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Platonism vs. Nominalism in Contemporary Musical Ontology

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I. Introduction

Ontological theories of musical works fall into two broad classes, according to whether or not they take musical works to be abstract objects of some sort. I shall use the terms 'Platonism' and 'nominalism' to refer to these two kinds of theory.[1] In this chapter I first outline contemporary Platonism about musical works—the theory that musical works are abstract objects. I then consider reasons to be suspicious of such a view, motivating a consideration of nominalist theories of musical works. I argue for two conclusions: first, that there are no compelling reasons to be a nominalist about musical works in particular, i.e. that nominalism about musical works rests on arguments for thoroughgoing nominalism; and, second, that if Platonism fails, fictionalism about musical works is to be preferred to other nominalist ontologies of musical works. If you think in terms of realism vs. anti-realism about musical works, then one way of putting this is to say that realism about musical works stands or falls with Platonism about musical works.[2] That's because, for methodological reasons I discuss below, a theory according to which musical works are concrete objects of some sort is not a realist theory of *musical works*, properly understood. This

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[1] Nominalists about musical works may be Platonists about other entities, such as numbers (and, in principle, vice versa). When I discuss a view according to which there are no abstract entities at all, I call it 'thoroughgoing nominalism'.

[2] Thanks to Christy Mag Uidhir for bringing this perspective to my attention.

chapter is thus a contribution to the debate over the fundamental ontology of works of Western classical music, broadly construed, though its conclusions could be applied to other musical (or artistic or cultural) practices that are sufficiently similar, if such there be.[3]

II. Contemporary Platonism about Musical Works

The basic questions in the fundamental ontology of musical works are the same as those of any topic in ontology: (1) 'Are there any?' And (2) 'If so, what kinds of things are they?' These questions cannot be approached separately for musical works any more than they can for numbers, ordinary objects, persons, possible worlds, and so on. On the one hand, the nature of the thing in question may provide strong reasons for thinking there are not any such things. For instance, one might argue that the concept of a soul is essentially incoherent, and thus that there can be no souls. On the other hand, one might take there to be such compelling reasons for thinking a particular kind of thing exists that one posits it despite its odd nature, or the problems it creates in other areas of inquiry. For instance, one might argue that numbers (conceived of as abstracta) are indispensible to our best theories of the world, and thus that they must exist, even though it is difficult to understand how there could be such things, or how we could know anything about them.

A couple of basic features of musical works might lead one to think that their ontology would be no different from that of something like properties: (i) musical works are 'multiple' or 'repeatable'; they have 'instances' (performances), none of which can intuitively be identified with the work. Yet (ii) we have 'access' to or come into 'contact' with the work 'through' or 'in' any one of these instances. In fact, as I have argued elsewhere, the early history of musical ontology can be read as a kind of applied debate over the problem of universals (Kania 2008a, pp. 426–7).[4] More recently, Julian

[3] For the distinction between 'fundamental' and 'higher-order' musical ontology, see Kania 2008b. There is some debate over how broadly we should construe 'Western classical music' if our aim is to include musical practices centered around the performance of works. (Lydia Goehr 2007, especially chs 7–9) is well known for arguing for a narrow construal. For a defense of the more traditional broader construal, see S. Davies 2001, pp. 86–91. I will not enter that debate here.

[4] I have primarily in mind here the work of Nelson Goodman (1976 (first published 1968)); Richard Wollheim (1980 (first published 1968)); and Nicholas Wolterstorff (1980).

Dodd (2007) has argued, pretty much exclusively on the basis of these two features, that musical works are eternal, unstructured, unchanging, modally inflexible, abstract types.[5]

But musical works have further, equally basic, features that do not allow their ontology (or debates about it) to be assimilated to that of properties so easily. For instance, (iii) musical works are intentionally created by composers; (iv) they are normative, both in the sense that they specify how their performances should go, and in the sense that they admit of better and worse performances; and (v) they possess aesthetic or artistic properties that seem to depend on the cultural context of their composition. To hold that these latter features, and others like them, are relevant to the ontology of music is to subscribe to a methodological principle held by many ontologists of art over the last thirty years, a principle now widely known, thanks to the work of David Davies, as 'the pragmatic constraint' (2004, p. 18). The principle is so-called not because of any connection with the philosophical theories of Pierce, James, and Dewey, but because it takes *artistic practices* to be the yardstick against which ontologies of art should be measured. As Davies puts it:

> Artworks must be entities that can bear the sorts of properties rightly ascribed to what are termed 'works' in our reflective critical and appreciative practice; that are individuated in the way such 'works' are or would be individuated, and that have the modal properties that are reasonably ascribed to 'works', in that practice. (2004, p. 18)

The basic rationale of the principle is simple, and familiar from other areas of metaphysics: we ought to believe that those things exist which are required by our best theories of how things are. When we ask ontological questions about numbers we rightly take our best mathematical theories to be our most important evidence base; when we ask ontological questions about music, we rightly take our best musical theories to be our most important evidence base. It is worth noting that 'musical theories' here does not just mean music theory, narrowly construed, or even musicology in a traditional sense. It is, rather, our best understanding of this entire cultural sphere, of everything that goes on in the production and reception

