

# THERE ARE NO THINGS THAT ARE MUSICAL WORKS

Ross P. Cameron

Works of music do not appear to be concrete objects; but they do appear to be created by composers, and abstract objects do not seem to be the kind of things that can be created. In this paper I aim to develop an ontological position that lets us salvage the creativity intuition without either adopting an ontology of created abstracta or identifying musical works with concreta. I will argue that there are no musical works in our ontology, but nevertheless the English sentences we want to hold true are literally true. I rely on a meta-ontological view whereby 'a exists' can be true without committing us to an entity that is *a*. This meta-ontological view is illustrated by its application to the familiar example of the statue and the clay. I argue that my account of musical ontology fares better on the balance of costs and benefits than its rivals.

## I

Here are three propositions:

1. Musical works are created.
2. Musical works are abstract objects.
3. Abstract objects cannot be created

These three propositions obviously form an inconsistent triad, and yet each of them enjoys some intuitive support. (1) is said by Levinson to be absolutely central to any account of musical works. He says

[The creativity claim] is one of the most firmly entrenched of our beliefs concerning art. There is probably no idea more central to thought about art than that it is an activity in which participants create things—these things being artworks. . . . The notion that artists truly *add* to the world . . . is surely a deep rooted idea that merits preservation if at all possible.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J. Levinson, 'What a Musical Work Is', *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 77, no. 1, (1980), pp. 5–28, at p. 8.

Perhaps he overstates his case,<sup>2</sup> but there is nonetheless something compelling to the intuition: we tend not to think of composers as drawing our attention to what is already there but rather as bringing something about. It seems wrong to say that Beethoven's Ninth existed before Beethoven did.

On (2): assuming with the orthodoxy that the abstract/concrete distinction is exhaustive, if musical works are not abstract, then they must be concrete. But what concrete objects could they possibly be? Might it be the score? No. The score is just a piece of paper and ink: it is not something that is heard, and its existence is accidental to the existence of the musical work. (Perhaps you object to the identification of the score with the piece of paper on which it is written. Fair enough—but then you are probably thinking of the score as an abstract type of which that piece of paper is an instance; in which case identifying this abstract object with the musical work is not going to solve the problem currently under discussion.) Could the musical work be the composer's thoughts about how the work is to be performed? No: thoughts cannot be heard, but musical works are (at least sometimes) heard. Might the musical work be a performance, or a sum of performances? No: we say that a musical work has been performed more than once; the performances are performances of a work, they are not the work itself.<sup>3</sup> Those seem like the best candidates amongst the concreta to be identified with the musical work, so the inadequacy of these identifications seems to point against identifying a musical work with a concrete object. Hence, if there are musical works, they number amongst the abstracta.

The motivation behind (3) is that an act of creation is an act of causation, and so the only things that can be created are things that can stand in causal relations to other things. But abstract objects cannot be the relata of causal relations—they can neither exert a causal influence or be causally acted upon; hence, abstract objects cannot be created.

(3) can be resisted, of course. Caplan and Matheson have recently pointed out how one's metaphysical commitments elsewhere are going to affect one's views as to whether abstracta can be created.<sup>4</sup> One might, for example, hold that whenever one creates a concrete object one thereby creates the abstract singleton set that has the created concrete object as a member. Likewise, one

<sup>2</sup> See P. Kivy, 'Platonism in Music: A Kind of Defense', *Grazer philosophische Studien*, vol. 19, (1983), pp. 109–129, at pp. 112–119.

<sup>3</sup> As is common in this debate, I am confining my attention to works of Western classical music; it should not be supposed that what we say here should generalize to other works of music, and certainly not to art works in general.

<sup>4</sup> B. Caplan and C. Matheson, 'Can a Musical Work be Created?', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 44, no. 2, (2004), pp. 113–134.

might hold that if someone brings about the first state of affairs of a thing's being F, she thereby causes the property F-ness to come into existence. Such claims are controversial, however, and I am tempted to side with Dodd<sup>5</sup> in his claim that abstract objects cannot be created, and as a consequence that if it is true at any time that an abstract object *a* exists, then it is true at all times that *a* exists.

So we have three intuitively true propositions. But they are jointly inconsistent: something has to go. In the literature, the main options appear to be to reject (1) or to reject (3); (2) is almost<sup>6</sup> universally accepted. Thus we have Dodd, convinced by the eternity of abstracta, denying that musical works are created; and we have Levinson<sup>7</sup> salvaging the creativity of composers by adopting a metaphysic whereby abstracta can be created, and identifying musical works with certain of these created abstract objects.

I want to put another option on the table. I will argue that, properly understood, (1)–(3) are not inconsistent after all. I think that the various philosophers engaging with this debate have been misled into adopting certain ontological claims by reflections on what sentences they find appropriate to say—a common and pernicious fault amongst ontologists. As a result, they are making their ontology needlessly complicated; there is a perfectly simple and intuitive ontological picture according to which each of (1)–(3) (when correctly understood) can be truly asserted.

## II

I want to begin by looking at another area where I think philosophers are led to complicate their ontology needlessly as a result of being confused by reflecting on the language they use: that is the case of the statue and the clay.

Suppose we have a lump of clay that is fashioned into a statue. What is the statue? Is it the lump of clay? No: the lump of clay existed before the statue did; the statue was created by a sculptor, the lump of clay was not. So what is the statue? Two options dominate the literature. On the first option,<sup>8</sup> the

<sup>5</sup> J. Dodd, 'Musical Works as Eternal Types', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 40, (2000), pp. 424–440, at pp. 431–432. See also J. Dodd, 'Defending Musical Platonism', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 42, (2002), pp. 380–402, at p. 397.

