

Issues in Contemporary Metaphysics

Lecture 10: Lesser Kinds

1. Works of Music

Take these sentences:

‘Beethoven’s Piano Sonata No. 14 is aesthetically pleasing.’

‘Bob Dylan composed *Blowin’ in the Wind*’

‘I love Arcade Fire’s *My Body is a Cage*’

Read literally, each of them commits to there existing some thing that is either pleasing, composed by Dylan or loved by me. But that is a metaphysically contentious claim.

Works vs. Performances

What is *not* contentious is the existence of *performances*. For instance, every time an orchestra performs *Piano Sonata No. 14*, my MP3 player plays *My Body is a Cage*, or Dylan knocks out *Blowin’ in the Wind* in some room laced with cannabis smoke, there is a performance of that work. The performances are composed out of, say, air vibrations. Enough air vibrations and you end up with a performance. So performances are (relatively) uncontentious because they are *concrete*; they are located in space and time; they are physical objects.

But those three sentences given at the start don’t refer to these performances. For instance, the *presto agitato* movement of Beethoven’s Sonata is incredibly difficult to play. Across the world, and throughout time, I conclude that many performances of Beethoven’s Moonlight sonata have thus failed to be aesthetically pleasing. So the *work* has properties that the *performance* does not have. So those sentences don’t refer to *performances* at all. If they refer to anything then they must refer to some thing else: *works of music*. So there exist numerous performances of Beethoven’s Piano Sonata No. 14 *and in addition there exists the work itself*. The performances are performances of the work. And the aesthetic properties of the performance are not necessarily the same as the works.

Nominalising Works Away

‘Beethoven’s *Moonlight* is a sonata’

Following Rudner and Bachrach we could paraphrase the first one as:

$(\forall x) (x \text{ is a performance of } \textit{Moonlight} \rightarrow x \text{ is composed of a succession of three movements})$

But what of the predicate? Surely that predicate isn’t a *monadic* predicate? Surely it’s a *relation*! In other words

$x \text{ is a performance of } \textit{Moonlight} \text{ iff } \exists y \exists x (y = \textit{Moonlight} \ \& \ x \text{ stands in the performance relation to } y)$

Imagine you can sort that out. Try:

‘Nine Inch Nail’s *March of the Pigs* features a seven second silence part way through’

But that could very well be false? If NIN played it live then it might have had an eight second silence, or a six second silence. Maybe one time they did a minute as a joke?

‘The Beautiful South’s *Don’t Marry Her* features the phrase ‘sweaty bollocks’.

To make it radio acceptable the line was changed to ‘Sandra Bullocks’. It is quite conceivable that the radio edit got played more (*more* performances) than the version containing the phrase. Surely that is *irrelevant* as to whether the song contains the phrase (surely it does!). And does the truth change over time?

‘Mozart composed more than thirty symphonies’

‘Exactly one of Bruckner’s symphonies was unfinished’

What paraphrases can we give here? Counting seems to explicitly involve quantification over entities (compare: ‘There are three ways to win this chess match’ and ‘There could have been more things than there actually are’). Consequently we have great difficulty paraphrasing these. I refer you to Dodd’s *Works of Music* §1.3 (where indeed I get some of these examples from)

Musical Platonism

What if works were *abstract*. If they are abstract, what type of abstracta are they? Are they universals? Propositions? Possible worlds? No, for a work isn’t *had* by an object (like a universal); it isn’t true or false (like a proposition); it doesn’t (usually) represent the world being a certain way (like a possible world). That means we need another ontological category. (These Platonists are starting to get greedy!)

Dodd and Levinson identify works with *Types*. Levinson thinks there are types of ‘sound-structures’. A ‘sound-structure’ is some specific noise pattern. For instance my cough corresponds to one sound-structure, whereas a clap corresponds to another. A cough is a *token* of one type of sound-structure, a clap is a token of another.

But *those* sound structures are, whilst types, *not* identical to works of music! Those types exist regardless of what anyone does. And works of music, according to Levinson, do not – works of music can be *created*, so they did not *always* exist. But *those* types did always exist.

Instead works are identical to *indicated types*. An indicated type is a type that has been ‘tethered’ to an act of indication. So I *indicate* a type to you. For instance, a certain sound structure that all performances of Beethoven’s Moonlight Sonata fall under. In doing so I ‘tether’ that type with my act of indication. For Levinson a type-as-indicated-by-an-agent is *not* the same type as that type I indicated. So the sound structure type that all performances of *Moonlight* fall under is not the work of music *Moonlight*. Instead, when Beethoven composed *Moonlight* in 1801 he was bringing our attention to a certain type (the sound structure). In so doing a *new* type came into existence: that sounds structure-as-indicated-by-Beethoven. *That* type is *Moonlight*.