[5] Dodd explicitly acknowledges his debt to Wolterstorff (Dodd 2007, p. 100).

of music, that is our evidence base for ontological claims about music. This is because, to quote Davies once more:

> [O]ur philosophical interest in 'art' and in 'artworks' is grounded precisely in [artistic] practice. It is because certain features of that practice puzzle us, or because the entities that enter into that practice fascinate us, that we are driven to philosophical reflection about art in the first place. To offer an 'ontology of art' not subject to the pragmatic constraint would be to change the subject, rather than answer the questions that motivate philosophical aesthetics. (2004, p. 21)

Davies has been criticized for making unjustified exclusions from this evidence base. I, for one, have argued that Davies is led astray by not taking seriously enough the ontological implications of our artistic practices, including our ontological intuitions (Kania 2008a, pp. 429–32). In *Art as Performance*, his ontological magnum opus, Davies claims that:

> ... in reflecting upon our artistic practice in this way, the intuitions that are strongest will be those that relate to practical aspects of that practice ... — judgments made, ways in which entities are treated, etc.—rather than intuitions about what works *are*, ontologically speaking. (2004, p. 22)

But either I misunderstood Davies or he has taken this criticism to heart, for in a recent discussion of the pragmatic constraint, he says that he does not 'deny that there are ontological dimensions to some aspects of our practice', though he notes that 'these judgments, like other features of our artistic practice, can constrain ontological theorizing only when subject to rational reflection' (2009, p. 163).[6]

Robert Stecker has recently argued for a further broadening of the evidence base for musical ontology:

> Of course we should look at our musical practices and linguistic usage, ... but that should only be a starting point. There are many sciences that study music, including musicology, music theory, psychology, and anthropology. Why shouldn't these studies generate data that are just as valuable for the philosopher? (2009, p. 383)

I am sympathetic to this approach in general. For instance, I myself have suggested that those interested in a definition of music would do well to consider recent work in the psychology of music (Kania 2011a), and

[6] Davies does not comment in this essay on whether this acknowledgement would impact his arguments for his own ontology of the arts.

philosophers discussing musical understanding frequently make reference to the work of music theorists (e.g. Huovinen 2011). But I am not sure how much of a departure this implies from current best practices in the *ontology* of art, including musical ontology. On the one hand, it is not clear how some of these disciplines (psychology and music theory) could contribute to musical ontology in particular.[7] On the other, while musicology and anthropology seem more promising in this regard, precisely because they aim to describe musical practices, it seems to me that (good) musical ontologists already appeal to such evidence. After all, when Davies appeals to the ways in which people talk about certain artworks (he is concerned with art in general, not just music), he appeals to what critics and art historians say. Such evidence seems to be the equivalent of musicological and anthropological data in this context. Similarly, when Theodore Gracyk (1996) argues for the work of art in rock music's being the recording, rather than the song or live performance, he appeals to rock criticism and musicology. We might sometimes hope for better musicology and anthropology—more systematic, objective, and wide ranging—but in the meantime we must make do with what we have.

The pragmatic constraint is touted as a methodological principle used to arrive at the best ontological theory of artworks. But as such it can also be used critically, to reject theories that do not respect the principle. One such theory that I have already mentioned is Julian Dodd's ontology of musical works. Recall that Dodd argues, on the basis of (i) their repeatability; and (ii) the fact that they can be heard in performances, that musical works are eternal, unstructured, unchanging, modally inflexible, abstract types (Dodd 2007). Dodd thus violates the pragmatic constraint in two related ways. Most obviously, he ignores vast tracts of musical practice (e.g. taking composition to be work creation and the attribution of aesthetic and artistic properties to works) until after he has established his preferred ontological theory, at which point he explains away such data, either by rejecting it outright (e.g. composition as creation) or by supplying paraphrases of the relevant judgements (e.g. as attributing aesthetic properties not to works but to performances). The second violation of the pragmatic constraint is more subtle, and occurs as Dodd is establishing his view. Dodd argues very

[7] Stecker admits that his new suggestion's 'potential for providing better data for an ontology of music is as yet unknown' (2009, p. 384).

early on that his view is a (in fact *the*) 'simple' one, the 'default' view, given the repeatability of works and their audibility in performances (2007, p. 1 *et passim*). But judgements of simplicity (to say nothing of default) are always relative and contextual. Two prominent aspects of the way in which Dodd motivates his view show that its simplicity depends on taking what I have called the 'metaphysical constraint' at least as seriously as the pragmatic constraint (Kania 2008a, pp. 434–8). According to the metaphysical constraint, our ontological theories of art, as far as possible, ought to appeal only to entities posited by our best general metaphysical theories.[8] The fact that in motivating his view Dodd considers only the two features of musical works that make them seem most like simple properties is one sign that he implicitly endorses the metaphysical constraint. If musical works must belong to a well-established ontological category, then one promising approach is to ask: Of those things investigated by general metaphysicians, which are most like musical works? And 'properties' seems a plausible answer to this question.

