

The Metaphysics of Musical Works

ABSTRACT: This paper argues that realists about musical works should accept sets and possibilia 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.¹ There are then two questions:

- (1) What explanation (if any) can be given of why works fall under the predicates that they do?
- (2) What should we identify works with (e.g. Types, sets, fusions etc.)?

§2 presents a brief exposition of some popular answers to (2). §3 introduces a distinction realists should make between predicates that apply to works and those that apply to performances, and Dodds' theory relating the two (*a fortiori* his answer to (1)). §4 provides a superior answer to (1) in terms of sets of possibilia, and §5-7 defends that theory. §8 then argues that given sets and possibilia, we may as well answer (2) by identifying works with sets involving possibilia. §9 defends that theory, and then I end in §10 by defending my use of possibilia against the qualms of philosophers such as Dodd.

2. Realist Theories

Here is a selection of answers that realists give to (2):

Typism: Musical works are eternally existing Types.²

Performancism: Musical works are perduring fusions of their performances.³

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

All of the above answers are reductive, but one could also be a realist who did not admit that works were ontologically reducible:

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

Throughout I will compare the theory I develop to Typism, Performancism and Irreducibilism. (Since the conclusion I am aiming for is that musical works are sets, there's no need to compare it to Setism; if you find Setism favourable then you already agree with me!)

3. Predicates_{mw} and Predicates_{pf}

Introduce two pieces of terminology: 'predicates_{mw}' and 'predicates_{pf}'. As a rough guide, the predicates_{mw} are those predicates that are normally predicated of musical works (similarly, subscript the individual predicates e.g. Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 14 – *PS14* henceforth – is a sonata_{mw}). The predicates_{pf} are those predicates that are normally predicated of performances (so a particular performance of *PS14* is a sonata_{pf}).

Realists should deny that predicates_{mw} and predicates_{pf} are the same predicates e.g. 'sonata_{mw}' and 'sonata_{pf}' are not the same predicate, so a performance of *PS14* is a sonata_{pf} but *not* a sonata_{mw}, whilst *PS14* is a sonata_{mw} but not a sonata_{pf}. To demonstrate this, take the theories in turn.

¹ Not that this is the only plausible position (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.

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

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

Take Performancism. Whilst a particular performance of *PS14* is a $\text{sonata}_{\text{pf}}$, the fusion of all performances of *PS14* (i.e. *PS14*) cannot be the same. Whilst each performance qualifies as a sonata, the *fusion* of those performances has too many movements, and exists for hundreds of years etc. But *PS14* is a $\text{sonata}_{\text{mw}}$, so the performancist must say that $\text{predicates}_{\text{pf}}$ are different from $\text{predicates}_{\text{mw}}$.

Take Typism. Dodd is clear that Typists should think the predicates are different from one another.⁴ For instance, a performance of *PS14* may have a certain sound as a part, but *PS14* itself does not (for Types both make no sounds and have no parts).

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 (for how can something make a sound if it is outside space and time?). If instead the *sui generis* entities are 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 $\text{sonata}_{\text{pf}}$ as the performance does. So, either ways, we should draw a distinction between $\text{predicates}_{\text{mw}}$ and $\text{predicates}_{\text{pf}}$.

Wolsterstoff and Dodd agree the predicates are different, saying that the $\text{predicates}_{\text{mw}}$ are *analogical predicates* of the $\text{predicates}_{\text{pf}}$.⁵ Indeed, we can use this distinction to replace the rough definitions of $\text{predicates}_{\text{mw}}$ and $\text{predicates}_{\text{pf}}$ from above. The $\text{predicates}_{\text{pf}}$ are the literal predicates that performances fall under, whilst $\text{predicates}_{\text{mw}}$ are the non-literal analogues of the $\text{predicates}_{\text{pf}}$, which works fall under. So whilst it is literally true that performances of *PS14* last a certain length, it is not *literally* true of *PS14* that it lasts a certain length. Note that not *every* predicate a work falls under is non-literal 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 $\text{predicate}_{\text{mw}}$; only some are i.e. those that are analogues of $\text{predicates}_{\text{pf}}$).

Dodd and Wolsterstorff do say that there is a systematic relationship between the $\text{predicates}_{\text{pf}}$ of the performances and the $\text{predicates}_{\text{mw}}$ that the work falls under. If this were true then we could answer (1): the non-literal predicates that works fall under (i.e. the $\text{predicates}_{\text{mw}}$) will be explained by this systematic relationship, and the literal predicates that works fall under will be explained by the ontological identification that is made e.g. works are Types because Typism is true (or what have you). So if we can get a satisfactory explanation of the systematic relationship between $\text{predicates}_{\text{mw}}$ and $\text{predicates}_{\text{pf}}$, then (in combination with an answer to (2)) we can answer (1).

