

The Poverty of Musical Ontology

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Abstract

Aaron Ridley posed the question of whether results in the ontology of musical works would have implications for judgements about the interpretation, meaning or aesthetic value of musical works and performances. His arguments for the conclusion that the ontology of musical works have no aesthetic consequences are unsuccessful, but he is right in thinking (in opposition to Andrew Kania and others) that ontological judgements have no aesthetic consequences. The key to demonstrating this conclusion is the recognition that ontological judgments are a priori and aesthetic judgments are empirical. A priori judgements have no empirical consequences. Neither fundamental ontology of music nor higher-order ontological reflections have any aesthetic consequences.

1. Introduction

For many years, the ontology of musical works has attracted a good deal of attention from philosophers. More recently, Aaron Ridley has raised a question about whether the attention devoted to the ontology of musical works will have any aesthetic payoff. (Ridley 2003) That is, Ridley asks whether views about the ontology of musical works have any implications for judgements about the aesthetic value, expressiveness, interpretation or meaning of any works or performances of music. (I will call these aesthetic judgements.) The hope is that all of the time and effort invested in the ontology of musical works will assist critics in arriving at the right aesthetic judgements about musical works or performances. Anyone with this hope will be disappointed. Nothing ontologists have to say about musical works will assist in making aesthetic judgements about music.

The ontology of music has focused on three questions. The first question asks about the basic ontological category to which works of music belong. Some philosophers answer the question by saying that works of music are eternal, immutable sound event types. (Dodd 2007) Others say that works of music are classes of performances (Goodman 1968), performances (Davies 2004), initiated types (Levinson 1990), perduring individuals (Caplan and Matheson 2006), and so on. Following Kania, we can call this the *fundamentalist debate*. The other debates are concerned with what Kania calls *higher-order musical ontology*. (Kania 2008a) These higher-order debates can be decided without determining which fundamental ontology is correct. Two distinct questions have been asked in debates about higher-order musical ontology. The first of these questions asks which conditions must be satisfied for a performance *P* to be a performance of a work of music *W*. Kania calls this the *identity debate*. Finally there are questions about the types of musical works found in particular musical traditions. Theodore Gracyk has, for example, argued that works of rock music are recordings (or tracks) for playback. (Gracyk 1996) Others hold that works of rock music are not ontologically different from works of classical music. Kania holds that works of jazz are improvisations rather than works for performance. (Kania 2011) All of these debates are irrelevant when we ask aesthetic questions about musical works and performances.

2. The fundamentalist debate and aesthetic judgements

Let us begin by considering whether the fundamentalist debate has implications for aesthetic judgements about works and performances of music. This is not the first paper to deny that positions in the fundamentalist debate have aesthetic consequences. It is not clear, however, that previous writers are right about why fundamental ontology has no aesthetic implications.

Ridley's specific arguments for the aesthetic inconsequence of the ontology of music have been refuted by Kania. (Kania 2008b) I will not repeat Kania's arguments here. Christopher Bartel is another philosopher skeptical about the aesthetic implications of musical ontology. He points out that a music critic can reach aesthetic judgements about a work or performance of music without having any ontology of musical works. (Bartel 2011) He concludes that positions adopted by participants in the fundamentalist debate have no aesthetic implications. Unfortunately, this conclusion does not follow. One might wonder about the value of fundamental ontology to critics given that they successfully make aesthetic judgements in complete ignorance of the fundamentalist debate, but the fact that people can make aesthetic judgements in complete ignorance of fundamental ontology does not entail that they would not change their aesthetic judgements if they were to read some papers on musical ontology. We need to look elsewhere for an argument to establish the aesthetic poverty of musical ontology.

I will begin the case for my conclusion with an analogy. It seems clear that views about the ontological category to which other types of artworks belong have no implications for aesthetic judgements about works of these types. Consider, for example, paintings. Suppose that I have been convinced that paintings are individual mind-independent material objects. While holding this view about the ontology of paintings, I form an aesthetic judgement about some painting, say, Jan Davidszoon de Heem's *Still Life with Books and Lute*. Let us suppose that I judge that the painting is expressive and that it insightfully represents profound melancholy.