The other, more explicit sign that Dodd subscribes to the metaphysical constraint is the way in which he talks about types when he proposes them as the best candidate for the ontological category to which musical works belong. He claims that upon recognition that musical works are 'generic entities', that is, repeatable:

> [w]e are . . . invited to treat [them] as types because . . . we thereby provide a familiar and plausible explanation of the nature of the relation holding between a work and its occurrences . . . Rather than being a queer relation of *embodiment*, it turns out to be just one more example of the familiar relation that holds, for instance, between the word 'table' and its token inscriptions and utterances. (Dodd 2007, p. 11)

One response to Dodd's approach, then, is simply to reiterate the 'primacy of practice', the trumping of the metaphysical constraint by the pragmatic constraint. So David Davies argues that '[s]omething that only admitted of the sort of appreciation and evaluation permitted by [Dodd's theory] would not *be* a work of art in the sense that interests us as philosophers' (2009, p. 163). Here are two more responses.

[8] This characterization of the constraint is somewhat rough and ready, in part because those who subscribe to it rarely do so explicitly. For an attempt at working out more explicitly the proper relationship between the metaphysics of art and general metaphysics, from a perspective sympathetic to the metaphysical constraint, see Mag Uidhir (this volume, Introduction).

Note that however one formulates the metaphysical constraint it must appeal to something like our best general metaphysical theories. One problem with this is that it is not clear what our best general metaphysical theories are. The fact that contemporary guidebooks to metaphysics still take the problem of universals to be a central issue in metaphysics suggests that even if contemporary metaphysics is not mere footnotes to Plato, large chunks of it might still be considered appendices to Plato and Aristotle.[9] For instance, Dodd takes the existence of abstract types to be relatively uncontroversial, while nominalists about musical works tend to start from the premise that we ought not appeal to abstracta if we can avoid it at all (a point I return to below).[10]

Another problem is with the very idea of a general metaphysical theory, as opposed to a specialized theory such as an ontological theory of musical works. There are two ways one could conceive of this opposition, inclusively and exclusively, but both cause problems for the metaphysical constraint. Considered *inclusively*, our best general metaphysical theory is a metaphysical theory of everything, including, for instance, musical works (if such there be). But clearly there cannot be a consensus on such a theory without a consensus on the ontology of musical works, since the latter is part of the former. Considered *exclusively*, one need not wait for a consensus on the ontology of musical works before achieving consensus concerning the best general metaphysical theory, because the latter *excludes* musical ontology. On this conception our best 'general' metaphysical theory is our best *basic* metaphysical theory—a theory of individuals, properties, modality, and causation, say. One problem for this conception would clearly be demarcating what is metaphysically basic in a non-question-begging way. Another, related problem is the mirror image of the problem with the inclusive conception: it is plausible that moving on from these 'basics' to more complicated things such as musical works could introduce considerations that will lead us to add to or alter the ontology required to cover the basics. An interesting application of this point can be found in Zoltan Gendler Szabó's introduction to nominalism

[9] e.g. Loux and Zimmerman (2003) and Le Poidevin, Simons, McGonigal, and Cameron (2009). For the best consideration of Whitehead's famous aphorism that I am aware of, see Lachs (1995).

[10] Dodd spends five pages early in his book dismissing nominalism about musical works, employing standard moves in the debate over universals. For responses to these moves, see Caplan and Matheson (2006, 2008) and Tillman (2011).

(Szabó 2003). Discussing the problem of the causal isolation of abstracta, he notes that '[t]his sort of argument is applied all the time across the board against all sorts of abstracta, but the fact that it was originally presented in the context of the philosophy of mathematics is of utmost importance' (p. 29). He goes on to give the example of Jaroslav Hašek's novel *The Good Soldier Švejk*, which is 'presumably an abstract entity, but one that is causally dependent on a host of concrete ones' such as its author and the Austro-Hungarian monarchy's involvement in the First World War, and upon which many other concreta depend, such as Szabó's use of it as an example (pp. 29–30). Szabó's point is precisely that if we ignore things more complicated than the metaphysical basics, we run the risk of oversimplifying our metaphysics.

What kind of ontological theory of musical works do we end up with, then, if we forget the metaphysical constraint and apply the pragmatic constraint? We get a non-standard Platonism, that is, a theory according to which musical works are abstract objects, but with features not traditionally attributed to abstracta. One locus classicus here is Jerrold Levinson's 'What a Musical Work Is' (1990a [first published 1980]), though Levinson has modified his view over time.[11] Levinson argues that, as features (i) and (ii) mentioned above suggest, musical works are abstract objects, something like abstract, multiply instantiable structures of sounds. But, as features (iii) and (v) suggest, they are not *simply* sound structures, for two different musical works could share a sound structure, and yet differ in their aesthetic properties as a consequence of who composed them, and when. One might be a simple, naïve piece, for instance, while the other is simple in the service of a kind of primitivism or biting irony. Those sympathetic to Levinson's approach have suggested modifications of the view in light of other features of musical works. In particular, the normativity and modal flexibility of musical works have been discussed. The upshot is that the consensus among those who subscribe to the pragmatic constraint and reject the metaphysical constraint is that the best ontological theory of musical works is that they are something like *structures of performed sounds made normative by the production of a score in a particular creative act.*[12] The details of the theory are not important for our purposes. The question is: Are there in fact any such things? Thoroughgoing nominalists will think not. I now turn to motivations for such a view.

