

# The Metaphysics of Musical Works

ABSTRACT: This paper argues that realists about musical works should accept sets and possibilities in order to give an explanation of why works fall under the predicates that they do. I then argue that, given such an ontology, we should identify musical works with sets.

## 1. Introduction

Assume for the course of this paper that we should be realists about musical works i.e. that musical works exist and should be included in our ontology.<sup>1</sup> This paper begins (§2) by introducing the extant realist theories on offer. It then turns to the following question:

(1) What explanation (if any) can be given of why works fall under the predicates that they do?

I will argue that the best answer to (1) involves accepting an ontology of sets and possibilities (§3-8). With that theory in place, I proceed to look at a different question:

(2) Can we identify musical works with things already in our ontology (e.g. Types, fusions, sets etc.) or are they *sui generis* entities?

There are a few realist answers to (2) that are on offer:

*Typism*: Musical works are eternally existing Types.<sup>2</sup>

*Performancism*: Musical works are perduring fusions of their performances.<sup>3</sup>

*Setism*: Musical works are sets (e.g. sets of performances and/or scores).

*Irreducibilism*: Musical works are a new *sui generis* entity, not identifiable with things from any other ontological category.

I will argue (§9-10) that if we accept my proposed answer to (1), we may as endorse a version of Setism. Thus, by using sets constructed out of possibilities, we can settle various worries in musical ontology.

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<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that such realism is demanded (see Ross Cameron 'There are no things that are musical works' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 48 (2008)), but an argument over the plausibility of realism itself is an argument for another time.

<sup>2</sup> I will concentrate on the presentation by Julian Dodd in his *Works of Music* (Oxford: OUP, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Ben Caplan and Carl Matheson, 'Defending Musical Perdurantism' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 46 (2006).

## 2. Preamble: Predicates<sub>mw</sub> and Predicates<sub>pf</sub>

Begin by introducing two pieces of terminology: ‘predicates<sub>mw</sub>’ and ‘predicates<sub>pf</sub>’. As a rough guide, the predicates<sub>mw</sub> are those predicates that are normally predicated of musical works, and predicates<sub>pf</sub> are those predicates that are normally predicated of performances. Similarly, subscript the individual predicates e.g. Beethoven’s Piano Sonata No. 14 – *PS14* henceforth – is a sonata<sub>mw</sub> whilst a particular *performance* of *PS14* is a sonata<sub>pf</sub>.

All realists, no matter what ontological identification they endorse, should deny that predicates<sub>mw</sub> and predicates<sub>pf</sub> are the same predicates e.g. ‘\_\_ is a sonata<sub>mw</sub>’ and ‘\_\_ is a sonata<sub>pf</sub>’ are not the same predicate, so a performance of *PS14* is a sonata<sub>pf</sub> but *not* a sonata<sub>mw</sub>, whilst *PS14* is a sonata<sub>mw</sub> but not a sonata<sub>pf</sub>. To demonstrate why this is so, take the theories in turn (except, of course, Setism for that’s the theory I intend to endorse anyhow).

Take Performancism. Whilst a particular performance of *PS14* is a sonata<sub>pf</sub>, the fusion of all performances of *PS14* (i.e. *PS14*) cannot be. Although each performance qualifies as a sonata<sub>pf</sub>, the *fusion* of those performances has too many movements, and exists for hundreds of years etc. But *PS14* is a sonata<sub>mw</sub>, so the performancist must say that sonatas<sub>pf</sub> and sonatas<sub>mw</sub> are different things, *a fortiori* that (at least some) predicates<sub>pf</sub> are not predicates<sub>mw</sub>.

Take Typism. Dodd is clear that Typists should think the two types of predicate are different from one another for Types have no spatial parts whereas the tokens do.<sup>4</sup> For instance, when we say that a particular performance of *PS14* has three movements, we are saying that a particular concrete sound event has other concrete sound events as parts. But when we say that *PS14* – the work itself – has three movements we’d better *not* be saying that. If *PS14* is a Type, it is not spatially located, ergo cannot have any concrete sound events as parts. So we must be saying something different – attributing to a work that it has three movements is a different matter entirely from a performance having three movements (i.e. *PS14* has three movements<sub>mw</sub> but does not have three movements<sub>pf</sub>). Again, as their extensions are different, the predicates<sub>pf</sub> and predicates<sub>mw</sub> are different.

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<sup>4</sup> Dodd *op cit* p. 46-7.

Take Irreducibilism. If the introduced *sui generis* entities are not located in space and time, then it will clearly have the same problem as Typism. If the *sui generis* entities are instead spatiotemporally located then, as Irreducibilists will presumably try to meet the intuitive persistence conditions of works (see §7), works will exist from the moment the composer creates it and then persist forever more (or, alternatively, until the final performance). But, as with Performancism, the work is now too long to count as a sonata<sub>pf</sub> as the performance does. So, whether works are located or not, Irreducibilists should draw a distinction between predicates<sub>mw</sub> and predicates<sub>pf</sub>.

So Typism, Performancism and Irreducibilism all demand that predicates<sub>mw</sub> and predicates<sub>pf</sub> are different things. I think we should endorse the position of Wolterstorff and Dodd that the difference is that the predicates<sub>mw</sub> are *analogical predicates* of the predicates<sub>pf</sub>.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, we can use this distinction to replace the rough definitions of predicates<sub>mw</sub> and predicates<sub>pf</sub> from above. The predicates<sub>pf</sub> are the literal predicates that performances fall under, whilst predicates<sub>mw</sub> are the non-literal analogues of those predicates<sub>pf</sub> (which works fall under). Note that not *every* predicate a work falls under is an analogical predicate e.g. if Typism were true then works would, *literally*, be Types (so it follows that not every predicate a work falls under is a predicate<sub>mw</sub>; only some are i.e. those that are analogues of predicates<sub>pf</sub>, which is why the earlier definition of predicates<sub>mw</sub> and predicates<sub>pf</sub> was only rough and ready).