Now suppose that I take an introduction to philosophy course and I learn about the ontology of George Berkeley. I come to believe that all objects of experience are ideas in the mind of God. *Ipsa facto*, I now believe that *Still Life with Books and Lute* is an idea in the mind of God, and not a mind-independent material object. This change in my

views about the ontological category to which the painting belongs has absolutely no implications for any judgements about experience of the work. Having accepted that the painting is an idea in the mind of God, my experience of the painting is no different from what it was when I believed that is a mind-independent physical object. The colours and shapes that I perceive do not change. I still believe that the painting is rectangular, painted in subdued colors and so on. I can go on believing that it is expressive and represents profound melancholy. I still believe all of the art-historical facts about the painting that I previously believed. In particular, I still believe that it was painted in the seventeenth century, that is a still life of the Dutch school, and so on. (Notice that I am not presupposing aesthetic empiricism, the view that only experience of a work itself is relevant to its aesthetic evaluation.) The change of my ontological views does not compel me to revisit any of my aesthetic judgements about paintings. Thinking that a change of ontology has aesthetic implications is like Dr. Johnson thinking that he could refute Berkeley by kicking a stone. My aesthetic judgements are independent of my ontological judgements because my ontological judgements have no empirical consequences.

What goes for paintings goes for works of music. Suppose that I have believed that Levinson (1990) is right and that works of music are initiated types. While holding this belief, I listen to a recording of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* Symphony. I then form the aesthetic judgement that the performance is deeply moving and expressive of tragic despair. Suppose that I subsequently read Dodd (2007) and I am completely persuaded by his arguments. Under Dodd's influence, I now believe that works of music are Platonic abstracta: eternal, immutable sound event types. My ontological conversion does not compel me to revise my earlier aesthetic judgement. After I have accepted Platonism about works of music, my experience of the performance is identical to how experience of the performance was when I believed that symphonies are initiated types. I still believe all of the art historical facts about the symphony that I previously believed: that it is in b minor, that it was composed in 1893, and so on. I still hear the same notes when listening to the recording. There is no reason to believe that I will not make the same aesthetic judgements about the *Pathétique* Symphony and any other work or performance.

Here is another illustration of this point. Levinson and Dodd go to a concert where they hear Bach's Double Violin Concerto. Levinson thinks that they have heard a token of an initiated type while Dodd maintains that they have heard a token of an eternal, immutable sound event type. Suppose now that Levinson makes the aesthetic judgement that the performance was disappointing. Dodd disagrees and thinks that it was quite good. The two philosophers enter into a debate about the aesthetic virtues of the performance. Levinson may argue, say, that excessive use was made of vibrato and that the tempo was too relaxed. Dodd, in contrast, is not troubled by the vibrato and the tempo. He points to the tasteful use of rubato in defence of his aesthetic judgement. Had he said that the rubato was tasteful *and* the performance was a token of an eternal type, he would have added nothing to his view. Similarly, if Levinson had offered as a rejoinder to Dodd that the performance was too slow *and* they had heard an initiated type, he would have added nothing to his initial claim about the aesthetic value of the concert.

Here we have been considering aesthetic judgements about performances. Some writers have claimed that the fundamental ontological category to which works belong affects aesthetic appraisal of the works. For example, some ontologists have held that they will be more impressed by a work if it turns out to have been created rather than discovered. I am at a loss to see how this could be. Suppose that musical works are discovered and not created. If so, this cannot possibly affect the relative aesthetic values of musical works. Some philosopher might be disappointed to learn that a favourite composition was discovered, not made. But every other composition was also discovered, not made. Consequently, there are no grounds for revising the relative aesthetic assessment of any particular work of music. If ontological discoveries affect the aesthetic value of compositions, they affect all compositions equally.

