

Debugging the Case for Creationism

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Abstract Repeatable artworks like musical works have presented theorists in the ontology of art with a puzzle. They seem in some respects like eternal, immutable objects and in others like created, historical objects. Creationists have embraced the latter appearances and attempted to compel Platonists to follow them. I examine in detail each argument in a cumulative case for Creationism, showing how the Platonist can respond. The conclusion is that the debate between Platonists and Creationists is a stalemate. In order for progress to be made in the first-order debate, second-order progress on the metaontology of art needs to come first.

Keywords Metaphysics · Music · Platonism · Creationism · Metaontology

1 Introduction

Consider some musical work, say Beethoven's *Eroica*. *Eroica* presents us with a puzzle. First, *Eroica* has some features that theorists say point in favor of its being an eternally existing, immutable abstract object. For example, *Eroica* is repeatable: there are many performances and recordings of it all of which are instances of it. Moreover, it's audible.

Repeatability: Dodd (2007) and Kivy (1983) and (1987) focus on the repeatability of musical works. Repeatability is something theorists generally

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claim can only be a feature of abstract objects like types or universals, which they then argue must be eternal and immutable.

Audibility: Theorists point to the audibility of musical works as evidence of their being eternal and immutable since certain versions of that view (e.g. the view that musical works are types of which their performances are tokens) seem to make better sense of talk about audibility than certain versions of the view that musical works are historical individuals (e.g. the musical perdurantism explored in Caplan and Matheson (2006)). Audibility of musical works plays an important role in Dodd (2007).

On the other hand, *Eroica* has several features that many contemporary ontologists would say point in favor of its being a created, historical entity. *Eroica* originated with Beethoven's compositional activities. It was susceptible to change after Beethoven composed it, according to Beethoven's decree. *Eroica* could have gone differently than it does. It was composed by a particular person in a particular music-historical context. Finally, *Eroica* is meant to be understood by an audience.

Temporality: Works come into and go out of existence. Rohrbaugh (2003) stresses this point. His claim is that a work's existence depends on there being what he calls "embodiments" of it, objects (and events, I take it, for artworks that can be embodied by being performed like musical works) that ground the facts about what the work itself is like. An embodiment of a particular musical work is anything that "preserves what it is like and leads to new performances." (Rohrbaugh, 2003, 191) Rohrbaugh's discussion of embodiments arises in the context of talking about photographs, but Dodd (2007, 107-108) applies it to musical ontology.

Temporal Flexibility: Works can undergo change. Friedell (2018) discusses this issue extensively, including why it is that in most cases only a work's composer (and not I, for example) can change a work. We want to explain both the ways works can change and the ways they can't change.

Modal Flexibility: Works could have had other properties than they do. Rohrbaugh (2003) emphasizes this point as one reason we should take some artworks to be historical individuals rather than eternal types.

Essentiality of Composer and Origin: Works' composers are essential to them. That is, for any musical work, it is impossible for that work to exist while having been composed by someone other than the person (or people) who in fact composed it. Levinson (1990) and Fisher (1991) endorse and emphasize this. Works' contexts of origin are also essential to them. That is, for any musical work, it is impossible for that work to exist while having been composed in a different musico-historical context or by a different composer. Levinson (1990) especially emphasizes this point by the use of modal arguments and the invocation of Leibniz's Law. I'll address composers and contexts of origin separately below.

Teleology: Works exist in order to be understood. This point belongs to Morris (2007), who argues that since works have *teloi*—they are for something—it must be the case that they are created.

So, there are features of *Eroica* that tell in favor of its being eternal and immutable, and there are features that tell in favor of its being created and historical. It can't be both. So which is it, and what features should we prioritize when theorizing about musical works?¹

One way to resolve the puzzle is to take only some of the relevant features of *Eroica* to be important (or of primary importance) for theorizing about the nature of the work. This sort of resolution seems fairly popular amongst ontologists of art. For example, Dodd (2007) takes repeatability and audibility to be of primary importance. A large portion of his book is spent explaining away other apparent features of musical works. Levinson (1990) considers primarily repeatability, temporality, and essentiality of composer and origin. Rohrbaugh (2003) takes temporality, temporal flexibility, and modal flexibility as the primary features in his argument. In the context of arguing that fictional characters and fictional works (rather than musical works) are created abstract artifacts, Thomasson (1999) relies heavily on the temporality of the works to make the case.

It's not an uncommon dialectic strategy, then for an ontologist of art to make a case for some position about what musical works (or some other repeatable artwork) must be by directing their focus entirely or primarily on a subset of the set of (arguably) ontologically significant features of the work. One might not think this strategy misguided. After all, if one can construct a valid deductive argument that will resolve the puzzle with which we started using only some of the features of musical works, that would seem to be a great success.

And lo and behold, for each feature F that tells in favor of musical works being created and historical, one *can* compose an argument (and in some cases theorists have done so) that runs as follows:

1. For any musical work m , m has feature F only if m is created.
2. For any musical work m , m has feature F .
3. For any musical work m , m is created.

The fact that there are multiple such features builds a seemingly strong cumulative case in favor of the idea that musical works are created, historical objects. Call this view "Creationism."