With this distinction in place, we open up one avenue of investigation towards answering (1) (an avenue that Dodd endorses for his Typist theory). In that they are analogous, it seems obvious that the predicates<sub>mw</sub> that the work falls under and the predicates<sub>pf</sub> that the performances fall under are systematically related to some extent. Indeed, it seems obvious that *certain* performances will be a dead give away as to what predicates<sub>mw</sub> the work falls under: namely, those of the properly performed performances (PPPs). Whilst a *bad* performance of *PS14* may not be aesthetically pleasing<sub>pf</sub>, or a performance that ends prematurely may not have three movements<sub>pf</sub>, *all* the PPPs of *PS14* that there could be will be aesthetically pleasing<sub>pf</sub>, be a sonata<sub>pf</sub>, have three

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<sup>5</sup> See Dodd (*op cit* p. 46) and Nicholas Wolterstorff *Works and Worlds of Art* (Oxford: OUP, 1980) p. 58-62.

movements<sub>pf</sub> etc. We could just say that the predicates<sub>mw</sub> the work falls under are just the analogues of the predicates<sub>pf</sub> that *all* the PPPs would fall under:

(3)  $W$  is  $F_{mw}$  =<sub>df</sub> every properly formed performance of  $W$  would fall under the corresponding predicate<sub>pf</sub>.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately (3) doesn't cut it as an answer to (1): it merely moves around the problematic bump in the realist's carpet. (3) features the relation '\_\_\_ is a properly formed performance of work \_\_\_'. As is, that relation will be a primitive. Although some things must be taken as primitive, this doesn't appear to be the best candidate if we want to be offering informative explanations. *That* primitive looks to have too tight a connection to the predication of musical works in the first place for it to be truly explanatory. Compare: if I asked you to explain why Humphrey won an election, it would (in most circumstances) be trivial and uninformative to say it was because he garnered the most votes. I would be looking, instead, for reasons to do with his policies, or his charismatic demeanour, or the values of the electorate. 'Garnering the most votes' has too tight a connection to 'winning the election' to be genuinely explanatory (at least, in most cases).

Similarly, just as winning elections and getting the most votes are tightly connected, the predicates<sub>mw</sub> a work falls under and a performance being properly performed seem tightly connected. Properly performed performances of a work are just those where every predicate<sub>mw</sub> of the work is matched by the performance having the corresponding predicate<sub>pf</sub> (all properly performed performances of *PS14* will be sonatas<sub>pf</sub> just because *PS14* is a sonata<sub>mw</sub>; aesthetically pleasing<sub>pf</sub> just as *PS14* is aesthetically pleasing<sub>mw</sub> etc.). So there is something suspicious about thinking it is an *informative* explanation to say that the predicates<sub>mw</sub> a work falls under is in virtue of its having certain PPP.<sup>7</sup> More importantly, even if you *are* happy with (3), as theoretical simplicity is a virtue, a theory

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<sup>6</sup> This doesn't quite furnish us with an answer to (1), for works will fall under literal predicates such as '\_\_\_ is a type' etc. and those predicates won't be predicates<sub>mw</sub>. But presumably falling under those literal predicates is easily explained by the ontological identification that is made e.g. works are literally Types because Typism is true. With that said, set such worries aside and assume that explaining what predicates<sub>mw</sub> a work falls under will give us everything we need to give an answer to (1).

<sup>7</sup> The 'informative' is important. For instance, Dodd endorses (3) and goes on to add that the properly performed performances are just those tokens which are properly formed. Obviously that doesn't really help (not that I believe Dodd intends it to, or was particularly concerned by the issues raised here), as now we've just moved the question back a stage: rather than asking what counts as a properly performed performance we are asking what counts as a properly formed token. So no advance is made by those sorts of analyses.

that did without such a primitive, and did not in turn introduce its own extra primitives, should be preferred in any case. So we have, as a desideratum, that we should provide an informative analysis of what it is for something to be a PPP.

### 3. The Proposed Explanatory Theory

I believe that this desideratum can be met, and that we can answer (1) without introducing any unwanted or suspicious primitives. Assume an ontology of sets and possibilia (and worlds). Given standard set theory there would then exist sets pairing performances with a world at which they are PPPs of the work they are performances of. Call such pairs ‘exemplars’. Further, there will be sets of those exemplars with the following form:

$$(4) \{ \langle w_n, a_n \rangle, \langle w_{n+1}, a_{n+1} \rangle \dots \}$$

where the  $w$ s are worlds and  $a$ s are the possibilia that are PPPs at the worlds they are paired with. Next, imagine that each work is ‘correlated’ with some such set of exemplars. This allows us to analyse predicates<sub>mw</sub>:

$$(5) W \text{ is } F_{mw} =_{df} \text{ for every exemplar } E \text{ that is a member of the set correlated with } W, \\ \text{the second member of } E \text{ is represented as being } F_{pf} \text{ at the first member of } E.$$

So where works are correlated with sets of the form given in (4), a work is a rock song<sub>mw</sub> iff every one of  $a_1, a_2 \dots$  is a rock song<sub>pf</sub> (at the world each is paired with); it’s aesthetically pleasing<sub>mw</sub> iff every one of  $a_1, a_2 \dots$  is aesthetically pleasing<sub>pf</sub> (at the world each is paired with) etc.

Does this do any better than taking ‘\_\_ is a properly performed performance of work \_\_’ as primitive? Not as yet, for I’ve done nothing to explain what ‘correlation’ is, or – more importantly – why or how each work is correlated with an appropriate set. If I left it at that then ‘correlation’ would be a primitive, one that was just as unwanted as ‘\_\_ is a properly performed token of work \_\_’. So in lieu of an analysis for correlation, (5) is no better than (3).

The solution is to analyse correlation. Start with a flawed analysis:

$$(6) W \text{ is correlated with a set of exemplars, } S =_{df} \text{ there is an ordered pair } \langle W, S \rangle.$$

Now ‘correlation’ is analysed using familiar set-theoretical notions, and facts about correlation (and therefore predication<sub>mw</sub>) are explained by what ordered pairs there are.