<sup>6</sup> There are accounts that identify musical works with concreta. See, for example, B. Caplan and C. Matheson, 'Defending Musical Perdurantism', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 46, no. 1 (2006), pp. 59–69. I do not find such accounts plausible, but I do not have the space to argue against them in this paper, so I will be assuming that if there are musical works, they are abstract.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> See, *inter alia*, T. Sider, *Four-Dimensionalism: An Ontology of Persistence and Time* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2001).

statue is a proper part of the lump of clay: it is the fusion of all the temporal parts of the lump of clay that are statue shaped. Since these temporal parts are a proper subset of the temporal parts of the lump of clay itself, the statue is a proper part of the lump of clay. On the second option<sup>9</sup>—appealing to those who do not like temporal parts and hence favour an endurantist account of persistence over a perdurantist account—the statue is not identical to the lump of clay, nor is it a proper part of the lump, but the statue bears a very intimate relation to the lump of clay: the relation of constitution.

Both options have their costs. The perdurantist's story complicates our world with many things undreamt of by the folk, such as the entity which came into existence at noon today and will go out of existence at noon tomorrow and which occupies the same region of space you occupy throughout that time period. The constitution story, on the other hand, has it that two wholly distinct objects can occupy exactly the same region of spacetime. Neither story is particularly believable.

Dissatisfaction with the perdurantist and constitution theories may lead us to look for a simpler option. One option is to hold that 'is a statue' is simply a phase sortal like 'is a child'. On this account, defended by Michael Ayers,<sup>10</sup> the statue is said to be identical to the clay, but this one thing is merely temporarily and contingently a statue, just as the child is identical to the person, but that one thing does not remain a child throughout its life, and perhaps might never have been a child. The cost of this view, however, is that the common-sense claims we make about the statue and the clay—such as that one existed before the other, that one could exist without the other—come out false. It would be nice to have an account that saved the common-sense intuitions without resorting to the outlandish ontologies of the perdurantist or constitution theorist.

I wish to propose such an account.<sup>11</sup> The trouble arises, I suggest, from taking our common-sense claims concerning the statue and the clay to be ontologically committing to a thing that is the statue and a thing that is the lump of clay. I want to eschew such a commitment. All that there is, I suggest, is a

<sup>9</sup> See, *inter alia*, J. J. Thomson, 'The Statue and the Clay', *Noûs*, vol. 32, no. 2 (1998), pp. 149–173.

<sup>10</sup> See M. Ayers, 'Individuals Without Sortals', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 4, no. 1 (1974), pp. 113–148.

<sup>11</sup> The philosopher whom I am closest to in my views concerning the statue and the clay is John Heil. See J. Heil, *From an Ontological Point of View* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2003), chap. 16. See also E. Barnes and R. Cameron, 'A Critical Study of John Heil's *From an Ontological Point of View*', *SWIF Philosophy of Mind Review*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2008), pp. 22–30.

collection of (enduring) simples,<sup>12</sup> arranged a certain way for a while, and then arranged a different way as a result of the intentional action of agents.

On this view there is no thing that is the statue. In a sense, then, I am denying the existence of statues. That might seem to go against common sense, and I suspect that is the reason why this simple ontological view is usually overlooked. But really, I do not think this view does go against common sense at all. We should consider it a datum that 'there are statues' is a true sentence of English. But then the question is: how does the world have to be to *make* this sentence true? Need the world contain entities that are statues in order to make the sentence 'there are statues' true? I say that it does not.<sup>13</sup> In order for the world to make 'there are statues' true it only need contain entities that, for at least some portion of their life, are arranged into a statue shape (and are arranged thus because of the actions of an intentional agent).

Compare my view to van Inwagen's.<sup>14</sup> van Inwagen and I agree on how the world is here: all there is are atoms arranged certain ways. But van Inwagen takes it to be a consequence of this ontological view that 'there is a statue' and 'there is a lump of clay' are false (although they are assertable when there are atoms arranged statue-wise and lump-wise). Such a violation of common sense is a large cost, but I think there is no need to admit it. There is only a need to deny the truth of these sentences if their truth is ontologically committing to statues and lumps of clay. But this I deny. Those sentences can be

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<sup>12</sup> I am telling my story assuming the ontology of a compositional nihilist. But really this is just for simplicity (no pun intended!). If you do not want to commit yourself to the existence of simples, then there are many alternative accounts available that follow my general idea. You could, for example, hold that there *is* a composite entity here: the enduring lump of clay. My story would then be that the truthmaker for 'there is a statue' is the lump of clay shaped a certain way. As on the account I offer in the body of the paper, then, the fact that 'there is a statue' was false but is now true does not commit us to holding that there is an entity that came into existence. All that happened was that the shape of the lump of clay did not suffice to make it true that 'there is a statue', but now it does (as a result of an act of sculpting). And this is not to say, as Ayers says, that the lump of clay is a statue for part of its life. That is not true, because it is true to say that the statue did not exist prior to the sculpting. It is, instead, to deny that there are statues, but to admit that there are lumps of clay, and to hold that the literal truth of 'there are statues' does not commit us to the existence of statues but only to the existence of lumps of clay with a certain shape (which have that shape as a result of the intentional actions of intelligent agents). Nevertheless, I will continue to assume an ontology of simples in the text: but it should not be supposed that the kind of story I favour is committed to such an austere ontology.

<sup>13</sup> I say more about the possibility of it being true that there are Xs without the world having to contain entities which can be identified with the Xs in my 'Truthmakers and Ontological Commitment', *Philosophical Studies* (forthcoming).