Here’s an example. Imagine I accidentally start playing *Chopsticks* even though I know nothing of the piece. Maybe I was raised by wolves and came across a piano. My performances sound exactly the same as the one played by Tom Hanks in *Big*. Both are tokens of some sound structure, ψ . But only *one* a token of *Chopsticks*. The song played by Hanks has some sort of causal connection with Euphemia Allen’s composition. So Allen *indicated* ψ by composing the work. In doing so he brought into existence the type of ψ -as-indicated-by-Allen in 1877. That type is *Chopsticks* not the sound structure. In the ‘raised by wolves’ scenario, of course, there is no such connection. So it is a token of the sound structure but not the work.

These indicated types only come into existence when an act of indication is tethered to some type. So *Chopsticks* didn’t exist before 1877 (even though the type corresponding to the sound structure did). Why is this important? Because it captures the intuition that composers *create* the musical works that they compose. And if they existed eternally, they’d no more be created than we can create the numbers, or the Platonic universals.

Dodd thinks Levinson’s theory won’t work. Here are two of his reasons:

- There is no motivation for thinking indicated types exist only when indicated.
- Demands that the abstracta causally interact with the concrete.

Instead Dodd says works are eternal Types. This avoids many problems, but doesn’t this mean that musical works *aren’t* created? Dodds admits this, and then tries to defuse the argument for creatibility.

Works as concreta

But wouldn’t it be nice if they *weren’t* abstract? That’d fit with naturalist intuitions; easily allow for creatibility (as they’d be *concrete*) etc. Maybe we could conjure up some *sui generis* concrete entity and just call it a work of music. But it’d be nice not to do that either.

Well, what *are* musical works to be identified with if not abstract types or some new type of entity? Perhaps they are identical to the performances of the work. But the performances are distinct. So the work can’t be identical to every single one of them, as by transitivity of identity we’d have a contradiction. Maybe one of the performances is special? We could identify it with the *first* performance maybe? But what if there is no *first* performance (perhaps it was first played *simultaneously*)?

Caplan and Matheson identify a work with the *fusion* of its performances. Recall that ‘fusion’ just means the object composed out of those things. So I’m the fusion of my atoms; you’re the fusion of yours; and a musical work is composed out of all of its performances put together from every time. So it’s not identical to any given performance but the object they all compose.

So works *perdure*. Just as objects have temporal parts according to the perdurantist, so too do works as conceived by Caplan and Matheson. The performances are the temporal parts of the work. (Kind of: that’s a lie). So musical works come into existence with their first performance, and then remain until their last performance.

Recall that perdurantists (usually) say that whenever you have some material objects they compose a further object. So if you’re that kinda of perdurantist you *already* believe in the perduring fusions of performances. The performances are material objects, *a fortiori* there are fusions of them. So we have identified a musical work with an object we already believe in for independent philosophical reasons.

2. Other Lesser Kinds

So we’ve looked at two lesser kinds: Holes and Works. There are others!

What about *groups* (does Barclays Bank PLC exist?; if it does, is it *sui generis*?; abstract or concrete?; a fusion of all the people who work for Barclays?; some kind of set?)?

Do *species* exist (does the human race exist?; is it the fusion of all humans?; the set of all humans?; a *sui generis* abstract object?)?

Do *sounds* exist (are they physical things?; are they *sui generis*?)?

3. Fundamentality: What is it?

Those who buy into fundamentality think that there are two questions:

- What is there?
- What is there really?

They think that uneasiness about ontological questions often arises because of conflating these questions. Take the example of works of music. Are there any musical works? '*Of course there are!*' they say. How can a competent English speaker think otherwise? But are there *really* any musical works? No. There aren't *fundamentally* any musical works. They exist, but they don't *fundamentally* exist. And when it boils down to it, those who buy into this distinction worry about what really exists rather than what exists. This might be because looking at what exists is fairly straightforward and trivial – we just look at natural language (Cameron). Or it might not be trivial, but exceedingly easy to answer (Schaffer)

For such people, this entire course is wrong headed. What I should've been doing is talking about whether there are, fundamentally, any properties; fundamentally any possible worlds; fundamentally any spatiotemporal regions etc. If I asked that, we could have a proper debate. Merely talking about what exists doesn't help.

4. Fundamentality: Motivation

Historical Precedence

The idea that there is a difference between what there is and what there really is allegedly has historical precedence. For instance, Spinoza talks about people but he thinks all there *really is* is a single substance. Descartes talks about tables and chairs but he thinks there *really is* is a single material substance. The Euthyphro Dilemma is somewhat similar: does God set the moral truths or do they come prior to him? Which is more *fundamental* – the moral truths or God's statements about what is moral? Heck, Schopenhauer seems to believe that there are *three* levels. So we might find motivation from historical precedent.