That counts as a genuine explanation (unless you're worried about what explanation there is for there being the ordered pairs that there are – but what explains *that* is an issue for metaphysics in general, or philosophy of mathematics, and so quite independent of musical ontology). Whilst we will be left taking some set-theoretical notion as primitive, that's a primitive most ontologists are happy to accept (at least for those who believe in sets). So we can answer (1) without having to introduce a primitive peculiar to musical ontology, and so succeed where (3) does not.

(6) also guarantees that *PS14* is paired with the appropriate set of exemplars, for (given standard set-theoretic assumptions) there will definitely be an ordered pair of *PS14* and the appropriate set of exemplars. But that's because *PS14* is paired with *every* set of exemplars, which is also why (6) is grossly flawed! Given (5) *PS14* would not just be a *sonata<sub>mw</sub>* but also a *canata<sub>mw</sub>* (for *PS14* is correlated with all the exemplars that should solely be correlated with *Dona nobis pacem*); it is also an irritating advert jingle<sub>mw</sub> (for it is correlated with the exemplars that should solely be correlated with the advert jingle you find most annoying) etc.

(6) nevertheless gives an insight into what we could say instead. We revise our musical ontology, and instead of, say, identifying works with Types, we endorse:

*Typism\**: Musical works are ordered pairs, where the first member is a Type and the second member is a set of exemplars.

Similarly, we could have *Performancism\**, *Irreducibilism\** (etc.) pairing performance fusions, *sui generis* entities (etc.) with sets of exemplars. But for purpose of example, we will use *Typism\** throughout. So initially the Typist identified some Type, *T*, with *PS14*. *Typism\** instead identifies *PS14* with the ordered pair  $\langle T, E \rangle$ . Subsequently we can redefine correlation:

(7) *W* is correlated with a set of exemplars,  $S =_{df} S$  is the second member of *W*.

Similarly, we must redefine what it is to be a performance of a work. Whereas it was previously the case that a performance was a token of the work, we now need:

(8) *p* is a performance of *W* =<sub>df</sub> *p* is a token of the first member of *W*.

Now every work is correlated with only one set of exemplars, rather than many sets (for every ordered pair has only one second member). So we avoid the problem that befell (6).

This new ontological identification, in combination with (7), also delivers the superior explanatory power that (6) brought, for it too only uses set-theoretical primitives in order to explain what predicates<sub>mw</sub> a musical work falls under. But (7) comes with its own problems. I defend Typism\* against these problems in §5-7 (and if such defences succeed will have completed the first aim of the paper and answered (1)).

#### **4. Problem One: Circularity and Reference**

You might think I've tried to pull one over on you. Assume *PS14* is to be identified with the ordered pair  $\langle T, E \rangle$ , where *T* is the Type that the Typist would otherwise identify with *PS14*, and *E* is a set of exemplars. All the explanatory work is being done by the members of *E* – where those members are just performances paired with the worlds at which they are PPPs of the work in question. The fear that there is no genuine explanation here arises when we ask *why E* has as members the exemplars that it does. For instance, given standard set-theoretic assumptions (and the existence of worlds and possibilia) there are pairings of performances, which aren't even of *PS14*, with worlds at which those performances are excellent rock songs<sub>pf</sub>. Why doesn't *E* have *those* pairings as members (which would erroneously make *PS14* a rock song<sub>mw</sub> rather than a sonata<sub>mw</sub>)?

One answer would be that the ordered pairs are members of *E* in virtue of pairing PPPs of *PS14* with the worlds they are properly performed at. But this wouldn't be good, for then we'd be back where we started. We didn't want to take '\_\_\_is a properly performed performance of work\_\_\_' as a primitive, so we analysed it in terms of correlation, and correlation in terms of the membership of certain relevant ordered pairs, but if we analyse which ordered pairs are relevant in terms of which performances are PPPs that'd be clearly circular.

But there is no circularity here, for the exemplars *do not* have their membership in virtue of the performances being PPPs. Compare my theory here with the class nominalist's identification of properties with sets of their instances, where there is a similar temptation to think circularity ensues. For instance, the property *red* would be the set of all red things. An object being red depends upon the membership of *red*, but one might suspect that the membership of *red* in turn depends upon which objects are red. The alleged circularity here is analogous to the circularity Typism\* stands accused of in the previous paragraph. But there is no circularity. Sets (including *red*) have their membership

regardless of what their members are like, and (given class nominalism) are properties regardless of what their members are like (in that a set of random coloured objects is still a property, just a weird gerrymandered one). So the membership of the set *doesn't* depend upon its members being a certain way. Similarly, the membership of a work, and its exemplars, *doesn't* depend upon how those members are. A performance isn't a member of one of the exemplars because it is properly performed, it just *is* a member of that exemplar. Or to put it another way: there's not much more to say about *why* sets have the members that they do, other than to cite the axioms of ZF set theory or what have you – none of which involves talking about the qualities of the members. So we don't *explain* the membership of the exemplars in terms of the performances being properly performed.<sup>8</sup>

But you might think I'm still cheating, and you just need to phrase the worry slightly differently. Rather than worrying about what it is in virtue of that the works have the members that they do, we might ask why the name 'Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 14' refer to *that* set. How do our words pick out the set  $\langle T, E \rangle$  rather than the ordered pair of  $T$  and the set of exemplars that would otherwise make *PS14* a rock song<sub>mw</sub>? Again, we can compare it to the case of *red*. However it is that the class nominalist explains how the word 'red' ends up referring to the set that it does, as opposed to other sets, is how 'Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 14' refers to *PS14*. (A related worry is not to ask about reference, but ask why the other such sets don't count as musical works. Just as the class nominalist thinks any old gerrymandered class counts as a property, I think such sets *do* count as works of music – see §6.)