[11] See, in particular, Levinson (1990b, 1996, and this volume Ch. 2).

III. Motivations for Nominalism about Musical Works

David Davies says that '[t]o offer an "ontology of art" not subject to the pragmatic constraint would be to change the subject, rather than answer the questions that motivate philosophical aesthetics' (2004, p. 21). It's not clear why we couldn't extend this principle to other cultural practices, such as religion. It seems just as plausible to say that to offer an 'ontology of religion' not constrained by rational reflection on what religious practices imply about the nature of God or witches, say, would be to change the subject, rather than answer the questions that motivate philosophical theology. (Davies himself draws an analogy with philosophy of science.) The challenge this suggests to the ontologist of art is that though the pragmatic constraint will deliver our best *concept* of a musical work, it will not guarantee that anything falls under that concept.

One response to this challenge is to point out that though the pragmatic constraint does not guarantee that anything falls under our concept of a musical work, this is no reason to think that the concept is in fact empty. Furthermore, the general ontological principle appealed to above—that we should believe in the things implied by our best theories—suggests a relevant difference between musical works and supernatural entities, namely that our best theories of the world (including the cultural world) imply that musical works exist, but that those same theories imply that there are no witches or gods. One problem with supernatural entities, for instance, unlike musical works, is that they (arguably) conflict with scientific theories.

[12] This literature is too extensive to summarize here, but for a recent example see Matheson and Caplan (2008). They consider challenges to Levinsonian views on the basis of the modal flexibility of musical works, and end up defending the plausibility of something very close to Levinson's own view (though they do not endorse the view).

Nominalists, however, will claim that there is just such a conflict—perhaps an even deeper one—between our best concept of musical works and our best overall theories of the world: our best concept of musical works implies they are abstract objects, and our best theories of the world make no reference to abstract objects. The Platonist might try to reply to this argument in the same way I suggested she should reply to a proponent of the 'metaphysical constraint': she might claim that to exclude the evidence for musical works from the evidence base for our best overall ontological theory is to beg the question against the Platonist. But the situation is different here. The nominalist is not (or should not be) appealing to some pre-existing, settled metaphysical theory. He is arguing that, even when we have taken the evidence of musical practice into account, a theory without abstracta, and thus without anything like what we take musical works to be, is preferable to one that posits abstracta. Presumably whatever the details of the argument here, a major component will be an appeal to something like Occam's Razor. We would thus have to attempt to weigh the ontological savings of rejecting abstracta against the costs in other aspects of the theory, such as simplicity. Obviously at this level of generality there is nothing I can say that should sway us one way or the other; to go further with this debate we would have to turn to particular arguments for or against thoroughgoing nominalism.

It is noteworthy that musical nominalists do not say much to motivate their thoroughgoing nominalism. They usually briefly appeal to problems of causal interaction with abstracta, particularly the creation of musical works, and then move quickly on to considering nominalist proposals. (See, for example, Caplan and Matheson 2006 and Cameron 2008.) There are several responses the Platonist can give to the initial problem of causal interaction or creatability. I have already discussed the first in connection with the metaphysical constraint. Our conception of musical works could just as easily (and perhaps less dogmatically) be taken as evidence that some abstracta are capable of causal interaction, including creation, as that they cannot be abstracta. In other words, the nominalist's dialectic here seems to rely on the (bankrupt) metaphysical constraint. Second, there are of course resources available to the Platonist for giving a positive account of the nature of musical works as abstract and creatable. For instance, Caplan and Matheson (2004) suggest some promising strategies for defending a conception of musical works as sets or types that are creatable, and Simon Evnine has suggested that creation does not require causal interaction, in the case of either concreta or abstracta (2009, pp. 214–15, esp. fn. 25).

What this suggests is that the nominalist's motivation resides wholly in quite general motivations for nominalism which are seldom, if ever, engaged with. Perhaps it is too much to expect the nominalist about musical works to provide arguments for nominalism in general. However, this does mean that the nominalist's case is built on a conditional: *if there are no abstracta, then musical works must be thus and so.* This comes out pretty explicitly in Chris Tillman's consideration of various nominalist theories of musical works: 'If there is a presumption in favor of the material over the abstract, and if the main motivation for musical materialism is that materialism is untenable . . . , then musical abstractionism is unmotivated' (2011, p. 28, emphasis removed).[13] The nominalist might reply that the Platonist's case is similarly built on a conditional: *if there are abstracta, then musical works must be thus and so.* However, the Platonist has the dialectical advantage here, because, thanks to the pragmatic constraint, the 'thus-and-so' in the case of the Platonist is how we ordinarily conceive of musical works. This means that (a) other things being equal, there's a smaller cost to accepting the antecedent of the Platonist's conditional than the nominalist's;[14] and (b) it gives us some (perhaps slight) reason to think there are abstracta. Nonetheless, I doubt these brief reflections will do much to sway anyone already inclined to thoroughgoing nominalism. I thus turn now to the ontological options open to a thoroughgoing nominalist when it comes to musical works.

