This theory says, more or less, that a piece of music is expressive of an emotion E iff it resembles a physical appearance, or a behavior, that is a characteristic way for humans to express E. It bears emphasis that the account of experiencing music from within offered here does not compete with this theory; they answer different questions—what is involved in experiencing music from within? versus what makes e.g. sad music sad? The first concerns psychological processes inside listeners, the second concerns a property (possibly dispositional) of the music itself. Still the second question, and the resemblance theory's answer, are clearly relevant to this paper's project. If the view developed here is correct, the resemblance theory is at least partly right. The view, to repeat, says that one experiences a piece of music as sad "from within" if one stipulatively imagines, of one's hearing the sounds, that it is one's perceiving one's own behavior, and one allows this imaginative episode to unfold involuntarily, and this results in one imagining being sad (where this result is produced by the offline operation of one's disposition to infer what one is feeling from perceptual input about one's own behavior). If a piece of music meets the resemblance theory's criterion for being sad—if it does indeed resemble behavior that is characteristic of sadness—then certainly imagining one's hearing the music to be one's perceiving one's behavior will result in the above-mentioned disposi-

⁹Two prominent versions are in (Kivy 1989) and (Davies 1994); Kivy calls it the contour theory, Davies calls it appearance emotionalism.

tion recognizing the (imagined) behavior as behavior characteristic of sadness. The resemblance theory, however, has known limitations, for example the fact that minor or diminished chords can be used to express sadness or anguish, even though they do not (in any obvious way) resemble behavior that characteristically expresses those emotions. Those limits, however, are not limits of this paper's account of experiencing music from within. That is because the resemblance theory focuses on externally-observable behavior that is characteristic of the various emotions, while the account here of experiencing music from within invokes that capacity to recognize perceptions of one's behavior from the inside, as perceptions of behavior characteristic of an emotion. And the aspects of one's behavior that one may perceive from the inside go beyond the aspects that are observable by third parties: one can perceive the tension in one's muscles, the racing of one's heart, a metallic taste in one's mouth, and so on. Since many of these are characteristic of some emotion or other, they can ground knowledge of what emotion one is feeling. If, when listening to some music from within (as here characterized), one imagines one's hearing the music to be one's perceiving tension in one's muscles, one may go on (involuntarily) to imagine that one is anxious—even if no one looking at you when you (actually) tense your muscles in that way could know you were anxious.¹⁰

7 Conclusion

When listening to a sad piece of music from within one does not imagine, of one's auditory experience, that it is one's feeling sad. But listening from within does

¹⁰Although listening to music "from without" is not the topic of this paper, an account of it paralleling this account of listening from within suggests itself. Experiencing (say) sadness in a piece of music from without is supposed to be experiencing the sadness, "in a certain imaginative manner," as someone else's (Elliott 1967, 112). How do you do that? The parallel account says: you stipulatively imagining that your hearing the music is your perceiving someone else's behavior, and then, as the imaginative episode develops, involuntarily imagining that that person is sad, as a result of the off-line running of your ability to detect emotions in others' behavior. Since emotions tend to be contagious—seeing a sad person crying tends to make people sad—this imaginative episode is apt to evolve into one where you imagine yourself to be sad as well. (Thanks here to a referee.)

(in such cases) involve imagining being sad; the question is why and how. The new proposal in this paper begins from the idea, put forward in (Budd 1985) and (Walton 2015), that hearing an emotion in a piece of music, when listening to the music from within, involves imagining feeling that emotion, and imagining, of the sounds that make up the music, that they are your expressing that emotion in your behavior. This proposal is incomplete, because it does not explain why people tend to converge in their imagining: why they tend to hear sadness in one piece (e.g. the Beethoven Adagio) and joy in another (e.g. the Bach variation). To complete the proposal, the constraints in play, when one engages in the kind of imagining that listening from within requires, must be articulated. To articulate them this paper uses the distinction between stipulative and involuntary imagining. When listening from within, one begins by stipulatively imagining that one's hearing the sounds is one's perceiving one's own behavior. This episode of imagining is then allowed to unfold involuntarily. When an episode of imagining proceeds in that way, it engages one's disposition to infer, from a belief that one is behaving in ways characteristic of E, that one feels some emotion E; this disposition is run offline, and so produces imaginings rather than beliefs. Some of the things one imagines perceiving oneself doing, when one listens to the Beethoven Adagio, are things characteristic of sadness; that is why one finds oneself, when listening to it from the inside, imagining being sad.

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