## 5. Problem Two: Arbitrariness

But perhaps that doesn't settle any qualms. Perhaps you think the real worry is that Typism\* is arbitrary. You might suspect that there is no *principled reason* for accepting Typism\*, for what argument do I have for  $\langle T, E \rangle$  really being *PS14* as opposed to some other set? Moreover, what reason is there to think that a set standing in those relations

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<sup>8</sup> One might press the circularity objection, this time targeting the identification of properties with sets as well. This is the view of David Armstrong (see his *Nominalism and Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978)). I don't want to resolve that debate here. It is enough for my purposes to say that my theory is in the same boat as a popular metaphysical theory about properties.

*explains* why it falls under the appropriate predicates<sub>mw</sub> as (5) and (7) entail? After all, none of Typism\*, (5), or (7) could be said to be *intuitively* true.

But here I'm relying on a methodology that has already seen service elsewhere. Compare: Kripke argues that *even if* (as Lewis says) there exist scads of disconnected spacetimes, whereby in a disconnected spacetime there is someone very similar to me who wins the American Presidential Election, this fails to explain why I *could* have won the election i.e. there is no principled reason to think there is a connection between modal truths and the existence of disconnected spacetimes. This objection is analogous to the one raised against my theory: an identification and analysis are made (concerning possible worlds and *de re* modal statements for Lewis, and concerning works and predication<sub>mw</sub> for me), and one complains that the analysis and identification aren't intuitive. So I can rely upon the same responses used against the Kripkean objection to Lewis: that this is just the paradox of analysis; that such definitions and identifications need not be obvious; etc.<sup>9</sup>

Another charge of arbitrariness against Typism\* could be based upon Benacerraf's argument against identifying numbers with ordered pairs. There are numerous options regarding what set we should identify an ordered pair with (e.g. Kuratowski's identification, Weiner's identification etc.), and it is arbitrary which one we choose. So any identification (be it of numbers, be it of musical works) using ordered pairs will likewise be arbitrary. There is not enough space to discuss Benacerraf's objection here, but I can at least say it is defensible for me to rely upon such an identification. Numerous philosophers have identified things with sets involving ordered pairs e.g. relations,<sup>10</sup> temporal parts<sup>11</sup> and *ersatz* times.<sup>12</sup> Each of these identifications face the same arbitrariness problem. Thus Benacerraf's problem may be serious, but it is one that a lot of extant ontological theories face. As I say, there is not enough space to discuss an

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<sup>9</sup> These reasons, and more besides, are from the first section of Ted Sider's 'Beyond the Humphrey Objection' (manuscript).

<sup>10</sup> Willard Quine *Quiddities: An Intermittently Philosophical Dictionary* (London: Belknap Press, 1987) p. 90 and David Lewis *On The Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) p. 52n39.

<sup>11</sup> John Pollock *Knowledge and Justification* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974) p.139 and Sydney Shoemaker *Identity, Cause and Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

<sup>12</sup> Craig Bourne *A Future for Presentism* (Oxford: OUP, 2006) p. 52-65.

adequate response to Benacerraf, and I will have to rest content with the fact that my theory is in good company in having to face it.<sup>13</sup>

So, there are a handful of closely related worries concerning circularity, reference etc., but if there are any such worries we can at least be assured that they are not unique to my theory. I also imagine that they are the most serious concerns for thinking that Typism\* does not offer a genuine explanation of the predicates<sub>mw</sub> that works have.

### **6. Problem Three: Too many works?**

The Typist wanted to identify *PS14* with some Type, *T*. Because standard set theory holds that *T* would be paired with lots of different sets of exemplars, we had to give up on (6) and move to Typism\*. But you might worry that the ‘too many ordered pairs’ problem still has bite against Typism\*. It won’t just be  $\langle T, E \rangle$  that has *T* as its first member; there will be many other such ordered pairs. Consider the ordered pair  $\langle T, E^* \rangle$ , where *E\** is the set of exemplars correlated with *Dona nobis pacem* (rather than those correlated with *PS14*). Call that ordered pair *PS14\**. Given (8) all performances of *PS14* will be performances of *PS14\**, whereas no performances of *Dona nobis pacem* are. So the first problem is that all of *PS14\**’s performances are sonatas<sub>pf</sub>, but (given (5)) *PS14\** is a canata<sub>mw</sub>. That just seems crazy. The second problem is that, unlike *PS14*, *PS14\** is unknown to us. There is no composer who takes credit for it, and presumably no-one has ever even thought about this musical work before. So Typism\* seemingly commits us to the existence of too many works.

We can solve the first problem, but not the second. Solve the first by revising what a work is:

- (9) *W* is a work =<sub>df</sub> *W* is an ordered pair with a Type as its first member and a set of exemplars as its second member (where the performances that are members of the exemplars are all tokens of *W*).

(We could give similar redefinitions for Performancism\* etc.)

So although  $\langle T, E^* \rangle$  exists, the performances that are members of the exemplars are not tokens of *T*, so it is not a musical work according to (9).

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<sup>13</sup> Although I do discuss this problem further in my forthcoming paper ‘The Metaphysics of Groups’, *Philosophical Studies*.

But this still doesn't solve the second problem.  $\langle T, E^* \rangle$  may not be a work, but there are still many odd works out there. For instance,  $T$  is not just paired with  $PS14$ 's exemplars, but also paired with every subset of those exemplars. Those pairings will count as a musical work given (9), and as they are distinct from  $PS14$  they are all presumably as strange and unknown as  $PS14^*$ . Similarly,  $T$  is paired with supersets of  $E$  that have as members e.g. exemplars pairing performances of  $PS14$  with worlds at which those performances are absolutely awful. In that case, (given (5)) that work wouldn't have only aesthetically pleasing<sub>pf</sub> PPPs, so the work wouldn't be aesthetically pleasing<sub>mw</sub> either.<sup>14</sup>

So (9) unavoidably commits us to too many musical works. But I think we should bite this bullet, for (as I shall explain) it is plausible, *independent of concerns in musical ontology*, that such works *could* exist. I then further explain why it is then dialectically appropriate to say that they *do* exist.