<sup>14</sup> P. van Inwagen, *Material Beings* (Ithica, NY: Cornell U.P., 1990).

true—*literally* true—but their truth commits us only to the simples arranged such-and-such a way. To insist that their truth commits us to the existence of statues and lumps of clay is to read our ontology off of our language: precisely the mistake I want to avoid.

People are often tempted, when introduced to van Inwagen's position, to say something like 'Why doesn't van Inwagen just say that what statues (say) *are* are collections of atoms arranged statue-wise, rather than that there are no statues?' The answer to this, of course, is that to say that the statue is identical to the atoms arranged statue-wise is to commit to composition as identity: the claim that some plurality of things are identical to some one thing—the one thing they compose; and van Inwagen, with the majority, rejects composition as identity.<sup>15</sup> But there is something to this intuitive reaction that does not require composition as identity; van Inwagen should not say that the statue is identical to the atoms arranged statue-wise, but he *should* say that all that is required to make true our sentences concerning the statue are the atoms arranged statue-wise.<sup>16</sup>

This may sound absurd. I am claiming that 'there are statues' is a true sentence of English but denying that there are statues. Am I not simply contradicting myself? There *is* a difficulty here; but the difficulty is simply in stating the theory. I am making a claim about how language links up to the world—about how the world has to be in order to make certain of our sentences true. Unfortunately, I have no choice but to use language when stating how the world has to be for those sentences to be true. Now, it is trivial that, when the meta-language is the same as the object language, for the sentence 'p' to be true the world has to be such that p. But we should not let that confuse us into thinking that there is nothing more substantial to be said about how language links to the world than that 'p' is true because p. Let us use bold type when we are aiming to describe the fundamental features of the world. When a sentence is in bold it is not a sentence of English: it is, as it were, a sentence of *Ontologese*—the language we use to describe how the world is at its

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<sup>15</sup> P. van Inwagen, 'Composition as Identity', in *Philosophical Perspectives*, vol. 8: *Logic and Language* (1994), pp. 207–220.

<sup>16</sup> Remember that it is not in general true that if a proposition is made true by the Xs, then it must be made true by the Xs if it is made true at all: propositions can have multiple possible grounds. And so while 'the statue exists' is in fact made true by this collection of simples (the Xs) being arranged statue-wise, that very same proposition might have been made true by a different collection of simples being arranged statue-wise—say by a sub-plurality of the Xs. This explains why it is true to say that the statue could have lacked some of its matter even though the Xs could not have lacked any of the Xs. There is no need to recognize an entity that is the statue that is something over and above the Xs, only a need to admit that the Xs are not the sole truthmaker for the existence of that very statue.

fundamental level.<sup>17</sup> Now, while it is trivially true that ‘p’ is true iff p, it is *not* trivially true that ‘p’ is true iff **p**. Since the quoted sentence is a sentence of English and the sentence in bold a sentence of Ontologese, the disquotation scheme does not hold.

Now, ‘there are statues’ is true iff there are statues. That is trivially true. But it does not tell us *why* ‘there are statues’ is true. *Using* the English sentence that is mentioned and said to be true hardly explains what *makes* that sentence true. My claim is that ‘there are statues’ is true but that **there are no statues**; and there is no contradiction there, because the sentences are sentences of different languages. ‘There are statues’ is true, I claim, because **there are simples that are arranged statue shaped (as a result of the intentional actions of agents)**. This view does not go against common sense because common sense demands only that there are statues; it does not demand that **there are statues**. (There are no existence claims in Ontologese that are part of the corpus of our common-sense beliefs. That does not mean we are unconstrained in what we can say is true in Ontologese, however. How the world is fundamentally must make (many of) the common-sense claims of English come out as true, and so, since the true sentences of Ontologese describe how the world is fundamentally, what we say about the true sentences of Ontologese is constrained by what common sense tells us are truths.)

Perhaps another example will help. Consider the debate over van Inwagen’s Special Composition Question (SCQ): when do a collection of objects compose some further complex object?<sup>18</sup> A large part of that debate has centred over whether or not we need to hold as true sentences in English proclaiming the existence of complex objects. It is easy to see why: if we are forced into recognizing as true some sentence proclaiming the existence of a complex object, then nihilism—the answer to SCQ that says that no collection of objects ever composes—seemingly has to be false. Thus we have van Inwagen, who denies the existence of tables and chairs, engaging in a program to show how sentences proclaiming their existence can be assertable even if they are literally false,<sup>19</sup> and we have, for example, Uzquiano challenging van Inwagen’s ontology by

<sup>17</sup> My general strategy here bears similarities to that of Cian Dorr in his ‘There are No Abstract Objects’, forthcoming in J. Hawthorne, T. Sider, and D. Zimmerman (eds), *Contemporary Debates in Metaphysics* (Oxford: Blackwell). See also Dorr’s ‘What We Disagree About When We Disagree About Ontology’, in M. Kalderon (ed.), *Fictionalism in Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 2005), pp. 234–286. The distinction I make between existence claims in ordinary English and those made in Ontologese is somewhat similar to the distinction David Chalmers makes between ordinary and ontological existence assertions in his ‘Ontological Anti-Realism’, forthcoming in D. Chalmers, D. Manley, and R. Wasserman (eds), *Metametaphysics: New Essays on the Foundations of Ontology* (Oxford: Oxford U.P.).