Creationism as it's normally understood is really the combination of (at least) three theses:

1. Musical works exist.
2. Musical works are objects.²

¹ I cast this discussion as about the ontology of musical works here, but I take everything I say in what follows to be applicable to other kinds of repeatable artworks as well, things like photographs, novels, or video games as well as musical works. Much of the relevant literature has tended to be about musical works, for whatever reason, and it is easier on the verbiage to focus the case on one art kind.

² There's an obvious way we sometimes use the term "object" on which anything that exists is an object. Everything that's anything is a thing, so to speak. But sometimes we use the term "object" to distinguish a more limited class of things in our ontology in order to contrast them with things that lack a certain particularity or thisness. When I say Creationists hold that stories are objects, I use the term "object" in this second way. Creationists typically hold that stories are particular things, not properties, events, states of affairs, norms, or other things we might think of as non-objects when drawing the sort of contrast just mentioned. See Rettler and Bailey (2017) for more discussion on the category of object and more ways of drawing object/non-object distinctions.

3. Musical works are created by their composers.³

Creationism is a view both about the nature of musical works and of the artistic activity of composition. It takes composition to be a kind of creation, and it takes musical works to be particular things that composers directly bring into being.

On the other hand, one might think that when a composer composes a musical work, they thereby discover some new object.⁴ Call the view that by composing music one discovers some new object(s) “Discoverism.” Discoverism is not incompatible with Creationism. It’s possible, for all we know, that composers both discover objects and create objects while composing. (Indeed, Levinson (1990) holds this view of composers.) Call a view “Platonism” if it entails that Discoverism is true and Creationism is false.⁵ According to Platonism, in the course of composing a musical work, a composer discovers some new object that is the musical work, and they do not create any object that is the musical work.⁶ Platonism agrees with Creationism about the first two of its theses:

³ When I speak of works being created by composers here, I mean to use ‘composer’ in the broadest possible sense to include anyone who makes up a musical work, so that folk and pop songs count as having composers too (even if they’re co-written by cultural groups, or by collections of writers, artists, and producers). I’ll stipulate here that in order to create something, one must act in such a way as to directly bring that thing into being, and not merely as a logical or ontological consequence of something else one brings into being. I want to rule out this kind of case: Lucy directly brings into being a statue of a ladybug, and as a consequence there comes to be the singleton set of the the ladybug statue. Lucy created the ladybug statue, but she didn’t create the singleton of the ladybug statue. I don’t want to rule out the possibility of unintended creation, however. It isn’t necessary that one intend to bring an object into existence to create that object, but objects that merely follow logically or ontologically (rather than etiologically or in some other more substantive way) from one’s actions won’t count as being created. The Creationist holds that when a composer composes a musical work, they thereby create some new object, and that object is the musical work. There are varying possible species of Creationism. Some Creationists like Levinson (1990), Evnine (2016), and Friedell (2018) take musical works to be abstract. There are differences amongst their views about the complexity of the works. Other Creationists, like Caplan and Matheson (2006) and (2008) take musical works to be concrete.

⁴ I’ll say that to discover some object *o* is to become acquainted with *o* when (1) one was not acquainted with *o* at any prior time, (2) *o*’s existence predates one’s acquaintance with *o*, and (3) one’s acquaintance with *o* is not causally explained by the fact that anyone else is acquainted with *o*.

⁵ This is, of course, a stipulative definition of ‘Platonism’, one that contrasts with, for example, Kania (2017, §2.1), who defines Platonism as “the view that musical works are abstract objects,” and contrasts Simple Platonism (“works are eternal existents, existing in neither space nor time”) with Complex Platonism (“musical works come to exist in time as the result of human action”). While on my definitional schema, Levinson comes out as a Discoverist but not a Platonist, on Kania’s, Levinson comes out as a Complex Platonist, not a Simple Platonist. These are clearly merely terminological differences, but it’s important to be clear on them. This importance comes to light, for example, when we notice that Kania claims that Platonism “respects more of our pre-theoretic intuitions about musical works than any of the other theories.” Kania (2017, 2.1) This claim may seem to be especially germane to the topic at hand, but since Kania’s notion of Platonism doesn’t rule out Creationism, the relevant contrast class of theories doesn’t include all and only the Creationist theories. His point seems to be that identifying musical works with abstracta respects more of our pre-theoretic intuitions. It’s not clear exactly why Kania makes this claim in absence of a discussion of what kind of abstracta (e.g. created or eternal) he has in mind, though. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for helping me to identify the differences between my discussion and Kania’s and to relate my terminology to Kania’s.

⁶ It’s worth noting that Creationism and Platonism aren’t the only possible views to hold in this neighborhood. They are complex ontological theses that hold contradictory answers to questions about what musical works are and what composers are doing. However, they are natural views to hold and the most popular views represented in the literature, so they are the only views I discuss here.

1. Musical works exist.
2. Musical works are objects.

Platonism endorses a different third thesis, however:

4. Musical works are discovered by their composers.

Since discovery requires the pre-existence of the discovered object, it is impossible for one object to be discovered and created in the same activity. Thus, the Creationist and Platonist positions differ over what occurs in the activity of composition. The Platonist identifies musical works with eternally existing, immutable abstract objects, suitable candidates for discovery by composers. The puzzle that began this section can best be understood then as a trial between Creationism and Platonism. Some features of musical works seem to entail that Platonism is true. Some seem to entail that Creationism is true. Platonism and Creationism can't both be true, so something has to give.