First, demonstrate that it is plausible that the works could exist.<sup>15</sup> Imagine three duplicates of Beethoven, who have all composed three works very similar to  $PS14$ , and who all agree over what counts as a performance of those works. However, the first Beethoven says that *properly performed* performances of his work may vary with respect to whether or not the pedal mark is used. And who are we to argue – it's *his* work of music after all. You might disagree that it's any good, or as good as another very similar work, but it looks as if the composer is the ultimate authority concerning what counts as a *properly* performed performance of his work (at least when, at the point of composition, they are *explicit* about what is involved in such a perfectly performed performance, as we are imagining our Beethovens being here). The second Beethoven says that although you can perform the work slightly differently (e.g. with or without the pedal mark) the *perfectly* performed performances cannot so vary e.g. that they *must* include the pedal

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<sup>14</sup> Note that, even though the performances are aesthetically bad, they can still be *perfectly performed*. One can perform a terrible work of music perfectly, and be left with a terrible performance. So, in that case, the word 'exemplar' might mislead you into thinking the performances actually have to be aesthetically valuable.

<sup>15</sup> The argument I present here (and in §9) is a descendent of a similar argument about material objects, where, to avoid cultural prejudice, we must accept the existence of a host of gerrymandered objects. See, for example, John Hawthorne, *Metaphysical Essays* (Oxford: OUP, 2006) pp. vii, 109 and Ted Sider, 'Temporal Parts' from Hawthorne, Sider and Zimmerman (eds.) *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008) pp. 257-61.

mark. And who are we to argue – it’s *his* work of music after all. The final Beethoven comes from a world where there are no other sonatas. He thinks that being a sonata is what is most important about the work he composed – it doesn’t matter how badly played it is, or how shrill the notes, just as long as it has the form of a sonata then it is properly performed. So he is *far* more liberal about what counts as a PPP of his work than his duplicates. And who are we to argue – it’s *his* work of music after all. Indeed, rather than thinking that just the composers believe this, imagine that each composer is part of an entire culture that has a consensus that their respective composer is correct about what counts as a PPP of his work.

One could say that there is, in reality, only one work, and that only one of the Beethovens (and one of their cultures) is correct as to what counts as a perfectly performed performance, but it is eminently plausible that *none* of them are wrong and that there are, instead, three *different* works. We would be unreasonably prejudicing our own cultural beliefs over those of others to say that there was one work, rather than three, and that the cultures that disagreed with us were somehow missing objective facts about the musical works they perform and their society’s composers compose. So, regardless of the details of one’s musical ontology, it seems plausible that there could exist such works.

But although we might think they could exist, it doesn’t mean that they *do* exist which is what (9) commits us to. However, given the assumptions that have been made, this is not a problem. Given that *possibilia* exist, everything that might exist does so (*qua* *possibilium*). So given that there *could* be scads of strange works, if you accept *possibilia* you should be happy to say that there *are* such works. So, if you buy into *possibilia*, the scads of works that (9) commits us to will be no worry. Of course, you might raise objections to the existence of *possibilia*, but then you’re not buying what I’m selling (I have more to say about this in §10).<sup>16</sup>

So it is dialectically appropriate to endorse the existence of the works, and these works are just those works (9) committed us to. For purpose of example, say that the work the

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<sup>16</sup> Another related problem: all of the performances of *PS14* turn out to also be performances of *PS14\** (and indeed lots of strange works) even though the performers don’t know it. But if a performance can only be a performance of a work if the performers intended it to be so, (9) commits us to falsehoods. But I side with those who think that performances do not have to be intended to be performances of a work to count as performances of a work, which is already a commitment of some theories (such as Typism). See Dodd *op cit* p. 34.

first composer refers to is *PS14* as we know it i.e.  $\langle T, E \rangle$ . The work the second composer is referring to is the ordered pair  $\langle T, E' \rangle$  where  $E'$  is a subset of  $E$  excluding all performances that miss out the pedal mark. The third composer is referring to the ordered pair  $\langle T, E'' \rangle$  where  $E''$  is a superset of  $E$  including lots of badly played performances of *PS14*. And for all the other sets that we end up identifying with unknown and bizarre works of music, they too will correspond to some work that might have been created by some (unknown and bizarre) composer in some other possible world. So the commitment to such works that (9) entails is no problem at all.

### 7. Problem Four: Erroneous Predication

A final objection is that (5) commits us to erroneous predications. For instance, every performance is a performance<sub>pf</sub>, concrete<sub>pf</sub> and spatiotemporally located<sub>pf</sub>. Ergo, every PPP of every work will be these things as well. Given (5) this entails, for example:

(10) All musical works are performances<sub>mw</sub>.

The problem would be that (10) seems to be incompatible with:

(11) No musical work is a performance.

But it is not clear that they are incompatible. They would be if the predicate ‘\_\_ is a performance’ appearing in (11) was a predicate<sub>mw</sub>, but why think that? Given what was said in §3, when we ascribe predicates<sub>mw</sub> to a work we are engaging in non-literal ascription. But (11) is, to my ear, intended to be as literal as it gets. Just as claiming that a work is (or isn’t) a Type is intended to concern literal predication, normally when one denies that a work is a performance they place themselves in a context where the predicate is taken to be literal (similarly for ‘\_\_ is concrete’ and ‘\_\_ is spatiotemporally located’). So when we assert that works are none of these things, we are in a context where the predicates we are applying are literal, not analogical (i.e. not predicates<sub>mw</sub>), and it transpires that (10) and (11) are not contradictory.