<sup>18</sup> van Inwagen, *Material Beings*.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

posing problems for van Inwagen's strategy for paraphrasing sentences about complex objects into sentences that plurally quantify over simples.<sup>20</sup>

I think that debate is a red herring. Nihilism should not be understood as a thesis about what sentences in English are true. Nihilism is the claim that the world *fundamentally* contains only mereological simples. It is the doctrine that **there are no complex objects**. As such it is incompatible with the claim that **there are complex objects**, but it is perfectly compatible with the claim that there are complex objects. What sentences of English are true if the world happens to be as the nihilist says it is a substantial question; it should not simply be taken as read that sentences about complex objects must be false. To answer that question we must ask what is needed to *make* those English sentences true. *Perhaps* the world needs to contain complex objects to make it true that, say, there is some thing that is the sum of *a*, *b*, and *c*. In that case the truth of 'there is a sum of *a*, *b*, and *c*' demands that **there is a sum of a, b, and c**. But perhaps to make 'there is a sum of *a*, *b*, and *c*' true requires only that the world contain *a*, *b*, and *c*, in which case 'there is a sum of *a*, *b*, and *c*' can be true and yet it be the case that **there is no sum of a, b, and c** but only that **a, b, and c exist**. If so, then nihilism—the doctrine that **every thing is simple**—is compatible with the truth of sentences of English that proclaim the existence of complex objects. For all that has been said, it might be that for any collection of objects, it is true to say that there is sum of those objects, even if the nihilist is right about how the world is. And so I think it was a mistake for van Inwagen to leave his ontological theory hostage to the fortunes of his theory concerning the paraphrasability of a certain portion of English into a certain other portion. van Inwagen's organicism should not be understood as the claim that the only complex objects are living objects; it should be understood as the claim that **the only complex objects are living objects**. As such, it is compatible with the literal truth of the claim that there are tables and chairs, and so on (it just is not compatible with the truth of the claim that **there are tables and chairs, and so on**), and there is therefore no pressure to try and paraphrase away these common-sense claims of English.

We needlessly complicate our ontology by reflecting on how we describe the world. We say that Michelangelo's *David* exists, but we would not say that Michelangelo's *David* existed in the fifteenth century. We infer from this that *there is some thing* that exists now that did not exist then. Since the marble existed in the fifteenth century, we conclude that Michelangelo's *David* is not the marble from which it was sculpted.

That is fine if we are simply reporting on what English sentences are true. 'Michelangelo's *David* exists' is true; 'Michelangelo's *David* existed in the

<sup>20</sup> G. Uzquiano, 'Plurals and Simples', *The Monist*, vol. 87, no. 3, (2004), pp. 429–451.

fifteenth century' is false; and 'there is some thing (Michelangelo's *David*) that exists now that didn't exist in the fifteenth century' is true. Those three sentences are true sentences of English. But we go wrong when we take the truth of these sentences to transparently reveal ontological facts. When we are doing ontology we are concerned with what there fundamentally is: and we cannot read this off from what English sentences are true—we must ask what *makes* them true.

Let me digress briefly to respond to a possible objection. I have said that when we are doing ontology we are concerned with what there fundamentally is, and that fundamentally there are no things that are statues. One might object: 'Well of course *one* of our concerns is what there fundamentally is. But we are also concerned with what there is *simpliciter*. So even if statues are not *fundamental*, we still must face the question of what they are!'

Some philosophers who speak of fundamental versus non-fundamental ontology mean to be drawing a divide amongst the domain of all the things that have being. On such an understanding, the above objection is a fair one: the ontologist should be concerned with everything that has being, so should be concerned with the non-fundamental as well as the fundamental. This is not, however, how I intend to use the term 'fundamental'. When I speak of fundamental ontology I am aiming to speak of *everything* that has being. When I speak of fundamental ontology I mean to speak of the entirety of what is in the purview of the ontologist. When I say that statues are not fundamental I do not mean to say that they have being but are kind of less important than the things that both have being and are fundamental. I mean to deny that statues are elements of our ontology. I make use of the term 'fundamental' just because, as I discussed above, it is hard to state a theory that aims to pull apart the truth of existence claims and the ontological commitments of those claims. When I say that it is true that statues exist but that statues do not fundamentally exist, I mean that **there are no such things as statues**, but nevertheless the English sentence 'statues exist' is true. The ontologist should not be concerned with the ontology of statues, then, because statues do not have any being. There are true sentences in English about the existence of statues, but the ontologist (*qua* ontologist) should not care about that.

To return to the issue, we cannot simply observe that 'Michelangelo's *David* exists' is true now but was not true in the fifteenth century and conclude immediately that **there occurred a change in what things existed when Michelangelo sculpted *David***. We must first ask how the world has to be in order to make true the sentence 'Michelangelo's *David* exists'. *Perhaps* it requires there to be an entity in the world that is Michelangelo's *David*. If so, then, since the sentence goes from false to true when Michelangelo sculpts, Michelangelo's sculpting must bring about a change in what things there are. But perhaps the world does not need to contain an entity that is Michelangelo's

*David* in order to make the sentence ‘Michelangelo’s *David* exists’ true. Perhaps it only needs to contain some entities that are arranged a certain way and that have been caused to have that arrangement by Michelangelo. That is to say, perhaps the truth of ‘Michelangelo’s *David* exists’ does not require that **Michelangelo’s *David* exists** but only that **there is a *David*-shaped collection of marble bits (shaped thus by Michelangelo)**. In that case, there need not have been any change in what things there are from before Michelangelo’s sculpting to after, only a change in the arrangement of some of the things that endured throughout.

That is, I think, the ontological picture that most closely matches common sense. No need for temporal parts, no need for constitution. We were led into perdurantism and constitution theories because we wanted to find something that is the statue. But that was a mistake. There need be no thing that is a statue in order for us to be able to truly say that there are statues; there only needs to be some things that are (at the time of utterance) statue shaped. There need be no thing that came into existence at the time of sculpting for us to be able to truly say that there is a statue here that was not here before; there only needs to be some things that were not statue shaped before the sculpting but are now.