The cumulative case for Creationism will not resolve this puzzle. Every case of putative evidence in favor of Creationism can be explained by the Platonist. In this paper, I parse the case for Creationism into its component arguments and show how the Platonist can easily respond to each. In §§2-6, I show how the Platonist can respond to the Creationist's arguments as derived from each feature of musical works that are supposed to tell in favor of Creationism. Each section discusses a particular feature and the argument for Creationism stemming from that feature, as well as the way(s) a Platonist can respond. I conclude by discussing lessons to be learned. The main lesson is that the stalemate between Creationism and Platonism cannot be broken merely by focusing on a few features of musical works and attempting to push a view of musical works based only on those features. What is needed is some methodological clarity and agreement between sides about how to move forward.

2 Temporality

Rohrbaugh (2003) argues that just as paintings come into existence at a time (viz. with the painter's act of painting), so do photographs.⁷ Likewise, just as a painting can't be identified with any particular collection of matter (since it can degenerate and be restored), so a photograph can't be identified with any particular bit of matter. Rohrbaugh takes it that part of the temporality of a photograph is that it depends for its existence on the existence of embodiments of it. Embodiments, according to Rohrbaugh, are "those physical objects [and presumably events] which ground the facts about what [a work of art] is like." (Rohrbaugh, 2003, 191) An embodiment of a work needn't be an occurrence of it, but it does need to encode information about what the work (or occurrences of it) must be like. To be an embodiment of a work, something must preserve what the work is like and lead to the work's perpetuation. Rohrbaugh's suggestion is that the painting case and the photograph case are analogous because the constitution relation and the embodiment relation are both species

⁷ Levinson (1990) and (2012) also stresses the creation of musical works. See Thomasson (1999) for similar arguments addressing fictional characters and works of fiction. See Rossberg (2012) for a discussion of the destruction of artworks that deals with music but is focused more on computer art.

of the generic relation of ontological dependence. So paintings (which are constituted by their matter) and photographs (which are embodied by various objects) both are art objects that ontologically depend on other more mundane objects.

Rohrbaugh's argument translates easily to the case of musical works. It seems like musical works originate with the compositional activity of their composers, and it seems like they depend on their embodiments (objects and events such as scores, performances, recordings, and memories). Musical works are temporal in just that sense. But, the Creationist will tell us, musical works are temporal only if they're created. So, musical works must be created.⁸

The Platonist needn't accept this argument. They must deny the premise that musical works are temporal. They identify musical works with eternally existing, immutable abstract objects. Those are not the kinds of things that come into existence or that depend for their existence on mundane, concrete objects or events.⁹ However, the Platonist can explain why it seems that musical works are temporal. To do so, the Platonist makes a distinction between the intrinsic and extrinsic properties of a musical work. The intrinsic properties are the properties a musical work has "in itself," those that any qualitative duplicate of the work must possess. The extrinsic properties a musical work has are those the work has that are not intrinsic, properties it has in virtue of the way the work is related to other things.¹⁰ Intrinsic properties of my shirt, for example, include its *being-green* and *having-mass*. Extrinsic properties of my shirt include *being-owned* and *being-worn*.

On the Platonist's view, a work cannot come into existence or depend ontologically on mundane objects or events. However, it's natural for the Platonist to acknowledge that prior to a composer's act of composition, the musical work was not a musical work. This is to say that the kind *musical work* is a phase sortal. A phase sortal is any kind (like *parent*, *professor*, or *town hall*) something can come to fall under and later fail to fall under without ceasing to exist. Phase sortal kinds are accidental to the things that have them, as opposed to essential. Now, some phase sortals require an intrinsic change in an object for the object to fall under them. For example, everyone undergoes some intrinsic changes as a physical necessity in order to become an adult, even though *adult* is a phase sortal, a kind that isn't essential to any person. But not every phase sortal requires this kind of change. Some are such that an object can fall under them without any intrinsic change in itself, for example the kinds *uncle* or *secret crush*. The Platonist should posit that the kind *musical work* is just like that. Whatever a musical work is fundamentally (whether type, universal, or something else besides) it comes to fall under the kind *musical work* in virtue of relations it bears to things distinct from it, and its being a musical work depends on the

⁸ Rohrbaugh himself doesn't press the point about creation. He's interested in arguing for the thesis that certain artworks are historical individuals, particular objects that come into existence at a point in time, depend for their existence on other objects or events, and can cease to exist. It's easy to see how his argument can be extended to the case for Creationism, however, and the idea that musical works are historical in Rohrbaugh's sense is still inconsistent with Platonism about musical works. For an extension of Rohrbaugh's thesis about artworks as historical individuals, see Magnus (2012).

⁹ By asserting that eternal objects don't come into existence, all I mean to rule out is that they have a beginning. I take it that both temporal and eternal objects exist in time, but eternal objects exist at every time while temporal objects do not (having a beginning and possibly an ending).

¹⁰ For more discussion of the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction, see Lewis (1983) and (1986).

existence of embodiments of it. If there are no more embodiments, then the musical work ceases to be a musical work (even though it continues existing). In this way, the Platonist can capture the phenomenology of temporality without acknowledging any of the ontological theses of the Creationist.¹¹

3 Temporal Flexibility

Friedell (2018) argues for a particular answer to the question, “Why can’t I change Bruckner’s *Eighth Symphony*?” The answer, according to Friedell, is that while musical works are created abstract objects with no parts, they *have* sound structures. *Having-a-sound-structure* is an extrinsic property of a musical work, and our contingent social practices make it so that only a musical work’s composer can determine what sound structure a work has. If our social practices were radically different, though, then I would be able to change Bruckner’s *Eighth Symphony* (i.e. I and anyone else would be able to determine what sound structure it has). Friedell thus gives a satisfying account not only of the fact that musical works can change, but that not just anyone can change them. This is what their temporal flexibility consists in.