IV. Contemporary Nominalism about Musical Works

The broad sense in which I am using the term 'nominalism' encompasses a variety of ontological theories of musical works. One group of nominalist theories is the *materialist* theories, according to which a musical work is some kind of concrete entity, such as a collection of performances or the

[13] In the ellipsis, Tillman refers to the arguments typically marshalled against materialism, which he finds wanting. He considers these arguments on pp. 20–8. The details do not affect the point I am making here.

[14] The 'other things' in this case are elements of the debate between thoroughgoing nominalists and Platonists. Of course this debate may well not be equal, but part of my goal here is just to see how ontologies of music relate to more general ontological theories.

particular creative action of a composer. Chris Tillman (2011) has recently produced a useful menu of some options for the materialist about musical works. Call whatever you think the concrete manifestations of musical works are (scores, performances, recordings, etc.) the work's *atoms*. According to musical *perdurantism*, a musical work is the fusion of its atoms, and those atoms are its temporal parts.[15] According to musical *endurantism*, a musical work is its atoms, but only one at a time, as it were; it is wholly present in each atom, rather than being identified with the fusion of its atoms. According to musical *spannerism*, a musical work is coextensive with its atoms, but it is not identical to them, nor are they its parts. (As Tillman says, 'spanning is weird' (2011, p. 19 fn. 27).)

Another group of nominalist theories is *eliminativist* theories, according to which there are only concrete objects, such as performances and the creative actions of composers, and none of these can be identified with musical works; therefore there are no musical works. Few have defended eliminativism about musical works. Richard Rudner (1950) is the closest we have to a classic source, though it is possible to interpret his position as materialist. He argues that the best candidate ontological category for musical works is that of abstract object, since it does better than any other candidate (individual performance, set of performances, composer's intention, etc.) at filling the role our musical practices carve out for it. However, Rudner considers the peculiarities of the kind of abstractum musical works would have to be, and the fact that they would have to be created by composers, deal-breakers for Platonism about musical works. As a result, he argues, we should stop speaking (at least strictly, as theorists) of musical works, and talk instead only of performances, compositional intentions, and so on.

Judging by the title of a recent article in the *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 'There Are No Things that are Musical Works', Ross P. Cameron (2008) is also an eliminativist, though, like Rudner's, his position is not easy to pigeon hole. Cameron argues that we can have our musical works and eliminate them too. That is, he thinks that when we ordinarily say things like 'there are many musical works', we say something true, even though

[15] Ben Caplan and Carl Matheson have defended musical perdurantism at some length (2004, 2006, 2008), primarily in dialogue with Julian Dodd (2002, 2004, 2007). You could even be forgiven for thinking they subscribe to the view.

there aren't really *any* musical works. The reason this isn't a contradiction, according to Cameron, is that the truth conditions of ordinary English sentences such as 'there are many musical works' do not require that there be any things which are musical works. On the other hand, when we (truthfully) say things such as 'there aren't really any musical works', we are speaking 'Ontologese', the language of metaphysics or fundamental reality. The truth conditions of sentences in Ontologese *do* require there to be referents for terms like 'musical work'. I have no space to discuss Cameron's view in depth, in part because it is a general ontological position, out of which this theory of musical works falls.[16] I do think it is unstable, however, and threatens to collapse into Doddian Platonism, eliminativism, or fictionalism, depending on which elements of the theory one holds most firmly to.

According to both kinds of nominalist theory I have considered here—materialism and eliminativism—there are no musical works of the kind implied by our musical practices, since those practices imply that musical works are abstract. The major difference between the two theories is that the materialist sees the denial of the existence of musical works as a greater theoretical cost than the eliminativist. Consider that, in some sense, the materialist and eliminativist do not (or need not) disagree about the kinds of things that exist.[17] They both agree that there are no abstract objects (or, at least, no abstract objects that are musical works). They do disagree about whether there are any musical works, of course, but that is a disagreement about whether musical works can plausibly be identified with some kind of concrete entity, not about whether the kind of concrete entity in question exists. Moreover, both these kinds of theory count it as a cost to deny the existence of the kind of musical work implied by our musical practices. This is evident in the case of the materialist by the use of the paraphrase strategy. The materialist attempts to show that as many as possible of the claims we make that at least appear to commit us to the existence of abstract musical

[16] For some initial criticisms, see Stecker (2009, pp. 378–80) and Predelli (2009).