More importantly, perhaps, one has no reason to change one's judgement about the aesthetic value of a composition if one comes to believe that all musical works are discovered and not made. Regardless of whether Bach created or discovered his Double Violin Concerto, his actions were what they were. He sat down at his desk, dipped his pen in some ink, and put some marks on a sheet of paper. He engaged in his creative process. Like other composers, Bach would have, as Dodd says, worked away "imagining and reimagining sequences of sounds, playing and amending sequences on

an instrument” until he reached a satisfactory resolution. (Dodd 2007: 117) Bach’s compositional process can be described as creating or as discovering, but the empirical facts about what Bach did do not change when they are variously described. Whether he was creating or discovering, he was being creative and writing music of the highest quality without any assistance.

One might wonder why positions in the fundamentalist debate in musical ontology have no aesthetic implications. The answer is that all positions in the fundamentalist debate are equally compatible with all of the empirical evidence about musical works. (Young 2011) Positions in the fundamentalist debate are not empirical. They are the product of a process of a priori reasoning. In contrast, aesthetic judgements are empirical judgements. An aesthetic judgement is based on experience of an artwork and on knowledge of the empirically ascertained art historical facts about the work. A priori judgements do not have any empirical consequences. Consequently, ontological theories have no aesthetic implications.

One could take issue with my argument by maintaining that sometimes a priori judgements have empirical consequences. Consider the disjunction $A \vee E$, where A is an a priori judgement and E is empirical. Is the disjunction empirical or a priori? Suppose that $A \vee E$ is a priori. In this case, the validity of $E \vdash A \vee E$ demonstrates that empirical judgements can have a priori consequences. Similarly, if $A \vee E$ is empirical, then $A \vdash A \vee E$ demonstrates that a priori judgements can have empirical consequences. (Williamson forthcoming) My argument depends on the view that a priori statements cannot have empirical consequences. But it seems that the line between a priori and empirical judgements is not as hard and fast as my argument requires.

I allow that empirical judgements can have a priori (ontological) consequences. So the inference from E to $A \vee E$ need not trouble me. In contrast, the inference from A to $A \vee E$, on the assumption that $A \vee E$ is empirical, is worrisome. Properly understood, however, $A \vee E$ is a priori, not empirical. There are two senses of a priori. In the positive sense, a statement is a priori if and only if it can be justified independently of experience. In the negative sense, a statement is a priori if and only if it is immune to empirical revision. (The negative conception of the a priori is found in Field 1998.) On either conception of a prioricity, $A \vee E$ counts as a priori. On the positive account, $A \vee E$ is a priori because it can be justified independently of experience. On the negative

account, $A \vee E$ is a priori because it cannot be empirically refuted. On either conception of a prioricity, a priori judgements entail only a priori judgements. On both the positive and negative conceptions, if A is a priori and $A \vdash B$, then any justification of A can become a justification of B but the justification will be a priori and B will be a priori.

In my view, this argument is decisive. However, even if some a priori judgements have empirical consequences, the conclusion that positions in the fundamentalist debate about musical works have empirical aesthetic consequences does not follow. The cases just considered (which involve the disjunction of empirical and a priori judgements) establish at most that some a priori judgements have empirical consequences. These special cases involving the disjunction of a priori and empirical judgements do not establish that a priori ontological judgements about musical works actually have aesthetic consequences. The burden of proof remains with those who believe that ontological judgements have aesthetic consequences to provide an example.

3. Ontology and meta-aesthetics

So far we have been concerned with the question of whether the fundamentalist debate has any aesthetic implications. We have found that it cannot since the ontological debate is conducted a priori and aesthetic judgements are empirical. The possibility that ontological judgements have meta-aesthetic consequences remains open. This is possible since meta-aesthetics, like ontology, is an a priori inquiry. One might think that the meta-aesthetic judgements may have aesthetic implications and that, in consequence, ontological judgements have (indirect) aesthetic consequences.