### III

Let us bring this back to the ontology of musical works. Just as I deny that there are entities that are statues, so I deny that there are entities that are musical works. But I do not take myself thereby to be denying any common-sense claim. I am no more committed to an eliminativism about musical works in making this claim than I am committed to an eliminativism about statues, and I am not committed to that at all. Non-eliminativism about statues and musical works requires just that it be true that there are statues and musical works. I believe that. I just do not think that we need the world to contain entities that are statues or that are musical works in order to make those sentences true. The common-sense claim is just that there are musical works. As such, I am only denying common sense if the world must contain musical works in order to make true the sentence ‘there are musical works’. But this I deny. In order to make that sentence true, I claim, the world need only contain objects which, at the time of utterance, play a certain role. Common sense says that there are musical works, and I agree; I just do not hold that **there are musical works**. It is a mistake, then, when doing ontology, to try and locate some entity that can be identified with a musical work: ontology is concerned with what there is fundamentally; and fundamentally, there are no such things.

I think that the objects that play the musical works role (at times) are abstract sound structures. But that is not to say that abstract sound structures are

musical works. They are not: every abstract sound structure that exists existed before there were any living beings, but no work of music existed before there were any living beings. Nor is it to say that the musical work is the sum of the temporal parts of the abstract sound structure that play this role, for I deny that there is any such thing (since I deny that abstract sound structures have temporal parts). Nor is the musical work something that is constituted by the abstract sound structure at certain times and not at others, for I deny that there is any such relation as constitution. And I take it as obviously desperate to identify the musical work with the mereological sum of the abstract sound structure and each of the times at which the abstract sound structure plays the musical work role, or any other equally gerrymandered and unnatural entity.

Nor is it even to say that abstract sound structures are musical works for some proper sub-duration of their life: that would be the position analogous to Ayers' view of the statue and the clay, discussed above—that 'musical work' is a phase sortal that abstract sound structures temporarily fall under. On this view it would come out true that the musical work existed before the act of composition, since the object which is (now) a musical work has been around for all time; but this is not true—the musical work did not exist before the act of composition.

We just should not be interested in trying to find something to identify, whether for the whole or for part of its life, as the musical work. Rather, we should be asking what it takes for the world to make it the case that a musical work exists. What must the world be like for it to count as a world containing musical works? My proposal is that the world need not contain entities that are, whether throughout or for a part of their existence, musical works in order for it to make the sentence 'there are musical works' true, just as it needn't contain things that are (at any time) statues in order for it to make the sentence 'there are statues' true. Just as 'there are statues' comes to be made true not by a change in what there is but by a change in the properties of certain things that exist throughout (that is, not by bringing a new entity—a statue—into existence, but by changing the relations that hold between some things that have been there all along), so 'there are musical works' comes to be made true not by a change in what there is but by a change in the properties of certain things that exist throughout (that is, not by bringing a new entity—a work of music—into existence, but by changing certain properties of a thing—the abstract sound structure—that has been there all along).

In order for the world to be a world with musical works, I propose, all that has to happen is that some of the eternally<sup>21</sup> existing abstract sound structures

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<sup>21</sup> Do I mean eternally existing or atemporally existing? I do not think it matters if you want to think of the abstract sound structures as existing outside time (atemporally) as opposed to existing at every time (eternally), but I will discuss this below.

get indicated by composers, who lay down instructions for their performance. **There is no thing that is Beethoven's Ninth.** There is an abstract sound structure that Beethoven gave instructions to perform, tokens of which are heard when people go to hear Beethoven's Ninth. What it takes for the sentence 'Beethoven's Ninth exists' to be true is not that the world contain some entity that can be identified as Beethoven's Ninth but simply that Beethoven has identified the relevant abstract sound structure and laid down instructions for its performance.

It should be clear in what sense I can hang on to the creation intuition. I claim that 'Beethoven created a work of music when he composed Beethoven's Ninth' is a literally true sentence of English. What I deny is that recognizing the truth of this commits me to admitting that there was an increase in ontology when Beethoven composed: I deny that I need to locate an element of fundamental ontology that came into existence.

It is in virtue of the activity of composers that the sentence 'there are musical works' is true; had there been no composing, this sentence would not have been true, and it was not true before there were intelligent creatures making music. The 'act of creation' that a composer undertakes makes true English sentences concerning what there is that were not true previously. But this act is not, strictly speaking, the act of bringing something into existence. Composers do not create entities; they make certain pre-existing entities perform a role as a musical work, a role they were not performing prior to the act of composing. Nevertheless, there is a perfectly good sense in which they are creators; for they make it such that we can truly say that there is some musical work which did not exist prior to their act of creation. We just should not be misled into thinking that the truth of this assertion requires there to be some entity that has come into being. The truth of 'there is an entity that is a musical work that exists but which did not exist previously' does not demand that **there is an entity that is a musical work that exists but which did not exist previously**, it demands only that **there is an entity that is performing a musical work role that it was not performing previously**. And so we can see that the truth—the literal truth—of the creation claim (a claim of English) does not demand that we admit into our ontology abstract objects that come into being.

Let me at this point respond to another possible objection. I am claiming that in order to make it true that a work of music comes into existence we do not need an element of our ontology that exists but did not always exist and that is the work of music; all that is needed, on my account, is that a composer indicates an eternally existing abstract sound structure. But one might object that this simply reintroduces the ontological problems we started with; for isn't this 'indication' causal interaction with the abstract object?