Whilst we avoid contradiction, it does seem *weird* that we can make even analogical predications of works along those lines i.e. that, *when uttered analogically*, ‘Piano Sonata No. 14 (*qua* work) is a performance’ is true. I admit that this is weird, but then this should be no surprise as the situation being imagined is weird. We only get the bizarre result that the utterance is true when said in contexts where the predicates involved are

not meant to be literal, even though *normally* such contexts are ones where the predicates involved *are* meant to be literal. So it might be weird that the utterance is true in that context, but that's only because such a context would be an abnormal context to be in (indeed, perhaps one would never be in such a context outside of philosophical discussion).

But there are still other predications that turn out badly. Take the intuition that

- (12) Every work comes into existence at the time of its being first written down by the composer, and remains in existence from that point forth.<sup>17</sup>

As most works will be such that their PPPs all come into existence at different times, given (5) few works 'came into existence<sub>mw</sub>' at any time. So (12) isn't non-literally true. But nor is it literally true, for if works are sets, and sets are timeless, it would be wrong to attribute the literal predicate 'came into existence' of it either. Thus, whether read literally or non-literally, (12) is false. So given Typism\*, Performancism\* etc. there will be some intuitive predications that turn out to be false (regardless of whether we treat the predicates as being literal or not). However, once we compare this erroneous result to the original theories we'll see it's not a problem.

Take Performancism. Perduring objects exist at a time iff they have a temporal part that exists at that time. *PS14*'s temporal parts are its performances, and so it only exists at those times that it is performed. When it is not performed, it does not exist. But (12) has it that *PS14* came into existence in 1801 *and then stays in existence from that point on*. To my knowledge, no-one reports the intuition that musical works blip in and out of existence as fusions of performances do.<sup>18</sup> So Performancists can't have (12), and so it's no cost that Performancism\* cannot either.

Take Typism. As Types exist eternally, they obviously fail to meet (12). Indeed, Dodd expends a great deal of effort arguing that this isn't a problem. (There are some ways to

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<sup>17</sup> Or, alternatively, come into existence when it was first performed; or some other saliently similar variation. Similarly, maybe they exist only for a significant time after they are created, and then cease to be (see Peter Lamarque 'Work and Object' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 102 (2002)). If that is your view, alter (12) accordingly.

<sup>18</sup> Indeed, Caplan and Matheson (both performancists) agree with my assessment that the existence of the work is intuitively uninterrupted. See Ben Caplan and Carl Matheson 'Can A Musical Work Be Created?' *British Journal of Aesthetics* 44 p.128.

toy with Typism such that abstracta do come into existence at certain times,<sup>19</sup> but like many others I think we should deny this heterodox position<sup>20</sup> and so will say no more about it.)

The Irreducibilist has different problems. One of the joys of taking works as *sui generis* entities is that in not identifying them with other entities already included in our ontology we won't have prior commitments that will pose problems for (12). As the entities are introduced solely to solve problems in musical ontology we can just *stipulate* that they meet (12). But we must weigh up the cost of the Irreducibilist theory against my theory. The Irreducibilist costs are that they introduce a *sui generis* entity, where it doesn't look like they can provide any explanation as to why those entities fall under the predicates that they do – it's just stipulated that they do (where the benefit is that Irreducibilism never conflicts with our intuitions concerning musical works). My theory has the cost of revising certain beliefs about works (with the benefit of exacting parsimonious reductions in our ontological and explanatory theories). I, for one, would see that price worth paying and do not think I would be alone. But this does bear on a broader question over how heavily we should weigh the costs of reductive theories in ontology, and to what extent our ontology should be revisionary versus descriptive. As with the Benacerraf problem, that issue is too big to deal with here, and so whilst there is a lot more to say, it suffices that I think my move here will be relatively popular. So although some costs must be borne by Typism\* (and Performancism\* etc.) compared to Irreducibilism, I do not think that, on balance, they are too great.

With that, I see no more pressing objections to Typism\* (or Performancism\* etc.). We can have a (relatively) unproblematic theory that meets the desideratum of giving an informative answer to (1). That completes my argument for preferring Typism\* to Typism (and Performancism\* to Performancism etc.) on the grounds of its success in answering (1).

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<sup>19</sup> See Ben Caplan and Carl Matheson 'Can A Musical Work Be Created?', Lamarque *op cit* and Jerrold Levinson *Music, Art and Metaphysics* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1991).

<sup>20</sup> For instance, Cameron *op cit* p. 296-7.

## 8. The Proposed Ontological Theory

Now move to the second part of the paper. Given such an answer to (1), we may as well endorse Setism. When we include sets and possibilia the Types (etc.) become redundant for we can replace them with sets. Hence, a version of Setism is preferable to Typism\* (and Performancism\* etc.). I start by explaining the theory, and then explaining why it is better than the competitors, before moving on in §9-10 to dealing with some putative objections.

My suggestion is (unsurprisingly enough) that we remove the Types (etc.) from Typism\*, and replace them with sets. We can't just replace the Types with sets of possibilia, for possibilia may exist at more than one world, and one might be suitably liberal about *de re* modality such that a performance of a work at one world is not a performance of that work at another. But we can solve that problem by pairing every world with every performance of the work *at that world* (pairing the world with the null set in cases where there are no performances). So whereas we have been identifying *PSI4* with the ordered pair of  $\langle T, E \rangle$  we now identify it with the ordered pair  $\langle S, E \rangle$  where  $S$  is a set of the form:

$$\{ \langle w_1, \{ x_1 \dots x_m \} \rangle, \langle w_2, \{ y_1 \dots y_n \} \rangle, \langle w_3, \{ z_1 \dots z_o \} \rangle \dots \}$$

Where the  $w$ s are worlds, and the  $x$ s,  $y$ s,  $z$ s etc. are possibilia which (at the world they are paired with) are performances of *PSI4*. More generally we can say:

- (13)  $W$  is a musical work =<sub>df</sub>  $W$  is an ordered pair of the form  $\langle A, B \rangle$  where
- (i)  $A$  is a set of ordered pairs, such that every world is the first member of exactly one ordered pair, and a (possibly empty) set of possibilia is the second member (where each of the possibilia exist at the first member); and
  - (ii)  $B$  is a set of ordered pairs where the first member of each pair is a world,  $w$ , and the second member is an individual (where each of those individuals is also the member of the second member of an ordered pair that has  $w$  as its first member, where that ordered pair is a member of  $A$ ).