[17] I supply the qualification because any given materialist and eliminativist may of course disagree about the kind of things that exist. For instance, one may be a perdurantist and the other an endurantist, in which case they would (arguably) disagree about the existence of temporal parts (on some construal of that term). But this kind of disagreement is not relevant to the arguments I am currently considering. It is, after all, a kind of disagreement two materialists could have. The only relevant disagreements here are disagreements between the materialist and eliminativist *qua* materialist and eliminativist.

works can be paraphrased into claims that commit us only to concreta. This saves us from some kind of error (e.g. the error of failing to refer to anything when we attempt to refer to musical works), but attributes some other error to us (e.g. not realizing what we are referring to).[18] But it is also evident in the case of the eliminativist, for the eliminativist does not (or need not) deny the existence of the concreta with which the materialist identifies musical works. Why, then, does the eliminativist not subscribe to materialism? Presumably because the eliminativist thinks that it would do less violence to musical practice to deny the existence of musical works altogether than to identify them with the concreta the materialist believes them to be. After all, eliminativism about musical works would make no sense if the eliminativist did not believe both (1) that our concept of a musical work is that of a certain kind of thing; and (2) that there are no such things.

It is at this point that we see that the dispute between the materialist and the eliminativist is doubly pragmatic: it is pragmatic in the sense that the materialist and eliminativist agree about what kinds of things exist, but not about whether to call one kind of thing a musical work. Choosing between the theories depends on one's purposes. The dispute is also pragmatic in the sense that the pragmatic constraint appears to be implicit common ground. The question the nominalist faces when choosing between materialism and eliminativism is whether it would be better to give up talk of musical works altogether or to transform it into talk of, say, fusions of performances.[19] And the measure of what is better here is clearly closeness to, or coherence with, existing musical practices.

V. Fictionalism about Musical Works

In this final section I will suggest that a virtually ignored ontological theory of musical works—fictionalism—should be preferred by a nominlist over

[18] There may be disagreement among materialists about exactly which errors we are committing and saved from.

[19] It is the fact that this would be a *transformation* of musical discourse that leads me to say, as I did in the introduction, that materialism about musical works is not realism about musical works.

both materialism and eliminativism by on the kind of pragmatic grounds just considered.[20] The basic idea of fictionalism is that, given claims in some domain that appear to commit us to the existence of things that do not in fact exist, we should conclude that these claims are fictional, rather than assertoric.[21] This is to be contrasted with the eliminativist strategy of ceasing to make the given claims, and the materialist strategies of substituting other claims or reinterpreting the given claims as referring to something that does exist.[22]

The basic motivation for fictionalism is that a realm of discourse may have *a value other than truth* that justifies its continued use. For example, Hartry Field (1980) argues that mathematics enables us to make inferences about empirical matters more easily than we could without it. Taken literally, argues Field, mathematical statements commit us to the existence of numbers (conceived as abstracta), but we need not take them literally to get what we want out of them. Thus, we should take them fictionally. Bas van Fraassen (1980) is a fictionalist regarding scientific discourse about unobservable entities. He thinks the point of such discourse is not truth but rather empirical adequacy, that is, roughly, the ability to predict and explain the observable.

These brief sketches are enough to distinguish two kinds of fictionalism: hermeneutic (descriptive) and revolutionary (normative). Van Fraassen purports to be giving an account of the nature of scientific discourse about unobservables, a nature it has possessed since long before his theory of it. He is thus a hermeneutic fictionalist—he offers an interpretation of what has been going on in the discourse all along. Field, by contrast, argues that mathematicians have actually been engaging in their discourse at face

[20] Lydia Goehr is perhaps the best known fictionalist about music works (e.g. 2007, p. 106), though, despite the title of the book in which she sets forth that theory, this aspect of it is not often commented upon. Also, as I've just mentioned, Cameron's arguments could be given a fictionalist spin, though he would clearly rather you just left them alone.

[21] I will not say much about what it is for a claim to be fictional, to adopt a fictional attitude towards a proposition, and so on (likewise for assertion). For an introduction to these topics in connection with fictionalism, and the literature on them, see Eklund (2007, Section 2) and Sainsbury (2010).

[22] Matti Eklund claims that this makes fictionalism primarily a linguistic rather than an ontological theory, albeit one that is usually motivated by ontological concerns (2007, Section 2.1). But the same reasoning would suggest that materialism is primarily a linguistic thesis, when it is generally considered an ontological theory. On the one hand, I think it would be misleading to think of fictionalism as a linguistic thesis in contrast to the other kinds of theories I have been considering here. On the other hand, I do think it is valuable to bring out the interconnection of linguistic and ontological matters, as I have tried to do already in comparing materialism and eliminativism.

value, saying a lot of things that are false because they are about a realm of entities that do not actually exist. He argues that enlightened mathematicians ought to stop asserting such claims, and start making them fictionally instead. He is thus a revolutionary fictionalist.[23]

What is the relevant discourse in the case of fictionalism about musical works? It is musical discourse—precisely the discourse that gives rise to questions about the ontology of musical works, and theories that purport to answer those questions.[24]

What kind of fictionalist should you be about musical works? I recommend revolutionary fictionalism. It seems implausible (to me) that in ordinary musical discourse people are not committed to the existence of musical works as distinct entities, that they are already speaking about them fictionally. Application of the pragmatic constraint gives us our best theory of the kind of thing people are referring to (or attempting to refer to) in such discourse. If you don't think there are any such things, and are tempted by fictionalism, then you should think that people *ought*, when speaking strictly, to adopt a fictional attitude towards them; that is, you should be a revolutionary fictionalist.[25]