Dodd provides just such a systematic relationship. Where F_{mw} is a predicate that applies to musical works, and W is a musical work:

- (3) W is F_{mw} =_{df} every properly formed token of W would fall under the corresponding $\text{predicate}_{\text{pf}}$.

The downside to (3) is that it takes ‘__being a properly formed token’ as a primitive, which merely moves around the problematic bump in the realist’s carpet. For whilst (1) would be solved, we now have:

- (4) What (if anything) explains a performance of a work being properly performed?

With no explanation of that to hand, it looks as if the facts about properly performed performances are brute facts, thus we wouldn’t have made substantial progress over taking the $\text{predicates}_{\text{mw}}$ of works as brute. What we need is an answer to (1) that does not bring with it a host of its own brute facts.

⁴ Dodd *op cit* p. 46-7.

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

4. Sets and Predication_{mw}

Fortunately, that is an achievable goal. Assume an ontology of sets and possibilities. Given standard set theory there would then exist sets pairing performances with a world at which they are exemplary performances of some work. Call such pairs *exemplars*. Further, there will be sets of those exemplars with the following form:

$$(5) \{ \langle w_n, a_n \rangle, \langle w_{n+1}, a_{n+1} \rangle, \dots \}$$

where the *w*s are world and *a*s are the possibilities that are exemplary performances 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_{mw}:

$$(6) W \text{ is } F_{mw} =_{df} \text{ for every exemplar } E \text{ that is a member of the set correlated with } W, \text{ the second member of } E \text{ is represented as being } F_{pf} \text{ at the first member of } E.$$

So where works are correlated with sets of the form given in (5), a work is a rock song_{mw} iff every one of a_1, a_2, \dots is a rock song_{pf} (at the world each is paired with); it’s aesthetically pleasing_{mw} iff every one of a_1, a_2, \dots is aesthetically pleasing_{pf} (at the world each is paired with) etc.

Does this do any better than Dodd’s explanation? Not as yet, for I’ve done nothing to explain what ‘correlation’ is, or why each work is correlated with an appropriate set, so if I left it at that then ‘correlation’ would be a primitive, just as Dodd’s ‘__being a properly formed token’ is a primitive and my new theory would have no more explanatory power than Dodd’s old theory. All we’ve got so far is that *PS14* is a sonata_{mw} because it is correlated with a certain set of exemplars (where each exemplar is such that its second member is a sonata_{pf} at its first member). But why is *PS14* correlated with *that* set as opposed to a set of random exemplars, or a set of exemplars where each exemplar is such that its second member is a rock song_{pf} at its first member (whereby, given (6), *PS14* would, wrongly, be a rock song_{mw})? If I said there was no explanation for this correlation, and that it was just brute fact, then (6) would do no better than (3).

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

$$(7) W \text{ is correlated with a set of exemplars, } S =_{df} \text{ there is an ordered pair } \langle W, S \rangle.$$

Now unwanted primitives are analysed using familiar set-theoretical notions, and facts about correlation (and therefore predication_{mw}), is explained by what ordered pairs there are (and what explains *that* is an issue wholly independent of musical ontology). (7) also guarantees that *PS14* is paired with the appropriate set of exemplars, for there 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 why (7) is grossly flawed. Given (6) *PS14* would not just be a sonata_{mw} but also a canata_{mw} (for it is correlated with all the exemplars that should solely be correlated with *Dona nobis pacem*); an irritating advert jingle (for it is correlated with the exemplars that should solely be correlated with the advert jingle you find most annoying) etc.

But (7) gives an insight into what we could instead say: revise our musical ontology. Instead of, say, identifying works with Types:

*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:

$$(8) W \text{ is correlated with a set of exemplars, } S =_{df} S \text{ is the second member of } W.$$

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:

$$(9) p \text{ is a performance of } W =_{df} p \text{ is a token of the first member of } W.$$

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 (7). (8) delivers more explanatory power than (3). Both (3) and (8) feature primitives: (3) takes ‘__being a properly formed token’ as primitive, and (8) takes ‘__is a member of __’ as primitive.⁶ But the former primitive is unique to Dodd’s theory, introduced solely to deal with problems in the ontology of musical works, whereas membership, primitive as it may be, is a well recognised primitive notion deployed in all sorts of places. So whilst (3) demands a primitive of its own, (8) demands only notions already acceptable to any who find sets to already be acceptable (which will be a sizable number of people). Hence, in not demanding an idiosyncratic primitive, (8) (in combination with (6)) will provide a theory with more explanatory power than Dodd’s original theory.