Friedell’s account highlights an important feature of social practices. Social practices constrain what’s socially possible. Given that it’s a social practice in your group to drive on the right side of the road or to grant ownership of property to certain people (and not others) who have satisfied certain conditions, these practices constrain where one can drive and what kind of claims one can feasibly make on property. Likewise, if Friedell is right, our social practices surrounding music constrain facts about who can work on what musical works. We can change the social facts, though, to change what’s socially possible. People can work to change practices about driving or property. They can change practices about how people dress or when they eat. It’s open to us to change the practices surrounding music, too, so that it would be possible for anyone to change what sound structure a musical work has.

What should the Platonist say about temporal flexibility? The Platonist says musical works are eternal, immutable abstract objects. Musical works’ immutability just consists in them not undergoing any intrinsic changes. Clearly, the Platonist must deny that musical works change intrinsically. Most versions of Platonism can’t quite say the same thing as Friedell, either. This is because Platonists about musical works tend to identify them with sound structures, or with more complex types or universals that are individuated by sound structures. The thought is natural: if you think composers are discovering something, you probably think what they’re discovering is a kind of collection of sounds, maybe also with certain constraints on instrumentation, key, timbre, meter or something else. So any normal Platonist can’t say (like

¹¹ This view of musical works is endorsed by (at least) Wolterstorff (1980, 88). In discussing temporal flexibility, Dodd (2007, 91) agrees that the type/token version of Platonism “has no choice but to say that Bruckner’s [unfinished] Ninth Symphony could not have differed with respect to its intrinsic properties: had he done what we would describe as ‘completing the work’, he would, in fact, have composed a work distinct from the work that exists actually.” It seems that Dodd’s view is like the view described, then, at least insofar as Dodd denies the temporality of musical works. However, it’s not clear from this passage whether Dodd feels compelled to say (like Wolterstorff) that *musical work* is a phase sortal.

Friedell) that a work's undergoing change is its coming to have a new sound structure, something it has only extrinsically. Platonism about musical works is bound to make musical works either identical to sound structures or to make it the case that *having-a-sound-structure* is intrinsic to the work.

The ideal strategy for the Platonist is instead to provide truth-conditions for claims people make about artwork change. The key observation for the Platonist is that when a composer composes, they establish certain social practices with respect to the abstract object they discover. By creatively discovering some abstract object, in combination with the powers granted them by the social practices of their artistic community, they make it the case that when anyone wants to perform, listen to, evaluate, or otherwise interact with the work, they must perform, listen to, evaluate or otherwise interact with an embodiment of the object identified by the composer. They might read a score that outlines how to perform the work. They might attend a performance of the work. They might instead listen to a recording of the performance they attended. But the fact that it is a social practice for members of an artistic community to interact with these embodiments of the abstract object in a certain way is an extrinsic feature of that object, something brought about by the composer, in concert with the pre-existing social practices of the community.

What the Platonist should say in cases of apparent change is that it's not the work but actually the social practice that's changing. For example, when someone claims that Bruckner revised his *Eighth Symphony*, the Platonist should say this is true iff Bruckner altered the social practice he had established. Instead of requiring people to interact with embodiments of the original abstract object, *o*, the social practice now required them to interact with embodiments of a different abstract object, *p* (different kinds of scores, performances, and recordings) in order to interact with his work. The change is not an intrinsic change in any work (i.e. not in any eternal type), but an extrinsic change in which object we refer to by means of the term "Bruckner's *Eighth Symphony*" (first *o* then *p*) and in what our beliefs and practices centered on Bruckner's *Eighth* are about. On Platonism, musical works don't undergo intrinsic change. However, *something* undergoes intrinsic change that makes it fine to say the works change. In particular, what changes are the social practices instituted by the composer. Bruckner originally instituted a social practice of thinking about, performing, listening to, evaluating, and otherwise interacting with embodiments of one abstract object. But he changed the social practice so that it required one to do these things with embodiments of a different object instead.

An obvious drawback to the Platonist's account of artwork change is the one it wears on its face: it says, "musical works don't actually change; it's just right to say they do sometimes." One might think Friedell's Creationist picture of musical works is on better footing here, since it seems to allow musical works actually to change. It's not clear this is right, though. For one thing, Friedell's Creationism only allows musical work to undergo extrinsic change, and the Platonist allows this too. The Platonist says works go from being works to not being works and that their aesthetic properties change based on their relations to artistic communities, but they understand these changes as purely extrinsic

Some might not think Friedell's Creationism even captures what we are after when we think musical works are temporally flexible. After all, it denies that musical

works change in themselves. Rohrbaugh (2003) and Evnine (2009) and (2016) stand apart from Friedell here. Their versions of Creationism do allow musical works to undergo intrinsic change and so obviously best account for the feature of temporal flexibility if it's meant to be the ability of musical works to undergo intrinsic change. Friedell (2018, 12) points out though that Rohrbaugh and Evnine are left with a mystery when attempting to explain why only some people (and not others) can change a work. To show this, Friedell points out that social practices do not prevent anyone from changing the intrinsic practices of artworks like paintings or sculptures. The mystery, on Rohrbaugh and Evnine's views, is why it should be possible for some people and not others to change the intrinsic properties of musical works. Both Friedell and the Platonist have a way of making sense of change for musical works without having to face up to that mystery.