What is the value of musical discourse about works that justifies retaining it despite its falsehood? It is the value of those musical practices that are enmeshed with that discourse—practices (apparently) involving musical works—whatever that value is. This raises a number of issues. The most obvious is what the value of musical practices involving works is. I take it that a large part of the answer to this question will be a general theory of the value of music. I don't have one to hand, but I take it as uncontroversial that music is very valuable.[26] One might, of course, argue that although music in general is valuable, musical practices involving the work concept are pernicious. One might even think that what is valuable about these practices could be retained, and its perniciousness expunged, by reformulating the practice (including its discourse) to eliminate the work concept. I think this is implausible, but it is not too far from some views that have actually been defended in musicology and philosophy of music.[27] For example, Lydia Goehr concludes that:

> [i]n the end, musicians must just ask themselves whether the most satisfactory form of musical criticism is one that is based on the ideal of *Werktreue* [faithfulness to a work]. If it is not, they must seek an alternative. No musician is necessarily bound to this ideal, however pervasive and persuasive the romantic aesthetic. (2007, p. 279)

She explicitly leaves such questions open, but to do even this is clearly far from a ringing endorsement of work-based musical practices. Lee B. Brown (2011) also bemoans musical ontologists' obsession with the work concept, but he is more concerned that the obsession has led ontologists to mischaracterize certain musical traditions, rather than that practices involving the work concept are less valuable than they could be.

On the other hand, it is possible to construct an argument for precisely the opposite conclusion: that musical practices involving works are more valuable than those without the concept. The basic idea would be that the works are enduring entities that thus admit of (i) being worked on over time by their creators; and (ii) being appreciated on multiple occasions of reception by their audiences. I doubt disagreement over these issues will have much effect on musical practices, even in combination with fictionalism. It seems unlikely we'll reach a philosophical consensus about the values of musical practices such that entire practices will be given up. And, when it comes to fictionalism, it is practical matters—the value of some discourse other than truth—that count. Anyway, if we *did* reach a consensus about the values of music and this significantly affected our musical practices, it would not make sense to bemoan the fact. If we

[23] I am no great fan of these terms, since it's not clear to me that revolutionary fictionalism is any more disturbing to our usual way of thinking about what goes on in a domain of discourse than hermeneutic fictionalism. But the terms are well established, so I will run with them. Note that materialists can also be divided into hermeneutic and revolutionary camps, according to whether they claim the paraphrases they provide for ontologically-committing claims supply what we *actually* mean by those claims, or what we *ought* to mean by those claims.

[24] As the pragmatic constraint suggests, I take non-linguistic behaviours to be relevant to our interpretation of the discourse. I assume this is uncontroversial.

[25] That said, whether you plump for hermeneutic or revolutionary fictionalism might depend on other commitments you have in the philosophy of language. For further distinctions between varieties of fictionalism, see Eklund (2007, Section 2).

[26] For an introduction to theories of the value of music, see Goldman (2011); Gracyk (2011); and S. Davies (2003).

[27] Of course, if we decided to get rid of the work concept altogether, due to its perniciousness, the problem of the ontology of musical works would disappear, just as we are no longer concerned with the nature of witches.

were to discover the true end of music, it would behoove us to strive to achieve it.[28]

Finally, there is some disagreement about which musical practices really involve the work concept. For instance, I have argued that much jazz is a tradition without musical works (Kania 2011b). Goehr argues that the work concept entered Western classical musical practice much later than most philosophers suppose (Goehr 2007). But, if correct, these theories do not affect fictionalism about musical works, which is only about musical discourses that do, implicitly or explicitly, refer to musical works. We might compare this with van Fraassen's 'constructive empiricism': van Fraassen is a fictionalist only about the *unobservable* entities posited by scientific theories; he believes that when it comes to observable entities science aims at the truth.

It is worth noting that the rooting of the musical-works fiction in musical practice means that fictionalism about musical works is immune to an objection raised against fictionalism about some other things, such as possible worlds or moral values. R.M. Sainsbury, for instance, argues that in both these latter cases the fictionalist faces a serious problem about how to choose the fiction we ought to subscribe to (2010, pp. 190–2, 200–4). This is because fictionally subscribing to a possible-worlds story, for instance, is supposed to help us discover modal truths—what is really possible or necessary.[29] But without knowing such things, we will be at a loss to choose between different possible-worlds stories (for instance, between a story according to which one has at most one counterpart in any possible world and a story according to which one has more than one counterpart in some possible worlds). Since the value of musical discourse is not epistemic, it does not face this objection.[30] If we grant that our discourse about musical works is (or ought to be) a fiction, and that the practices it is enmeshed in are valuable for reasons other than the acquisition of truths, there can be no question about the legitimacy of the pragmatic constraint. The story we should tell ourselves about musical works is the one implicit in our musical practice.