Meta-aesthetic judgements are judgements about what sorts of aesthetic judgements are possible and the form that they take if they are possible. Many possible meta-aesthetic positions are available. One is aesthetic non-cognitivism, according to which aesthetic judgements are just displays of approval or disapproval. Another is an error theory according to which, in the absence of aesthetic facts, all aesthetic judgements are false. Most aestheticians believe that some sort of aesthetic cognitivism is correct and that some aesthetic judgements are true. (In this essay, cognitivism is assumed to be true and error theory false.) Which aesthetic judgements can be true depends on what sorts of aesthetic properties exist. This is where ontology comes in.

Positions in the fundamentalist debate have consequences for questions about what sorts of aesthetic properties exist. Consider, for example, the debate between Levinson and Dodd on the question of whether or not works of music are created. If musical works are not created, then they cannot possess certain aesthetic and art historical properties. For example, Dodd (2007) argues, Wynton Marsalis's *In This House, On This Morning* (1994) cannot possess the property of being expressive of pride in African-Americans of the Deep South. The sound event type that is, on Dodd's view, the work could have been first tokened in 1594, when it could not have been expressive of pride in African-Americans of the Deep South. Similarly, Dodd believes that something that is eternally existent cannot possess the property of originality or the property of being Liszt-influenced. Liszt, who was not born until 1811, cannot have influenced something that has existed eternally and is immutable.

Nevertheless, I still maintain that judgements about the ontology of music have no aesthetic implications. Ontological judgements about works of music may have meta-aesthetic implications. Meta-aesthetic judgements, like judgements about ontology, are a priori. Being a priori, meta-aesthetic judgements can have no empirical consequences. Judgements about the particular aesthetic properties of particular works of music are not the consequence of any meta-aesthetic judgements or, indirectly, the consequence of judgements reached in the fundamentalist debate. For example, the melancholy of some performance is independent of the meta-aesthetics anyone adopts. (Of course, if for some meta-aesthetic reason, a work cannot be expressive of melancholy, or any other emotion, then it is not.)

Ontological positions can be adapted to be compatible with empirical evidence (as they must be in order to be viable). For example, Dodd's ontology of musical works has the consequence that works of music cannot have, for example, the property of being Liszt-influenced. This seems to be incompatible with the well-supported empirical judgement that certain compositions are Liszt-influenced. Dodd does away with the incompatibility by re-describing uncontroversial empirically ascertained facts. Brahms's Second Piano Sonata cannot be described as Liszt-influenced. Rather, Dodd holds, Brahms's compositional process was influenced by Liszt. (Dodd 2007: 258) Similarly, on his view, works of music cannot be original, but the composers' actions can be. In cases of this sort, there is no disagreement between Levinson, say, and Dodd on the

empirical facts. There is only a difference of opinion about how to describe them within the framework of a particular fundamental ontology.

Dodd does continue to resist the conclusion, on ontological grounds, that *In This House, On This Morning* is expressive of pride in African-Americans of the Deep South. (He does not deny that it is expressive of pride *tout court*.) Two comments need to be made about Dodd's views. For a start, good empirical reasons can be given for thinking that works of music (without lyrics or program) cannot be expressive of something as specific as pride in African-Americans of the Deep South. According to the resemblance theory of musical expression, works of music (without lyrics or program) are expressive of some emotion when they resemble verbal or non-verbal behaviour characteristically expressive of emotion. (For a recent review of the resemblance theory, see Young 2012.) The resemblance theory is an empirical theory. There is reason to doubt whether there is a characteristic behaviour expressive of an emotion as specific as pride in African-Americans of the Deep South. The second point is that *In This House, On This Morning* is not pure music without a program. The sections have titles and enough other clues are available for listeners to experience that, at least as tokened by Marsalis, a performance of the work is expressive of a specific sort of pride: pride in African-Americans of the Deep South.