Platonism actually appears to be even better off than Friedell's Creationism here though, since the latter says all musical works are intrinsically just the same. While Friedell's Creationism can say that musical works change, it can't say that any of them is intrinsically any different from any other. In itself, Bruckner's *Eighth* is just the same as Ariana Grande's "Love Me Harder." That's a surprising result, and the Platonist can avoid it, since they identify the works with sound structures (or at least allow sound structures to be intrinsically attached to works). The Platonist can say a lot of different things about how eternal, immutable abstract objects are intrinsically, and most versions of Platonism will make musical works come out as intrinsically distinct. So Platonism is on at least equal footing with Creationism here, if not actually better off.

4 Modal Flexibility

To say that a work is modally flexible is to say that it could have had different properties than it actually does. Rohrbaugh (2003, 181) points out that what is at stake is *de re* modality. People think of a work like *Eroica* that *it* could have been different, not just that some sentence featuring the term '*Eroica*' could have been true that isn't actually true.

It seems that *Eroica* could have had different properties than it actually does. But if *Eroica* is an eternally existing, immutable abstract object, then *Eroica* couldn't have had different intrinsic properties than it actually does. Say, for example, *Eroica* is an abstract sound structure type. Then the identity conditions for *Eroica* are determined by what a performance must be like in order to be a token of *Eroica* (or what a performance must be like in order to be an ideal token, if *Eroica* is what Dodd (2007) calls a 'norm-type'). Then consider another possible world w in which we suppose that normal (or ideal) performances of *Eroica* go differently than they actually do. Then *Eroica* in w is not identical to *Eroica* in the actual world, since the tokens of *Eroica* in w differ from the tokens of *Eroica* in the actual world. What we're imagining in considering world w is a world where Beethoven discovered a different object and called it '*Eroica*.' In such a scenario, it wouldn't have been the case that *Eroica*

had different properties than it actually does. It just would have been that Beethoven discovered some other object and we called *that* thing *Eroica*.¹²

The Platonist has at least a couple options for what to say about the purported modal flexibility of works. Which option they take will likely depend on their broader commitments in the metaphysics of modality. The first option is to agree with the paragraph above and deny that musical works are modally flexible. What's really true, the Platonist might say, is the broader possibility that things in general could have been different than they are. For example, we can imagine a possible world *w* in which everything is just as it actually is where there is a work intrinsically just like *Eroica*. This work differs slightly from *Eroica*, however, so that the theme of the second movement differs in a small but important way. People may then mistakenly (and understandably) move from that imagined scenario to the claim that *Eroica* could have had different intrinsic properties than it actually does. But conceivability doesn't entail possibility, and it's not clear what else about our experience of the work would make an evidential difference between the thesis that things could have been different in general and the thesis that *Eroica* could have been different in itself. The Platonist has no need to abandon their theory since the fact that it seems like works could be different is just as well explained by their theory as by the Creationist's.

The other option for the Platonist is to embrace a counterpart theoretic analysis of de re modal properties of musical works. On counterpart theory, de re modal properties are analyzed in terms of a counterpart relation, a relation of similarity. Simply put, *Eroica* could have been *F* iff there exists a possible object *a*, such that *a* is a counterpart of *Eroica* and *a* is *F*. What possible objects are counterparts of *Eroica* depends in large part on how intrinsically similar those objects are to *Eroica* and in part on the context of evaluation (since a normal feature of counterpart theory has it that the counterpart relation is context-relative).¹³ A Platonist who adopts a counterpart theoretic approach to de re properties of musical works can agree that *Eroica* really could have been intrinsically different. This is just because *Eroica* is very similar to another possible work that is intrinsically different. Once the Platonist has taken this approach, they no longer have to agree with the Creationist's claim that a work is temporally flexible only if it's created.

5 Essentiality of Composer

Some theorists take it that a particular musical work could only have been composed by the person(s) who actually composed it. What's supposed to tell in favor of this thesis is the fact that, for example, were Bach to have composed *Eroica* it would have certain aesthetic or artistic properties it doesn't actually have. Compare Fisher (1991, 135), who argues against the idea that musical works are discovered:

¹² This argument is very similar to the main argument of Hazlett (2012). He gives a condensed version as follows,

if there are repeatable artworks, they are abstract objects; no abstract object has any accidental intrinsic properties; would-be repeatable artworks have at least one accidental intrinsic property; therefore, there are no repeatable artworks. (Hazlett, 2012, 162)

¹³ For more on counterpart theory, see Lewis (1968), (1971), (1973), and (1986).

in the typical case of composition there is nothing to be discovered that is independent of the process of composition, filled, as it is, with the composer's taste, values, interests, competence, favorite motives, etc. . . . These are "discoveries" that only make sense within each particular artist's body of work. Hence they are not discoveries of pre-existing independent objects that others could have discovered.