[28] This dialectic might be taken even one step further: one might attempt a transcendental argument that there must be a diversity of musical values since humanity cannot be wrong in pursuing the diversity of musical practices it in fact pursues. But we're now in uncomfortably deep waters.

[29] The fictionalist about possible worlds is not (thereby) a fictionalist about modality *tout court*, just as the fictionalist about musical works is not (thereby) a fictionalist about music *tout court*. Hence the unsuitability of the labels 'modal fictionalism' and 'musical fictionalism', despite their appealing brevity (Sainsbury 2010, pp. 179–80).

[30] I choose fictionalism about possible worlds as my illustrative example because I am not so convinced by Sainsbury's arguments against moral fictionalism. Sainsbury argues that the moral fictionalist is also in a quandary about which story about moral values to choose, that she will end up choosing the story that gives the results she antecedently believe in. But he grants that engaging with the moral fiction might be useful for non-moral ends such as prudential self-interest. What he seems to reject is that there will be any way for us (practically? psychologically? theoretically?) to neutrally evaluate moral fictions for how well they achieve that end. That seems an unjustified assumption. To my mind, the bigger problem for the moral fictionalist is how to avoid the charge that the end substituted for moral value (e.g. prudential self-interest) is not being appealed to as exactly the kind of entity the moral fictionalist was motivated by rejecting in the first place (i.e. an objective value).

Why should a contemporary nominalist about musical works prefer fictionalism over materialism or eliminativism? As we saw at the end of Section IV, what motivates the choice between different nominalist theories of musical works is how closely each theory hews to existing musical practices. Fictionalism has certain advantages here. It looks, at first glance, as if we do not need to alter our musical practices at all. We can continue to talk about musical works in just the ways we have always talked about them.[31] On closer inspection, however, there are a couple of changes. First, and most significantly, the fictionalism I have recommended is 'revolutionary' in that it recommends moving from a musical-works discourse aimed at truth to a musical-works discourse aimed at whatever the value is of practices involving such discourse. So though the practice, including the discourse, may look the same on the surface, it will be operating in a different way. What would in the past have been assertions about musical works, for instance, ought really, according to the fictionalist, to be put forward as make-believe. Second, as we have just seen, it is conceivable that the fictionalist with a complete theory would recommend that some practices be changed, in light of the value of musical practices involving discourse about works. But this is not a consequence of fictionalism in particular, since the change is due to the theory of musical value, not the fictionalism. A Platonist about musical works with a theory about the value of practices involving musical-works discourse could just as easily suggest that certain musical practices ought to be changed.

It seems to me that the best response the materialist can give to this line of reasoning is to press on the fact that, according to fictionalism, there are no

[31] I pass over the distinction between the messiness of actual musical practice and the cleaner theory we achieve by a process of aiming at reflective equilibrium.

musical works. The appearance of congruity with our discourse about musical works is merely a façade, since we take that discourse to be *about musical works*. The fictionalist's response to this is to press on the idea that the value of our musical-works discourse is not truth, but instead whatever the value is of the broader musical practice that includes that discourse.[32]

I am not sure what response the eliminativist can plausibly give to the fictionalist. In a sense, fictionalism is just an eliminativism that preserves our discourse about musical works (albeit in fictional rather than assertoric mode). Perhaps the eliminativist could similarly press on the idea that the point of our musical discourse is truth, and thus that (given nominalism) eliminativism is the only theory that faces up to the harsh truth that there are no musical works as conceived of in our practices. But to my mind this just throws into sharper relief the fact that our musical discourse would be valuable even if there were no musical works of the kind it implies. A useful thought experiment available to fictionalists in this connection is that of the Oracle of Philosophy. Suppose you humbly submit to the Oracle the question of whether musical works exist, and the Oracle succinctly answers in the negative. Would you really conclude that we (for any 'we') should give up talking about musical works? If you're a nominalist inclined to answer 'no' to this question, you should be inclined to fictionalism about musical works.[33]

There is something a bit strange about this way of comparing the nominalist alternatives. For it seems as though our musical practices, including our discourse, wouldn't *really* change under *any* of these revisionary theories. The ontological theory of musical works as abstract objects is already the theoretical philosophical result of a process of reflective equilibrium—an abstraction, if you will. If the pragmatic constraint is correct, then, *as philosophers* we ought to think of musical works, if there are any, as a certain kind of abstractum. Similarly, if it turns out there are no such things, it is only *as philosophers* that we must choose between the nominalist alternatives. But that's just the nature of the ontological game. We are trying to figure out what ultimately exists, and what we ought ultimately to say about what exists. If my evaluation of the various nominalist alternatives here is correct, then,

[32] The fictionalist must also have some theory of empty names, which will allow them to explain how the discourse can still be about musical works in some sense, just as we can talk about Zeus or Sherlock Holmes. But everyone needs a theory of empty names.

[33] The Oracle makes its first appearance in the fictionalism literature in Burgess and Rosen (1997, p. 3).

ultimately, if there are no abstracta of the sort we seem committed to in our musical discourse about works, we ought to be fictionalists about musical works. For all I've said here, however, the nominalist still faces the challenge of showing that there are no such abstracta.

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