But (8) comes with its own problems. I defend my theory against these problems in §5-7.

5. Too many works? (Part One)

Just as with (7) we are guaranteed the existence of lots of ordered pairs, including many pairs with *T* as their first member e.g. the ordered pair $\langle T, E^* \rangle$, where E^* is the set of exemplars paired with *Dona nobis pacem*. Call that ordered pair *PS14**. Given (9) 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_{pf}, but (given (6)) *PS14** is a canata_{mw}. 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. 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:

- (10) W is a work =_{df} 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 whilst there $\langle T, E^* \rangle$ exists, the performances that are members of the exemplars are not tokens of *T*, so it is not a musical work according to (10).

But this still doesn’t solve the second problem. Whilst $\langle T, E^* \rangle$ is not a work, 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 (10), 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* having, say, really awful performances of *PS14* counting as exemplars. In that case, (given (6)) that work wouldn’t be ‘aesthetically pleasing_{mw}’ since at least some of its exemplary performances are not aesthetically pleasing_{pf}.

So (10) unavoidably commits us to too many musical works. But I think we should bite this bullet, for it is plausible, *independent of concerns in musical ontology*, that such works *could* exist. Given that, it is dialectically appropriate to say that they *do* exist. First, demonstrate that it is plausible that the works could exist.⁷ 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

⁶ That is, at least, if we can analyse what it is to be the second member of an ordered pair in terms of membership, but it is standard to think that this can be done, even if the details of how this can be done vary. In any case, as it is generally recognised that there are ordered pairs, and not generally recognised that there is a primitive that Dodd demands, my new theory will still have more explanatory power.

⁷ 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.

of those works. However, the first Beethoven says that exemplary 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. The second Beethoven says that whilst you can perform the work slightly differently (e.g. with or without the pedal mark) the *exemplary* performances cannot so vary e.g. that they *must* include the pedal 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 it is exemplary. So he is *far* more liberal about what counts as an exemplary performance 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 an exemplary performance of his work.

Whilst 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 an exemplary performance, 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 ones musical ontology, it seems plausible that there could exist such works. But these works are just those works (10) committed us to. For purpose of argument, say that the work the 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*. *Mutatis mutandis* for any other putatively strange works that (10) commits us to: we should acknowledge that those works could exist.

But whilst we might think they *could* exist, it doesn't mean that they *do* exist as (10) commits us to. So Typism* (etc.) might fare badly when compared to a theory that holds that works only come into existence due to, say, the intentions of certain composers. But 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 be happy to say that there are such works. So, if you buy into possibilia, the scads of works that (10) 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).⁸

6. Circularity, Reference and Arbitrariness

There's a fear that (10) is circular. If *PS14* is $\langle T, E \rangle$ we might wonder why E has as members the exemplars that it does e.g. the ones that happen to ensure it *PS14* has the predicates_{mw} that it should. It would be circular to say it is because the members of E pair exemplary performances of *PS14* with the worlds they are exemplary at, for in order to avoid relying on Dodd's primitive it is the membership of *PS14* that should determine what counts as an exemplary performance, not the other way around.

⁸ 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, (10) 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.

Fortunately, the exemplars don't so depend. Compare it to the ontological identification of properties with sets of their instances, where there is a similar temptation to think circularity ensues. For instance, the property *redness* would be the set of all red things. An object being red depends upon the membership of *redness*, but one might suspect that the membership of *redness* in turn depends upon which objects are red. The alleged circularity here is analogous to the circularity (10) stands accused of. But there is no circularity. Sets (including *redness*) have their membership regardless of what their members are like, and (on this theory) are properties regardless of what their members are like (e.g. a set of random coloured objects is still a property, just a gerrymandered one). So the membership of the set *doesn't* depend upon its members being a certain way. Similarly, the membership of a work *doesn't* depend upon a performance being properly performed or not.⁹ Further, we might wonder why the name 'Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 14' picks out *that* set, when there are numerous *very similar* sets (such as $\langle T, E \rangle$ or $\langle T, E' \rangle$). Again, we can compare it to the case of *redness*. However the word 'red' ends up referring to the set that it does, as opposed to very similar sets, is how 'Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 14' refers to *PS14*.

Another worry is that (10) is arbitrary. You might suspect that there is no *principled reason* for accepting (10), 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 *explains* why it falls under the appropriate predicates_{mw} as (6) and (8) entail? After all, none of (6), (8) or (10) 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_{mw} 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.¹⁰

Another charge of arbitrariness against (10) 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,¹¹ temporal parts¹² and *ersatz* times.¹³ Each of these identifications face the same arbitrariness

⁹ 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 about properties.