The claim that a musical work only "makes sense" within a particular artist's body of work seems to be the claim that a musical work has certain important aesthetic and artistic properties in virtue of its being composed by that artist. Works that differ significantly in their aesthetic and artistic properties must be distinct. But what aesthetic and artistic properties a work has depend in part on who composes it.

The Creationist argument in this case really has two steps. The first is to establish the essentiality of composers to works. The Creationist does this by imagining a possible scenario in which two different composers compose two intrinsically sonically identical works, *a* and *b*. The Creationist insists that *a* and *b* will vary in some of their aesthetic and artistic properties in virtue of their having been composed by different composers. By Leibniz's Law, *a* and *b* are distinct, since they have different properties. Since the example was arbitrary, it seems to generalize that intrinsic sonic duplicates with different composers are necessarily distinct. Thus, a work's composer is essential to it. The second step of the argument is to establish the created status of musical works. Musical works have their composers essentially only if they're created, the Creationist will say. After all, if a musical work is an eternally existing, immutable abstract object then it couldn't have any essential tie to a contingently existing being like a composer. Since musical works do have their composers essentially, it can be concluded that musical works are created.

Once again, the Platonist can say at least a couple different things in response. The first option for the Platonist is to protest that the Creationist's argument from Leibniz's Law is unsound. It depends upon the premise that possible intrinsic sonic duplicates composed by different people must have different aesthetic and artistic properties. But this begs the question against the Platonist. After all, on (at least some versions of) Platonism, if possible work *a* is an intrinsic sonic duplicate of possible work *b*, then *a* is identical to *b*. In that case *a* has all of the aesthetic and artistic properties *b* has. What the Creationist is forgetting, the Platonist will point out, is that a single work can be composed by more than one composer (however unlikely that is in actuality). In the event that this occurs, the one single work will have a number of aesthetic and artistic properties we'll only be inclined to attribute to it in one intensional context or another (e.g. thought of as *a*). But that's a matter of what's going on in our heads, not with the work itself.

The Creationist might push back here by pointing out that in acknowledging that a work could have different aesthetic and artistic properties were it to be (or to have been) composed by another composer, the Platonist seems to be committed to both the temporal and modal flexibility of musical works. After all, if works can acquire new aesthetic and artistic properties along with the advent of being newly composed, then it's possible for any given work either at another time or another possible world that someone else composes it and it acquires new such properties. But this is not

actually a problem for the Platonist. The aesthetic and artistic properties in question are clear cases of extrinsic properties, and the Platonist has already been ready to acknowledge that a work can change extrinsically (or that it could have been different extrinsically). *Of course* a musical work possesses (at least some of) the aesthetic and artistic properties it does only by being part of a composer's larger oeuvre. (For example, *The White Album* can be rightly evaluated as eccentric in part because it was written and recorded by the same band that had written and recorded an album like *A Hard Day's Night*. Likewise, it's only because of Stravinsky's prior work composing *The Firebird* and *Petrushka* that White (1961, 59) can say that in *The Rite of Spring* Stravinsky "pushed [his technique] to its logical conclusion.") That only goes to show that those properties are properties the work has by its relation to things outside it, namely to other works (of the composer's or of other composers). But then such properties are clearly extrinsic, so that even the Creationist shouldn't hold that they're intrinsic, and it's no problem for the Platonist to allow works to undergo change with respect to such properties.

The second option to respond to the case for Creationism here is open for the Platonist who endorses counterpart theory for *de re* modal properties of musical works. The counterpart theorist has no need to deny the essentiality of composers to works. On their view, it's a contextual matter what *de re* modal properties hold of what objects. If our modal intuitions strongly favor the importance of composers to works, then it will come out as true that necessarily, Beethoven composed *Eroica*, since in that context all of *Eroica*'s counterparts will have been composed by Beethoven (or by intrinsic duplicates, or counterparts of Beethoven). Thus, the counterpart theorist can agree with the Creationist that musical works have their composers essentially, but deny the Creationist's premise that this is so only if musical works are created.

6 Essentiality of Origin

Similar to the argument for essentiality of composer, Levinson (1990) argues that the musico-historical context in which a work was composed is essential to it.¹⁴

... a musical work, stripped of its contextual coordinates in musico-historical space—thus yielding, roughly, a pure sound sequence—is incapable of bearing many of the determinate aesthetic properties that we ascribe to it. ... the way to show this is to observe that for all we know there *are*, and at any rate easily *could be*, works containing (incorporating) *identical sound sequences* and yet presenting nontrivial aesthetic differences; the conclusion is inescapable that such works, if they truly differ aesthetically *cannot* be identified with the lone sound sequence itself. (Levinson, 1990, 222)

The style of argument is the same as in the composer case. Levinson considers an alternate possibility in which two people compose works with the same sound sequence in different contexts. But their works would have different properties were they composed in different contexts. By Leibniz's Law, the two works are distinct

¹⁴ For a more recent and more circumspect discussion of the role of historical origins in the individuation of a musical work, see Moore (2012).

and we must conclude that the context is essential to the work. Once again, the Creationist will want to say that this can be the case only if the musical work is created, and thus conclude that musical works are created.

It's worth pointing out that Levinson's point in this section is more idiosyncratic than Fisher's. He hopes to show not just that musical works are created, but that a pure sound sequence is "incapable of bearing many of the determinate aesthetic properties that we ascribe to" a musical work. It's unclear how this thought experiment is supposed to support that claim, however.