We can then keep (5) as an analysis of predication<sub>mw</sub>, and replace the Typist\* definition of '\_\_\_ is a performance of \_\_\_' (i.e. (8)) with:

- (14)  $x$  is a performance of musical work  $W$  (at world  $w$ ) =<sub>df</sub> (i) there is a set,  $S$ , that is the first member of  $W$  and (ii)  $w$  is the first member of an ordered pair that is a member of  $S$ , such that  $x$  is a member of the second member of that ordered pair.

We can now have an ontology of musical works with no irreducible Types, no *sui generis* entities and no fusions of performances. It's all done with sets, and so we have a version of Setism.

Now let's go through the competing theories to demonstrate the benefits that this version of Setism would have. Compared to Irreducibilism\* it is superior in three respects. First, it looks difficult to see what analysis Irreducibilists\* will give of the '  is a performance of   ' relation. Presumably, they will take it as a primitive (unlike Setism, which relies upon (14)). Second, the Irreducibilist\* obviously needs to introduce a new *sui generis* category of entities, whereas I can do it all with a well-recognised category i.e. sets. Third, the *sui generis* entities introduced look utterly bizarre when we make the move from Irreducibilism to Irreducibilism\*. Given Irreducibilism\*, *sui generis* entities *aren't* musical works, for works are instead ordered pairs of a *sui generis* entity and a set of exemplars. But then what is the *sui generis* entity meant to be? It is one thing to accept a new category of *sui generis* entities when they correspond to some category in our folk ontology (namely, musical works) but it's another thing to accept – as we are here – some new *sui generis* entities for which there is no such correspondence.<sup>21</sup>

Compare it to Performancism\*. The Performancist\* also needs to take the '  is a performance of   ' relation as primitive, for what else could they say? They cannot say that  $x$  is a performance of a work iff it is a mereological part of the fusion. Whilst *certain* parts of the performance fusion are performances, not all of them are e.g. a single note is a part of a performance of *PS14*, and so would be a part of the performance fusion that is *PS14*, but clearly *the single note* is not a performance of *PS14*. So relying on the mereological structure of the performance fusion won't yield an analysis of what it is to be a performance of a work. Since the only saliently interesting metaphysical structure

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<sup>21</sup> This last reason might make one think Irreducibilism\* has costs that make Irreducibilism seem more preferable. In that case, I should compare my setist theory to Irreducibilism (rather than Irreducibilism\*). Fortunately, the first two points would still apply, and now my Setist theory, unlike Irreducibilism, would have the added benefit of satisfactorily answering (1).

performance fusions have is a mereological one, it follows that Performancism\* has no analysis available.

Indeed, it seems that under Irreducibilism\* and Performancism\* the *sui generis* entities and performance fusions are doing no work whatsoever. The only duty the first member of the ordered pair that is a work seems to have, is to help analyse the ‘\_\_is a performance of \_\_’ relation. If the *sui generis* entities and performance fusions can’t do those things (which they don’t seem to) then it seems pointless to include them.

However, Typism\* fares better as Typists\* can analyse that relation, for they accept (8). But given an ontology of sets and possibilia, it is an extravagance to have Types in a category of their own. Instead, we may as well follow David Lewis in identifying Types (*any* Type, not just the Types that are meant to be musical works) with sets.<sup>22</sup> We can’t simply identify a Type with the set of all possible tokens of it (where to be a token of that type is simply to be a member of that set) as you might believe possibilia exist at multiple worlds, and be quite liberal about their modal properties e.g. *x* might be a polar bear at one world, and a walrus at another. Instead, as above, identify a Type with a set of ordered pairs, where each ordered pair is a world and a set of possibilia. Then say:

- (15)  $x$  is a token of type  $T$  at world  $w =_{df}$  (i) some ordered pair which has  $w$  as its first member and  $x$  is a member of its second member and (ii) that ordered pair is a member of  $T$ .

Parsimony demands that if we’ve already got sets and possibilia we should accept (15), and thus identify Types with sets. Thus, in a sense, the theory we have *is* Typism\*, even though it is *also* a variant of Setism. So, compared to Typism\*, we should still accept this Setist variant (and, indeed, should still accept Typism\*, albeit it in combination with (15)’s ontological reduction of Types to sets). So we now have an answer to both (1) and (2): not only should we explain the predicates<sub>smw</sub> musical works fall under using sets and possibilia, but with that in place we should identify works with sets solely involving possibilia (not involving Types, fusions etc.). §9 deals with a problem for this theory, and §10 details some reasons to think possibilia aren’t as problematic an entity as some have suggested.

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<sup>22</sup> Lewis *op cit*.

## 9. Problem Five: Too many works? Again.

(13) commits us to too many works, for there will be a work corresponding to every combination of possible performances e.g. there is a work such that the second performance Elvis Presley gave of *Just Because*, and all of the badly performed renditions I give of Radiohead's *Creep* when I have a shower, end up being performances of it. But, intuitively, there is no work such that Elvis Presley and I both gave performances of it.

We can use a similar objection to that we used above in §5. Our own culture doesn't demand that performances of *PS14* have to be exactly the same (indeed, it is exceedingly unlikely that *any* two performances of *PS14* are *exactly* the same). Works, then, are *tolerant* to a certain degree: their performances can admit of some variation, but not too much. But it would be sheer anthropocentrism to think that our own levels of toleration are the only permissible levels of toleration. For instance, there might be a culture with enhanced acoustic perception that was far less tolerant. Imagine that they have a work very similar to *PS14*, call it *PS14\*\**. Where we would deem two (ever so slightly different) performances to both be performances of *PS14*, they would (because of their enhanced sensitivity) find the variations between the two performances to make all the difference between one being a performance of *PS14\*\** and the other not.<sup>23</sup> So we should admit that *both* *PS14* and *PS14\*\** could exist, for otherwise we are unfairly prejudicing the contingent capacity of our own ears.