¹⁰ These reasons, and more besides, are from the first section of Ted Sider's 'Beyond the Humphrey Objection' (manuscript).

¹¹ 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.

¹² John Pollock *Knowledge and Justification* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974) p.139 and Sydney Shoemaker *Identity, Cause and Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

¹³ Craig Bourne *A Future for Presentism* (Oxford: OUP, 2006) p. 52-65.

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 adequate response to Benacerraf's dilemma, and I will have to rest content with the fact that my theory is in good company in having to face it.¹⁴

7. Erroneous Predication

Another objection is that (6) commits us to erroneous predications. For instance, every performance is a performance_{pf}, concrete_{pf} and spatiotemporally located_{pf}. Ergo, every exemplar of every work will be these things as well. Given (6) this entails, for example:

(11) All musical works are performances_{mw}.

The problem would be that (11) seems to be incompatible with:

(12) No musical work is a performance.

But it is not clear that they are incompatible. They would be if the predicate appearing in (12) was a predicate_{mw}, but why think that? Given what was said in §3, when we ascribe predicates_{mw} to a work we are engaging in non-literal ascription. But (12) 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, denying that a work is a performance places you in a context where the predicate is taken to be literal (similarly for '___ is concrete' and '___ is spatiotemporally located'). 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_{mw}). So (11) and (12) are not contradictory.

But whilst we avoid contradiction, it does seem *weird* that we can make even analogical predications of works along those lines. Apparently, *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. Given the thinking presented in §3 utterances such as 'Bohemian Rhapsody is a rock song' and 'Piano Sonata No. 14 is a sonata' are invariably uttered in a context where the predicates are to be taken as non-literal (and hence, the sentences are true). But utterances such as 'Piano Sonata No. 14 (*qua* work) is a performance' are normally uttered in contexts where the predicates are taken to be literal. We get the bizarre result that the utterance is true, when said in contexts where the predicates are not meant to be literal, because such a context *would an abnormal context to be in*. So the utterance *is* true in the relevant context, it's just that that context would be a rare one to find oneself in (indeed, perhaps one would never be in it outside of philosophical discussion).

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

(13) 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.¹⁵

As most works will be such that their exemplary performances all come into existence at different times, given (6) few works 'came into existence_{mw}' at any time. So (13) 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, (13) 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, I don't think this is so bad compared to the original theories.

¹⁴ Although I do discuss this problem further in my paper 'The Metaphysics of Groups' *Philosophical Studies* (forthcoming) where similar problems plague my proposed identification of groups.

¹⁵ 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 (13) accordingly.

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 (13) 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.¹⁶ So Performancists can't have (13), and so it's no cost that Performancism* cannot either.

Take Typism. As Types exist eternally, they obviously fail to meet (13). Indeed, Dodd expends a great deal of effort arguing that this isn't a problem. (There are some ways to toy with Typism such that abstracta do come into existence at certain times,¹⁷ but like many others I think we should deny this heterodox position¹⁸ 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 (13). As the entities are introduced solely to solve problems in musical ontology we can just *stipulate* that they meet (13). 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 whilst some costs must be borne by Typism* (and Performancism* etc.) compared to Irreducibilism, I do not think that, on balance, they are too great.

8. Setism Reborn

So we can have a (relatively) unproblematic theory with more explanatory power than Dodds' theory, if only we introduce sets and possibilia. That completes my argument for preferring Typism* to Typism (and Performancism* to Performancism etc.) on the grounds of its success in answering (1). This section argues that by including 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.).

We can't just replace the Types (etc.) 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 *PS14* 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:

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

¹⁶ Indeed, Caplan and Matheson 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.

¹⁷ 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).

¹⁸ For instance, Cameron *op cit* p. 296-7.

Where the *w*s are worlds, and the *x*s, *y*s, *z*s etc. are possibilities which (at the world they are paired with) are performances of *PS14*. More generally we can say:

- (14) W is a musical work =_{df} 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 possibilities is the second member (where each of the possibilities 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 one of the ordered pairs that is a member of A is a member of a set paired with w).

We can then keep (6) as an analysis of predication_{mw}, and replace the Typist* definition of ‘__ is performance of __’ with:

- (15) x is a performance of musical work W (at world w) =_{df} (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 Types, no *sui generis* entities and no fusions of performances. It’s all done with sets, and so we have a version of Setism.