4. The identity debate and aesthetic judgements

While it is clear that fundamental musical ontology has no implications for aesthetic judgement, one might still think that views on higher order musical ontology have aesthetic implications. Let us begin by considering the identity debate, which is concerned with the question of when a performance is a performance of a given work. Kania, who has been outspoken in defence of the view that ontological positions have aesthetic implications, allows that the positions adopted in the fundamentalist debate have no consequences for aesthetic judgements but maintains that higher order ontology does. (Kania 2008b) If all ontological claims are known a priori, it is already clear that higher order ontological claims do not have aesthetic implications, since aesthetic judgements are empirical. Nevertheless, let us look at some debates in higher order ontology to confirm this conclusion. Let us begin by considering whether positions in the identity debate have aesthetic implications.

The first point to confirm is that the identity debate is not an empirical dispute. In order to see that this is so, consider, for example, a performance that reproduces every note but one of Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*. Goodman famously held that this performance is not a performance of the *Moonlight Sonata*. On his view, performers succeed in performing a work only if all and only the notes specified in the score are played. (Goodman 1968: 186-7) Stephen Davies, on the other hand, may argue that it is a performance of Beethoven's work. (Davies 2001: 158) On his view, the performance complies sufficiently with the score to count as a performance of the sonata and it is a performance of Beethoven's sonata (so long as certain other conditions are satisfied). Goodman and Davies are, however, not in disagreement about any empirical facts. They agree that the pianist's performance departed from Beethoven's score by one note. They can agree that there was an intention to perform the *Moonlight Sonata* and they can agree about the art historical facts about this composition. Since they can agree on all the relevant empirical facts about the performance, and disagree about whether the performance is a performance of the sonata, the identity debate is not concerned with an empirical question. Like other ontological debates, the identity debate is conducted a priori.

Aesthetic judgements about musical performances are, however, empirical judgements. They are based on judgements about the perceived properties of musical performances and on empirically discovered art-historical facts about musical works. A priori judgements have no implications for such judgements.

Nevertheless, Kania argues for the view that the identity debate has aesthetic implications. He does so by holding that, in order to make an aesthetic judgement about a work, we need to know the category of art (in the sense of Walton 1970) to which the work belongs. For example, one needs to know whether one is listening to a performance of the *Moonlight Sonata* or a performance of some other work before one can make a judgement about the aesthetic value of the performance. (The performance could be a good performance of the *Moonlight Sonata* or a very bad performance of *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*.) Kania infers from this that the answers that higher-order ontology provides to identity problems have implications for aesthetic judgements.

Kania is right when he says that facts about the category to which some work belongs have implications for aesthetic judgements about the work. He is wrong,

however, in thinking that the identity debate has any aesthetic implications. In order to know that some performance is an aesthetically valuable performance of the *Moonlight Sonata* (rather than a poor performance of some other work) I need to know that it is a performance of the *Moonlight Sonata*. I do not need to know that it is a performance of the *Moonlight Sonata* because it satisfies Goodman's (or someone else's) conditions for being a performance of this work. Such ontological beliefs are, from an aesthetic point of view, irrelevant.

This can be demonstrated by the following argument. Imagine that I have been persuaded by Goodman's account of when a performance *P* is a performance of work *W*. I listen to a performance of the *Moonlight Sonata* which includes all and only the notes that Beethoven wrote. I judge that the performance is an aesthetic triumph: a subtle, shimmering, and deeply moving performance of the *Moonlight Sonata*. Now I read Stephen Davies (2001) and I am persuaded that Davies provides the correct account of the conditions under which a performance is a performance of a given work. It is difficult to see how this change in my views about the identity debate has any implications at all for my aesthetic judgement about the performance. If I believed that the performance is subtle, shimmering and deeply moving, I will continue to do so. My aesthetic evaluation has not changed because none of the beliefs relevant to the aesthetic evaluation of the performance have changed. These are empirical beliefs about how the performance sounds and about the category (in this case, performances of the *Moonlight Sonata*) to which the performance belongs.