No, it's not. When a composer indicates an abstract sound structure she is not *doing* anything to it. The abstract sound structure does not, for example, undergo any real<sup>22</sup> change. There is no pressure to say that when a composer indicates an abstract sound structure, that structure participates in a causal relation.

For similar reasons, you should not be worried by my attributing temporary properties—such as the property of playing a musical work role—to these abstract sound structures. Consider the following objection.

You say that these abstract sound structures are eternal. But really, you should be saying that they are atemporal. If they do not depend for their existence on any concreta, then they are just not the kind of thing that exist in space or time; and so they exist not at every time, but outside time. But if something exists outside time, it can hardly be said to have temporary properties, since to have a property temporarily is to have it at some times and not at others, and something can only have a property at a time if it exists *at* that time. Since abstract sound structures do not exist at any time, they cannot, therefore, have properties at a time, and so cannot have temporary properties.

I agree that for A to be a certain way *intrinsically* at a time requires A to exist at that time, and hence that atemporal entities cannot undergo real (intrinsic) change. But I am not attributing real change to abstract sound structures, only extrinsic change: the change is not in the sound structure but in the concrete world's relation to the sound structure. The change is whether or not an intentional agent in the concrete world indicates the sound structure; and I see no reason at all to think that the sound structure must exist in time in order for it to be indicated at some times and not at others. For the sound structure to be indicated is for a relation to hold between the indicator and the indicated; and the possibility of this relation holding at some times and not at others demands only that one of the relata be in time. Since the indicator—a composer—is in time, then this 'change' in the abstract sound structure is perfectly consistent with its existing atemporally. Having atemporal abstract sound structures be indicated by composers at some times and not at others is no more objectionable than having an atemporal number number the planets at some times and not at others. There is no change in the atemporal entity itself, only a change in the relationship between it and the genuinely changing world of concreta.

My account does face a problem though, and that is how it is that composers have *epistemic access* to abstract sound structures. *Given* that these things

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<sup>22</sup> In contrast to mere Cambridge change. Real change is a change in an object's intrinsic properties, as opposed to a mere Cambridge change like the 'change' a thing undergoes when it goes from, say, being my favourite entity to being my second favourite.

cannot stand in causal relations, how can composers come to know anything about them? I will not say anything to answer this problem here, but I will point out that I am not alone in facing it. Levinson is as under as much pressure as I am to say that composers have epistemic access to abstract sound structures, as is one who identifies such things with musical works. So we have a common problem, but those positions face further problems that mine does not face; on balance, then, I think my position comes out on top.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, this problem is not unique to musical ontology: the philosopher of mathematics also has to say how we can come to know about numbers, given that (presumably) we cannot have causal interaction with them; and presumably whatever is said there will also apply here.

#### IV

Let us bring things back to the beginning. The three sentences we started out with were

1. Musical works are created.
2. Musical works are abstract objects.
3. Abstract objects cannot be created.

The problem is that they are all intuitive but that they are jointly inconsistent. My proposed solution is in essence that there is a kind of equivocation going on. Intuition tells us that (1) and (2) are true English sentences. But the motivations for (3) are ontological motivations; (3) is motivated by the thought that abstracta cannot engage in causal interactions and hence cannot participate in an act of creation. This is a claim concerning how things are, fundamentally; thus what is motivated is not the English sentence (3) but the sentence of Ontologese (3<sup>★</sup>)

#### **3<sup>★</sup>. Abstract objects cannot be created.**

(3<sup>★</sup>) is true; if our ontology contains abstracta, they are entities that exist eternally (or perhaps atemporally, but certainly they do not come into existence). But the truth of (3<sup>★</sup>) is compatible with the falsity of (3), and (3) is indeed false: the way the world is fundamentally results in there being truths of English that proclaim the coming to be of certain abstract objects. We are not led into inconsistency by the above triad, then, because while (1) and (2) are true, (3)

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<sup>23</sup> There are, of course, views that *do not* face this problem. Any view that says that musical works are concrete does not face it. But as I said above (n. 7), I will leave objections to such views for another time.

is false. (3<sup>★</sup>) is true, and its truth is incompatible with the truth of the conjunction of (1<sup>★</sup>) and (2<sup>★</sup>).

**1<sup>★</sup>. Musical works are created.**

**2<sup>★</sup>. Musical works are abstract objects.**

But we need not worry, because (1<sup>★</sup>) and (2<sup>★</sup>) are false, since **there are no musical works**. There is no inconsistency then, and I think we hold on to all the motivations that appeared to lead us into inconsistency.

My account holds on to (1) in the only sense in which it should be held onto. It explains the datum that it is true to say that Beethoven's Ninth exists now but did not exist before Beethoven composed it. My account likewise holds onto (2) in the only sense in which it should be held onto. 'Musical works are abstract objects' is a true sentence of English, and it is true because the objects that perform the role of musical works are abstract objects: they are sound structures. Such things are not identified with musical works, of course (not even at the time at which they play the musical works role): *nothing* is identified (even temporarily) with a musical work on my account. But nevertheless, there is a perfectly good sense in which we can say that musical works are abstract, just as there is a perfectly good sense in which we can say that statues are concrete: while there are no things that are musical works or statues, the things that do the truthmaking work for the English sentences 'there is a musical work' and 'there is a statue' are abstract and concrete respectively. (3) is false, on my account. But I deny that there is any motivation for (3). When we appeal to ontological considerations to argue against the creatability of abstracta we are arguing for a claim concerning fundamental reality: it is (3<sup>★</sup>) that we argue for, not (3), and (3<sup>★</sup>) is true on my account. And so I claim that my account let us hold onto what is good about each of the intuitively compelling claims which initially appeared jointly untenable. Since the account is also one of a simple and intuitive metaphysic, I think these reasons combine to make the account more palatable than the extant alternatives.