To see this, examine the situation from the Platonist's point of view. On their view, a musical work is a pure sound structure. In being composed, the work gains some properties it didn't previously have, but the Platonist will understand these properties as extrinsic to the work, properties it has in virtue of the relations it bears to its composer, the historical context of its origin, the community of people in which it is appreciated, and so forth. Of course a pure sound sequence that hasn't been composed would lack some of the aesthetic properties it has in virtue of being composed, on the Platonist's view. But the aesthetic properties it gains on being composed are all extrinsic to the work itself, thinks the Platonist. Levinson's thought experiment doesn't seem to support at all the idea that a pure sound structure *can't* bear the aesthetic properties we attribute to musical works. Rather, it supports the idea that a musical work would be appreciably aesthetically different were it composed in a different context. The Platonist has a story to tell about this.

Returning to the case for Creationism, a similar reply to the case of the essentiality of composer is in order. The Platonist can object that Levinson's modal argument with the invocation of Leibniz's Law is unsound. The Platonist's way of understanding the imagined scenario is such that the two composers have each composed the same work. Perhaps it has some of its aesthetic properties in virtue of one act of composition and others in virtue of the other act, but all the aesthetic properties in question belong to the one work.

The Platonist who endorses counterpart theory for *de re* modal properties of musical works can give a similar response as well. The context of origin *is* essential to a musical work. This is given the usual counterpart theoretic analysis: all of a musical work's counterparts were composed in intrinsically identical or counterpart contexts of origin. The Creationist's claim that context of origin is essential only if a work is created can be rejected again.

7 Teleology

Morris (2007) argues that musical works are teleological entities, by which he means that they have the property of being *in-order-to-be-understood*. Morris's argument first proceeds from the observation that musical works are meaningful. Indeed, it seems that necessarily, all artworks are meaningful. Morris (2007, 60) then suggests a necessary condition on the property of being meaningful: "Something is meaningful [only] if it is, in some sense, *there to be understood*." The idea is that an object that's meaningful has a telos; it's "for" something, and "being understood is what it is for." (Morris, 2007, 60)

According to Morris, though, something can exhibit this kind of teleology only if it is created. “Nothing can have that specific teleological purpose [of being meaningful, and therefore requiring understanding] without having been created.” (Morris, 2007, 64) If that’s right, then musical works must be created.

The Platonist will deny the premise that musical works have this telos (and are meaningful) only if they’re created. Instead, the Platonist will adopt the view that what matters for an object’s being meaningful in this sense is its standing in the right intentional relation to someone (in the case of a musical work to a composer). Someone might create an object and imbue it with meaning from the get go, but another salient possibility is that someone selects a pre-existing object and presents it in such a way as to imbue it with the same kind of meaning.

Morris (2007, 67) argues that Platonism cannot take this route, since he has “argued that works of art are not only meaningful, but *essentially* meaningful. We could not have the very same things without their being meaningful. Consequently, we could not have had the very same things before the intervention of an artist.” Morris’s argument that musical works are essentially meaningful is that the other features of a musical work we don’t think could vary all seem to be tied to its meaning. Some of us don’t think a particular novel could have had entirely different words. Likewise, some of us don’t think a particular symphony could have had totally different melodies and instrumentation. Morris thinks the explanation for these intuitions is that in the supposed scenarios the meaning of those works wouldn’t be retained. A natural Platonist explanation of the modal intuitions Morris discusses is that we don’t think a musical work could have a different meaning and be the same *artwork*, even if it would still be the same object. On Platonism, a composer selects a pre-existing object and imbues it with meaning. If it didn’t have that meaning, the Platonist can very well admit it wouldn’t be the very artwork it is, but that’s because *artwork* is a phase sortal, not an essential kind. Morris doesn’t provide a reason to favor his explanation of these intuitions over a Platonist explanation.

Here’s a case to press the point against Morris. Imagine an alien civilization whose language, Formic, consists of the practice of taking found objects in their environment and presenting them, just as they are, for various amounts of time, in various relations to each other in space in order to create units of meaning. The lexicon of the language then just consists of the domain of physical objects available to be picked up by the speakers of the language. An object’s color, shape, and size can all make contributions to the overall meaning of a sentence, as do the ways in which speakers of Formic arrange the objects they use to compose sentences in time and space. Since the objects Formic-speakers pick up are the basic units of communication in the language, it seems that they have meaning. They are to be understood. However, it’s stipulated according to the thought experiment that those objects are found and not created. This seems like a counterexample to Morris’s claim that for something to be meaningful it must be created.

Morris anticipates this kind of case and says “so-called ‘ready-mades’ are not properly so-called; but that is hardly a counter-intuitive claim: it is quite natural to think that taking an already-made object and placing it in a gallery creates a work of art which did not exist before.” (Morris, 2007, 67) Morris insists on his principle then. It’s likely that in the case of Formic speakers he would reject the stipulation

and posit that what we're imagining is a group that routinely creates new objects that didn't exist prior. This seems ad hoc, though. There's no obvious reason to dig in one's heels and refuse to imagine the scenario described here.

