



## Reply to [Robert Cantrick](#)

Nicholas Cook



REFERENCE: [mto.02.8.2.cantrick.php](http://mto.02.8.2.cantrick.php)

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[1] Regarding listening: I wasn't arguing that meaning is "in" the music in any metaphysical sense. Meaning is realized through individual acts of experiencing music as meaningful; in this sense it is performative. I argued, however, that specific pieces of music constrain such performances of meaning in specific ways, and to this extent one can say that the music has a determinate potential for meaning. By way of shorthand we tend to refer to this as the music's meaning—but it *is* shorthand, and misleading shorthand, if it leads us to think that music has meaning other than in the act of experiencing it. It was in an attempt to clarify this that I drew a distinction between *potential* and *actualized* meaning.

[2] The point about performance is similar. In my article I talked about constraints inherent in compositional structure—so that I discussed the meaning of (or more correctly, a determinate potential for meaning inherent in) the first movement recapitulation of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, rather than the music as specifically performed by Furtwaengler in 1953, say. Of course listeners don't hear Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in the abstract, they hear specific performances of it, and each performance adds its own attributes to those specified compositionally. That is, every performance has its own potential for meaning; it can filter out possible meanings or add others. (The model I outlined would work equally well as applied to individual performances.) The kinds of properties I was talking about, however—brightness, glare, flicker and the rest—are probably more or less invariant as between performances, which means that the associated potential for meaning can be regarded as inherent in the composition rather than just in performances of it. But to say this isn't to say that listeners are responding to some kind of an abstract, out-of-this-world object.

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