Levinson levels another important objection—other than the failure to capture the creativity intuition—at the identification of musical works with abstract sound structures, and my account resists this objection as well, without the need for the complicated ontology that Levinson feels driven to. Levinson's second objection to the identification is that if musical works are abstract sound structures, then it cannot be that two composers compose two distinct pieces of work by determining the same abstract sound structure; since this is possible, the identification must be false.<sup>24</sup> He writes:

<sup>24</sup> Levinson, 'What a Musical Work Is', pp. 10–14.

A work identical in sound structure with Schoenberg's *Pierrot Lunaire* (1912), but composed by Richard Strauss in 1897 would be aesthetically different from Schoenberg's work. Call it 'Pierrot Lunaire★'. As a Straussian work, *Pierrot Lunaire★* would follow hard upon Brahms's *German Requiem*, would be contemporaneous with Debussy's *Nocturnes*, and would be taken as the next step in Strauss's development after *Also Sprach Zarathustra*. As such it would be more *bizarre*, more *upsetting*, more *anguished*, more *eerie* even than Schoenberg's work.<sup>25</sup>

If the works are aesthetically different they must, by Leibniz's law, be numerically distinct works. Since the works are identical in sound structure, the works cannot therefore be identical to the sound structure.

I agree completely; this is a perfectly good reason for not making that identification. But there is no problem for my view here. In the counterfactual situation Levinson is envisaging, my claim is that the truthmaker for 'Pierrot Lunaire exists' is that Schoenberg indicated a certain abstract sound structure and laid down instructions for its performance, and that the truthmaker for 'Pierrot Lunaire★ exists' is that Strauss indicated that *very same* abstract sound structure and laid down instructions for its performance. But since I am not identifying their work with the abstract sound structure there is no pressure at all to say that they have written the same work. (And I suggest that the truthmaker for 'Pierrot Lunaire ≠ Pierrot Lunaire★' is simply whatever makes 'Schoenberg ≠ Strauss' true, presumably Schoenberg and Strauss.)

It is the same sound structure that is playing the 'Pierrot Lunaire' role as is playing the 'Pierrot Lunaire★' role. But that is no problem; there is no acceptable law that tells us that if *a* plays the role of being X and also the role of being Y, then, if 'X is F' is true, then 'Y is F' must also be true.

Again, a comparison with the broader ontology literature may prove beneficial here. Gabriel Uzquiano wonders what sort of things groups like the Supreme Court are, and how they relate to their members.<sup>26</sup> A first thought is that the (present) Supreme Court is the set of the (present)<sup>27</sup> Supreme Court Justices, but Uzquiano argues against this identification on the grounds that the Supreme Court Justices could (in the same world, at the same time) be members of another group with different powers. He says

Suppose that the United States Senate appoints all Supreme Court Justices to a Special Committee on Judicial Ethics at a certain time. And suppose no one else

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> G. Uzquiano, 'The Supreme Court and the Supreme Court Justices: A Metaphysical Puzzle', *Noûs*, vol. 38, (2004), pp. 135–153.

<sup>27</sup> I am putting the 'present' in to avoid any problems created by the fact that the Supreme Court changes in its membership but sets have their members eternally. I will ignore this complication in what follows.

is ever in that committee. Thus there is at least a time at which the set of individuals then serving as members of the Special Committee on Judicial Ethics is identical with the set of individuals then serving as Supreme Court Justices. . . . [But] they enjoy different powers, and they may, in fact, act differently. Sometimes, their actions may even enter into conflict.<sup>28</sup>

If the Supreme Court is the set of Supreme Court Justices, then the Special Committee on Judicial Ethics is the set of *its* members. Since the members are identical, then, by the extensionality of set membership, it follows that the Supreme Court is identical to the Special Committee on Judicial Ethics. But that cannot be right because the groups have different powers and may in fact do different things and are hence distinct by Leibniz's law. Hence the groups cannot be identified with the set of their members. (The analogy between Uzquiano's reasoning here and Levinson's should be obvious.)

I agree with Uzquiano that this is a good reason not to identify the Supreme Court with the set of Supreme Court Justices. But I do not follow Uzquiano to his conclusion, which is to claim that there is a thing which is the Supreme Court and which is constituted by the Supreme Court Justices in a manner similar to how (he thinks) the statue is constituted by the clay.<sup>29</sup> It seems to me that Uzquiano makes a mistake in assuming that *there is some thing* that is the Supreme Court. I do not think we need admit any such entity to our ontology in order to account for the truth of the English sentence 'The USA has a Supreme Court'. What makes it true that there is the Supreme Court is not an entity that can be identified with the Supreme Court but simply that there are various people performing a certain role: the role of Supreme Court Justices. So 'There is a Supreme Court' is a true sentence of English, but '**There is a Supreme Court**' is not a true sentence of Ontologese; rather, the English sentence is true simply because **there are people performing the Supreme Court role**.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, what makes it true that there is the Special Committee on Judicial Ethics is not an entity that can be identified with the Special Committee on Judicial Ethics but simply that there are various people performing a certain role: the role of examining Judicial Ethics.

The Supreme Court and the Special Committee are not to be identified with the set of their members. They are not to be identified with *anything*. There is no thing that is the Supreme Court and there is no thing that is the

<sup>28</sup> Uzquiano, 'The Supreme Court and the Supreme Court Justices', pp. 141–142.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 148–150.