Conversely, there may be cultures that produce works that are *more* tolerant than our own. Imagine a culture that believed God made a single sound in the beginning, and that He dubbed it his 'Greatest Work', stipulating that all sounds from then on would be lesser imitations of this Greatest Work (i.e. that all sounds are performances of the Greatest Work). Such a culture would recognise the existence of a musical work such that *every* sound was a performance of it – a work that was *maximally* tolerant. They might be wrong that God had composed the work (say, because He didn't exist or what have you) but mistakes about the correct identity of the composer have nothing to do with whether

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<sup>23</sup> See *n16* for why I think the performances could be of both *PS14* and *PS14\*\**.

the work exists or not. So there would be a work such that every performance was a performance of it.

There might also be variation over what things even count as a performance. Whilst standard Western culture demands performances are regimented in a certain fashion, other cultures may think performances consist of disparate sounds (indeed, some Western sub-cultures already do so – consider *Einstürzende Neubauten*, who have composed works consisting of little more than drilling and sawing). Cultures may be more tolerant still, for instance finding aesthetic appeal of the form we find in musical performances in things with – what Walton would call – properties that are contra-standard for us, but not for them.<sup>24</sup> So a culture might find an assemblage of *objects*, and not sounds, to be an aesthetically pleasing ‘performance’ of a work.

So there *could* be works which take any variety of combinations of things to be performances of a work. And again, just as in §5, because the works could exist then, as we have possibilia, they *do* exist. So, it is no small wonder that (13) populates our ontology with scads of works that have seemingly bizarre performances. They are indeed bizarre, but only for us, and it’d be mere prejudice to rule them out from counting as works.

### **10. Problem Six: Possibilia**

I have argued that we have an excellent way of answering both (1) and (2) if we accept an ontology of sets and possibilia. Sets, I take it, are relatively uncontroversial. Possibilia, on the other hand, are not. For instance, Dodd considers just such an ontology, and quickly dispenses with it because of his distaste for possibilia.<sup>25</sup> There are three reasons for thinking this to be too cruel.

*Reason one:* Possibilia are relatively popular, being conscripted in by Lewis’s genuine modal realism, theories of *ersatz* possible worlds and Williamson’s bare possibilia.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Kendall Walton, ‘Categories of Art’, *Philosophical Review* 79 (1970).

<sup>25</sup> Works of Music p. 19.

<sup>26</sup> See Joseph Melia *Modality* for a survey of possible worlds, and his ‘Ersatz Possible Worlds’ (in *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics* pp. 135-51) for more on possibilia for ersatzers. See Timothy Williamson ‘Bare Possibilia’ *Erkenntnis* 48 (1998) for a discussion of bare possibilia.

Further, Performancism explicitly makes use of possibilia, so a musical ontology including them already has precedent.<sup>27</sup>

*Reason two:* We can even ditch possibilia and use surrogates to play their role instead. For instance, Plantinga thinks that although the golden mountain does not exist (i.e. there are no possibilia) its *essence* (the property of *being identical to the Golden Mountain*) necessarily does. Sets having essences as members will work just as well as using sets of possible performances (so rather than a possible performance of *PS14* being a member of the set, we have that performance's essence as a member; rather than (5) we have '*W* is  $F_{mw} =_{df}$  for every exemplar *E* of *W*, the first member of *E* represents that the thing which instantiates the second member of *E* as being  $F_{pf}$ '; and so on) and essences enjoy a relatively popular following. Indeed, essences are just one example of an alternative surrogate. For instance, reified fictional entities will do just as well (whereby it is fictional performances that are the members of the sets instead of possibilia).

*Reason three:* For those who disdain all of these things, there are yet more options. We need neither possibilia nor surrogates to exist for we needn't think that just because a set has something as a member, that thing must exist. For instance, we might go Meinongian and draw a distinction between there being something (which can be a set member) and that thing existing.<sup>28</sup> So, the relation could hold even when some of the relata don't exist.<sup>29</sup> As all I need is that the sets stand in the appropriate membership relation, not that their members exist, that option would work as well.

So whilst I appreciate Dodd's reluctance to take seriously this avenue of investigation, in view of these reasons I think he has closed the book on it too early.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Caplan and Matheson 'Defending Musical Perdurantism' p. 66-7.

<sup>28</sup> Those who believe that there are things that don't exist include Alexius Meinong 'On the Theory of Object' from Chisholm (ed.) *Realism and the Background of Phenomenology* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1960) p. 76-117; Terence Parsons *Nonexistent Objects* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980); Edward Zalta *Intensional Logic and the Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988); and a more contemporary version by Graham Priest, *Towards Non-Being: The Logic and Metaphysics of Intentionality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

<sup>29</sup> Hinchliff makes the same move on behalf of the presentist. See Mark Hinchliff 'The Puzzle of Change' *Philosophical Perspectives* 10 (1996)

<sup>30</sup> A second worry Dodd has for taking works as sets is that we allegedly could not hear a set unless we hear every member (*ibid* 18), whereas we can clearly hear works. Space prohibits an in-depth discussion of this problem, but essentially I think there is little cost in claiming that we can hear a work *derivatively* in virtue of hearing one of its members (in the same way that the Typist claims we can hear a work derivatively in virtue of hearing a token of a work).

## 11. Conclusion

I have argued that the best way to explain works falling under the predicates that they do is by conscripting in sets and possibilia, and that we may as well then accept Setism about musical works. Whilst not foolproof (for instance, there are still reasons to think Irreducibilism fares better) Setism, nevertheless, looks to be a serious contender for the correct theory of musical ontology.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> With thanks to the comments of an anonymous referee, Andy McGonigal, Aaron Meskin, Ian Middleton, Jon Robson and Jonathan Tallant.