Intuition

One might think the distinction is intuitive. Isn't it *obvious* that there's a difference between what there is, and what there *really* is. Or another way: we might say that it's obvious that ontology is only concerned with what makes a sentence true, not what the true sentences are themselves. Cameron has something like this going on. We need only worry about what the truthmakers are for a given sentence. So sentences like 'There are statues' and 'There are works of music' are true. So there *are* such things. But the *real subject* of ontology are the truthmakers – the things that *fundamentally* exist.

Naturalness

Some people think that some properties are more *natural* than one another. (*cf* Properties where the natural properties were the universals). *Charge* is more natural than *being an orange or a lightsaber* Naturalness can guide what we mean – or at least, that's commonly believed. For instance, imagine you (and your linguistic community) call something 'gold'. It later transpires that a good portion of the stuff you call 'gold' is such that each molecule of it is composed of one iron atom and two sulphur atoms. The majority is instead composed of molecules whose atoms are neither iron or sulphur atoms and are instead atoms with atomic number 79 (call it Au). Even though we *used* the word such that the former was 'gold' we might, as we do, take this discovery to rule it out. The first stuff is iron pyrite – *fool's gold*. The second stuff is gold. We could have thought the predicate took both as its extension, but then the predicate wouldn't be following the natural carvings of the world. The world is naturally carved into two substances. Even though we *used* the word to refer to those two substances, we think that the natural carvings of the world trump that use.

We might think that *quantifiers* can be more natural than one another. That is, that there is *more than one quantifier* and *some quantifiers are more natural than others*. To demonstrate how and what that means, imagine two communities: the Universicans and the Nihiliese. When you talk to a Universican and point at a bunch of random objects and ask whether they compose, the Universican says yes. When you ask whether atoms compose a person, they say yes. When you talk to the Nihiliese, they deny that either the random objects *or* the atoms compose. Are they disagreeing? Maybe, but some think they might not be. If an American and an Englishman are arguing about whether footballs are round, we might fear they're *talking past one another*.

The American is asserting:

$$\forall x (Ax \rightarrow \sim Rx)$$

The Englishman is asserting:

$$\forall x (\exists x \rightarrow R x)$$

They *say the same* phonetically, but they mean something different. The *predicates* are different. Same here! You thought the Universican was asserting:

$$\exists x x \exists y (x x \text{ compose } y, \text{ where } y \text{ is a gerry mandered object})$$

And you thought the Nihilesian was asserting:

$$\exists x x \forall y (\sim x x \text{ compose } y \text{ and } y \text{ is a gerry mandered object})$$

And they would be contradictory! But perhaps quantifiers can vary. The Universican is asserting:

$$\exists_U x x \exists_U y (x x \text{ compose } y, \text{ where } y \text{ is a gerry mandered object})$$

Whereas the Nihilesian is asserting:

$$\exists_N x x \forall_N y (\sim x x \text{ compose } y \text{ and } y \text{ is a gerry mandered object})$$

They say the same sentences – they *sound* the same – but they *mean* something different as the quantifiers vary. If quantifiers vary, they can reconcile. But some, such as Sider, think the quantifiers are more natural than one another. We can imagine a culture that speaks some bizarre unnatural language – they don't have predicates for objects having spin or charge but only, say, for objects being *both* spinning and charged. But even if that language was as expressively powerful as one that did respect natural boundaries we should adhere to that, we should think the *more natural* language was better. For instance, truths in that language would explain truths in the less natural language. Sider thinks the same thing applies to quantifiers. In English we might, truly, assert that 'There are musical works'. But what we, as ontologists, should be interested in is what exists according to the perfectly natural quantifier. So imagine a language, Ontologese, where the quantifier is *perfectly natural*. The proper subject of ontology is what falls under the quantifiers in Ontologese. For instance, the things that exist in that language will explain what exists in all other languages. So what *fundamentally* exists is what exists *according to Ontologese*. Works of music might exist (i.e. be quantified over by the English existential quantifier in English) but not fundamentally exist (i.e. not be quantified over by the perfectly natural quantifier).

5. Fundamentality: Problems

Problem One

What if you *don't* think there's naturalness in the world – that any talk of one predicate being more 'natural' than another is just a projection of your mind. The *world* isn't natural, it's just *our ways* of carving it up? If we believe there are many quantifiers, but no naturalness, we have a problem. That stymies this move to fundamentality. It also seems to screw all of ontology! Now any disagreements about objects existing can be resolved by saying the parties are talking past one another. Are there possible worlds? Properties? Numbers? Sure, *if you're speaking a language where it's appropriate to say there are such things*. Ontology is dead. (Remember, this *isn't* an objection)

Problem Two

Or we might swing the other way. We might deny that fundamentality makes any sense whatsoever (*a fortiori* that quantifiers can come in degrees of naturalness etc.) One of the worries here is that the distinction renders ontology mysterious and ill-suited to be a discipline. It becomes 'esoteric'. (See Hofweber)