<sup>30</sup> Or something similar. This might not be the appropriate sentence of Ontologese, since there might not fundamentally be any people. But the point remains that the sentence of Ontologese whose truth explains why the English sentence 'There is a Supreme Court' is true need not itself mention an entity that is the Supreme Court.

Special Committee. There are just people who perform multiple roles. A person *a* can play the role of being the president of the USA and also the role of being the high school Santa Claus, and it nevertheless be true that the president of the USA is powerful and false that the high school Santa Claus is powerful. *Qua* president, *a* is powerful; *qua* Santa he is not: but that does not mean we need distinct entities, one of which is president and the other of which is the high school Santa. Similarly, the Supreme Court Justices can have certain powers *qua* Supreme Court Justices and lack those powers *qua* members of the Special Committee. There is simply no puzzle here, and any illusion to the contrary is a result of getting confused between ontology and language. The confusion is to think that just because we can say ‘The Supreme Court can do X’ but not ‘The Special Committee can do X’ there must be some object in our ontology that is the Supreme Court and is distinct from the Special Committee. But that is far too quick. We have to ask what the world must be like to make true the sentence ‘The Supreme Court can do X’ and the sentence ‘The Special Committee cannot do X’. *Perhaps* the world must contain an entity with certain powers that is the Supreme Court and an entity without certain powers that is the Special Committee, in which case we should conclude that these entities are distinct via Leibniz’s law. But perhaps, as I suggest is the case, in order for the world to make true ‘The Supreme Court can do X’ and ‘The Special Committee cannot do X’ it need not contain two distinct entities with different powers but rather contain simply a bunch of people (or even merely collections of atoms arranged person-wise) that change in their properties over time, such that ‘those people have the power to do X’ comes out true at some times and not at others. Now, just *how* those sentences of English get to be made true by fundamental ontology is a question I am not fully going to answer, because it is going to depend on your metaphysical views elsewhere and I do not want to take a stand on that here: the point for today is simply that fundamental ontology *need not* contain distinct entities with distinct powers to make these sentences of English true.

Similarly, to bring us back to the current issue, there is absolutely no reason at all why one abstract sound structure cannot play dual roles as Pierrot Lunaire and as Pierrot Lunaire★, which is just to say that indication of one and the same sound structure by two distinct composers results in the truth of sentences proclaiming the existence of two distinct musical works.

But the abstract sound structure should not be identified with either work. (No thing is to be identified with either work!) In its role as Pierrot Lunaire★, the abstract sound structure is more bizarre, more upsetting, more anguished, more eerie, than it is in its role as Pierrot Lunaire. And there is no contradiction here at all, any more than there is in saying that in his role as president *a* is more powerful than he is in his role as high school Santa Claus.

Do not think of that as saying that there are two aspects to the sound structure, one of which is anguished (and so on) and one not, or that there are two distinct properties, the property of being anguished-as-Pierrot Lunaire\* and the property of being anguished-as-Pierrot Lunaire, that are had and lacked simpliciter by the one sound structure. That would be an objectionable and unnecessary inflation of ontology, either at the level of the object or at the level of the properties. The whole point of the proposal is to allow us to accept the truth of ‘Pierrot Lunaire\* is anguished’ and ‘Pierrot Lunaire is not anguished’ without either admitting two entities, Pierrot Lunaire and Pierrot Lunaire\*, one of which has and the other of which lacks the property of being anguished, or by admitting two properties ‘being anguished-as-Pierrot Lunaire\*’ and ‘being anguished-as-Pierrot Lunaire’ which one and the same entity has and lacks, respectively. Both those proposals read ontology off language in an objectionable way.

All that is going on, on my view, is this. There is an abstract sound structure that exists eternally (or atemporally). This sound structure is not identical (at any time) to either Pierrot Lunaire or Pierrot Lunaire\*, for it is not (at any time) a musical work. Nor is it (at any time) anguished, for it is not the kind of thing that can have the kind of aesthetic qualities we attribute to musical works. This abstract sound structure gets indicated by Schoenberg and this act makes it true that Pierrot Lunaire exists. The same sound structure is subsequently indicated by Strauss and this act makes it true that Pierrot Lunaire\* exists. And these acts together with certain facts concerning the history of the world at the time of the indication of the sound structure by the respective composers make true certain facts concerning the aesthetic features of Pierrot Lunaire and Pierrot Lunaire\*, including that Pierrot Lunaire\* is more anguished, and so on, than Pierrot Lunaire. And that’s it—that’s all we need to say! There is no need to complicate our ontology by admitting the existence of either the musical works or the aesthetic properties: the fundamental existents together with their fundamental properties are all we need to do all our truthmaking work. Everything else—including the aesthetic realm and its properties—is an ontological free lunch.

## V

I hope to have shown that my account avoids the objections that Levinson makes against the position that identifies musical works with abstract sound structures. My account is compatible with the literal truth of the creation claim, and it avoids the Leibniz law objections from differences in aesthetic properties. Furthermore, I think my account has the advantage of parsimony over Levinson’s. While my ontology includes the abstract sound structures, the concrete performances, and the thoughts and intentions, and so on, of the

composers, Levinson's ontology includes all this *and* a further category of abstracta which come into being as the result of human activity. To be sure, my account faces the problem of how composers have epistemic access to abstract sound structures: but both Levinson's position and the position that identifies musical works with abstract sound structures face the problem of how we can have epistemic access to abstracta, so I am no worse off here. I believe that the balance of costs and benefits favours my view.<sup>31</sup>

Ross Cameron, Department of Philosophy, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT, UK.  
Email: R.P.Cameron@leeds.ac.uk

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