It's worth noting that Morris's claim about what it's natural to think in the case of ready-mades is contested by other theorists writing on the subject. Evnine (2013) considers the case of ready-mades in detail. When asking just the question at hand (viz. whether it's right to say that a ready-made is an object created by an artist out of another object or whether it is a pre-existing object merely selected by an artist), he says the following:

The point of ready-mades is precisely that they confront us with these two options between which there is no definitive basis for decision. Is the artist effecting an imposture, passing off as a sculpture something that is not one? Is he, in the terms I used above, simply using a urinal as a work of art although it is not one? Or is he demonstrating something about the nature of sculpture and about the creative powers of the artist, who can indeed make something new merely by selecting another, already existing object? (Evnine, 2013, 420)

Evnine's point is not to deny that there is a fact of the matter as to whether ready-mades are created or mere appropriated objects. Rather, the point is that the purpose of historical ready-mades is to raise just that question. It shouldn't be obvious to anyone, then, that a ready-made is a creation. Moreover, ruling out the possibility of their being appropriated objects does not look like an advantage of a view.

Morris gives a further theory of just under what conditions a work of art is meaningful, according to which, "[i]t is only when an artist intentionally exploits those independent properties of the medium [viz. those properties of the medium that the artist uses to make the meaning of the work] that we have something which is meaningful at all." (Morris, 2007, 70) It's not at all clear why the Platonist can't agree with this claim, however. The Platonist thinks that artists intentionally exploit the properties of their media to communicate meaning through pre-existing works. It isn't at all clear why an object has to exist prior to the kind of activity Morris is describing for the activity to be possible.

8 Conclusion

The case for Creationism might be valid, and it might be sound. It presents us with a number of features of musical works, and an argument for each the conclusion of which is that musical works are created and historical. But the case for Creationism is a dialectical failure. There's not one argument the Creationist can construct that gives the Platonist a good reason to accept their view. Indeed, more than one version of Platonism has an easy time responding to the case for Creationism. For every individual argument the Creationist constructs, the Platonist can either justifiably deny that musical works have the feature in question and provide an explanation for why it seems that way, or the Platonist can agree that musical works have the feature in question and deny the inference to creation. There may be an associated theoretical cost for the Platonist of denying that musical works have some of the features associated

with the Case for Creationism, but the Platonist presumably has broader reasons for their Platonism that they see as worth paying the cost. The point is that the Case for Creationism does not (and cannot) rationally compel the Platonist to abandon their view.

This does not necessarily establish an upper hand for Platonism in the ontology of art. The Creationist will of course have things to say about how to account for the repeatability and audibility of musical works, and won't be moved by the corresponding case for Platonism.¹⁵ The stalemate leaves us with the puzzle with which we began: some features of musical works seem to entail that they're eternal and immutable; some seem to entail that they're created and historical. Both can't be true. How do we resolve the puzzle? Some philosophers have continued to press points on one side or the other of the first-order debate. A number of papers in Mag Uidhir (2012) (many of which are cited here) point to the repeatability, temporality, temporal flexibility, modal flexibility, or origins of works as important evidence for solving the question of what they are. Even more recently there have been a number of new attempts to explore Creationist theories of musical works and at least one attempt at breaking new Platonist ground.¹⁶ What this paper should have shown, however, is that these attempts are unlikely to resolve the debate.

A fair amount of discussion in ontology of art these days has been about methodology and metaontology. A number of authors have recently debated the extent to which the way artworks seem to us must be a guiding feature of our theorizing in the ontology of art.¹⁷ Rohrbaugh (2012) calls the principle that one's methodology in theorizing about the ontology of art must be constrained by the practice of art "Ontological Pragmatism." The question at issue amongst these (and other) theorists is the nature, scope, and validity of this constraint. For example, when approaching the question of what musical works are, just which apparent features of musical works (or practices surrounding musical works) must constrain our theorizing? Should we prioritize the beliefs and practices of experts (e.g. composers, musicians, and music critics) over others, or should we take a more democratic approach? If we adopt a strong pragmatist attitude, will this lead to incoherence (as the puzzle with which we began seems perhaps to suggest) and perhaps even to nihilism about certain art kinds? Without some further resolution on these questions we are liable to end up in dialectical stalemate. If the constraint is too strong, however, the puzzle with which we began threatens to escape resolution.

In order for theorists to make progress as a community, then, some measure of agreement about methodology must first be achieved. Progress could come about in different ways. If theorists agreed on a particular principle that settled the question

¹⁵ One might think the Platonist has the upper hand after all, however, since for multiple features they appear to have better explanations than Creationism. For example, it's quite plausible that the Platonist turns out to be in the best situation to account for both the repeatability and temporal flexibility of musical works. Unfortunately, litigating the fine details of this comparison would be time-consuming and likely fruitless. I won't pursue that project here.

¹⁶ For new work on developing and defending Creationism about musical works, see Aliyev (2017), Cray and Matheson (2017), Evnine (2016), Friedell (2017) and (2018), and Moruzzi (2018). For a new Platonist theory of musical works, see Letts (2018).

¹⁷ For example, see Davies (2009), Dodd (2013), Irvin (2008), Kania (2008), Predelli (2009), Rohrbaugh (2012), Stecker (2009), and Thomasson (2006).

of which features of musical works (or other artworks) were important for theorizing about them, that would help settle the standoff. On the other hand, theorists might settle on a metaontology that allowed one to resolve standoffs by weighing broader theoretical concerns. There isn't space here to offer a metaontology of art. But until some higher-order progress is made, answers to first-order questions about the nature of musical works look to remain elusive.

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