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 (15)). 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 of entity i.e. sets. Third, the *sui generis* entities introduced look utterly bizarre when we make the move from Irreducibilism to Irreducibilism*. Given Irreducibilism*, works *aren’t sui generis* entities, for they are 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 some new *sui generis* entities for which there is no such correspondence.¹⁹

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, 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 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 (9). But given an ontology of sets and possibilities, 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

¹⁹ This last reason might make one 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 theory, unlike Irreducibilism, would have the added benefit of satisfactorily answering (1).

Types that are meant to be musical works) with sets.²⁰ 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:

- (16) *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 (16), 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*!)

9. Too many works? Part II

(14) commits us to too many works. 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 the 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.²¹ So we should admit the existence of *both* *PS14* and *PS14***, 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 composer have nothing to do with whether 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

²⁰ Lewis *op cit*.

²¹ See *n8* for why I think the performances could be of both *PS14* and *PS14***.

that are contra-standard for us, but not for them.²² 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 took all 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 (14) populates our ontology with scads of works with 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. 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*.²³ There are three reasons for thinking this to be too cruel.

Reason one: *Possibilia* are relatively popular, being conscripted in by Lewis’ genuine modal realism, various theories of *ersatz* possible worlds and Williamson’s bare *possibilia*.²⁴ Further, Performancism explicitly makes use of *possibilia*, so a musical ontology including them already has precedent.²⁵

Reason two: We can even ditch *possibilia* and use surrogates to play their role instead. For instance, Plantinga thinks that whilst 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 (6) we have ‘*W* is $F_{mw} =_{df}$ for every exemplar *E* of *W*, the thing that instantiates the second member of *E* is represented as being F_{pf} at the first member of *E*’; 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.²⁶ Alternatively, we can avoid Meinongianism and say that a relation can hold even when some of the relata don’t exist i.e. that relations aren’t existence entailing. All I need is that the sets stand in the appropriate membership relation, not that their members exist. So that option would work as well.²⁷

²² Kendall Walton, ‘Categories of Art’, *Philosophical Review* 79 (1970).

²³ *Ibid* 19.

²⁴ 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*.

²⁵ Caplan and Matheson ‘Defending Musical Perdurantism’ p. 66-7.

²⁶ 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).

²⁷ For instance, see Mark Hinchliff ‘The Puzzle of Change’ *Philosophical Perspectives* 10 (1996).

So whilst I appreciate Dodd's reluctance to investigate this avenue of investigation, in view of these reasons I think he has closed the book on it too early.²⁸

Finally, it is worth noting that if we *do* accept *possibilia*, this puts us in a good position to explain why (13) is false. (13) is a desideratum because of the intuition that composers *create* musical works.²⁹ In response, those realists who think works exist independently of composers try and explain away such intuitions: arguing that when composers 'create' a work this is actually a case of them discovering an already existing abstractum. The dialectic is then such that the supporter of (13) digs their heels in, saying that (for whatever reason) this attempted redefinition of 'creation' doesn't bear out their intuitions. Creation, so they will say, requires you to bring something new into the world, to ensure something extra now falls under the existential quantifier, which this would not be.

But now look at the matter from the viewpoint of an ontology including abstract *possibilia*. Now no-one *ever* creates anything – not if you mean causing something to fall under the existential quantifier which did not previously – for every possible object exists *no matter what we do*.³⁰ So musical works not being created is just a specific case of the failure for *anything* to be created. Consider: if I had not been born then I would still have existed as a mere *possibilia*. I would have been *unactualised*, but that isn't the same as being confined to oblivion. So whilst you might think that my parents created me, this is (strictly speaking) false. They only actualised me, which is a mean feat, but not one of creation in the strict sense that those who motivate (13) are after. Similarly for all other things: given an ontology of abstract *possibilia* (in a sense) *nothing* is created.

Those who support (13) cannot then turn around and say that (given an ontology of abstract *possibilia*) we should redefine 'creation', and say things are 'created' iff they are actualised, for if they redefine creation as actualisation, one would wonder why they are so resilient to the attempts of Dodd *et al* to redefine what it means to 'create' a musical work. So arguments in musical ontology revolving around (13) would be pointless given you already accepted *possibilia*. Thus, *possibilia* have another added benefit.

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.³¹

²⁸ 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).

²⁹ Dodd *op cit* chapter 5.

³⁰ This won't work with *concrete* *possibilia*. Those *possibilia* *have* been created (albeit in their own respective worlds). This is quite unlike abstract *possibilia*, which cannot be related to causal relations and so cannot be created (although they may be *represented* as being created at a world).

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