Someone might object that, in the argument just given, I have taken an example of a performance which is uncontroversially a performance of a work. Perhaps the situation is different when we are dealing with cases where there is a question about whether a performance is a performance of a given work. Let us consider, then, performances that depart from the original score in some respect. For example, a pianist adds an ornament not sanctioned by the score of the *Moonlight Sonata*. Goodman will hold that the performance is not a performance of Beethoven's Piano Sonata No. 14. Stephen Davies will disagree (so long as there is an intent to perform the sonata and other conditions are satisfied).

Now the question is whether Goodman and Davies will (in virtue of their differing ontological beliefs) reach different aesthetic judgements about the performance. Let us

consider what basis they will have for an aesthetic judgement. They can agree about how the performance sounds: there is no disagreement about which notes have been played. They do not disagree about an aesthetic category to which the performance belongs: performances of piano sonatas in the style of Beethoven. They can agree that there was an intention to perform the *Moonlight Sonata*. Goodman and Davies may differ about the aesthetic value of the performance, but their difference of opinion will not be based on any ontological considerations. Suppose that Davies judges that it is an expressive and moving performance. Goodman's views about the identity debate give him no basis for disagreement.

Someone might still think that this argument still does not do justice to Kania's views about the aesthetic implications of the identity debate. Perhaps we do not see that views in the identity debate have aesthetic consequences until we consider a different sort of example. Consider a work by J.S. Bach given a jazz treatment. I have in mind something like Jacques Loussier's rendition of the Toccata and Fugue in d minor. Let us call this *P*. Some positions on the identity debate will have the consequence that Loussier does not perform Bach's work. Other positions (Stephen Davies', perhaps) will allow that it is. One might think that these different ontological judgements about *P* have aesthetic consequences. One might reason as follows: when *P* is regarded as a jazz performance (and not a performance of Bach's work) someone may judge that *P* is aesthetically valuable. When *P* is regarded as a performance of Bach it may be judged to be an aesthetic failure.

These reflections do not lead to the conclusion that ontological positions have aesthetic consequences. The difference of opinion about the aesthetic merits of the jazz treatment of Bach is not the consequence of any ontological difference. In particular, differing aesthetic judgements about *P* are not the consequence of any position in the identity debate. Two people can agree that *P* is a performance of Bach's work. Likely they will nevertheless disagree about *P*'s aesthetic merits if one person places it in the class of jazz performances and the other does not. Likewise, if two people agree that *P* is not a performance of Bach's work, but disagree about whether it is a jazz performance, they are likely to disagree about its aesthetic merits.

The aesthetic disagreement is the result of putting *P* into different aesthetic categories. One judgement follows once *P* is put into the category of jazz performances.

Another follows from regarding it as, say, belonging to the category of historically authentic performances of baroque music. These categories, the sort of categories of which Walton speaks, are not ontological categories. Walton's aesthetic categories are based on empirical knowledge of artworks. According to Walton, decisions about the category to which some performance belongs are made on the basis of aesthetic considerations and considerations about the performer's intentions. These are empirical matters. We are still looking for a case where ontological judgements have aesthetic implications.

5. Genre specific types and aesthetic judgements

One final ontological debate and its possible aesthetic implications remain to be considered. We may call this the *genre specific work type debate* or, more briefly, the *type debate*. A variety of writers, including Stephen Davies (2001) and Gracyk (1996), have maintained that musical works come in a variety of higher-order ontological types and that these types are specific to musical genres. Gracyk, for example, has maintained that the works of rock music are recordings or tracks, not songs and contrasts this type of work with the sort found in classical music. Davies has distinguished between works for live performance and works for studio performance. Kania maintains that jazz works are improvisations. One might think that debates about this sort of claim have aesthetic consequences.

Once again, the type debate is not an empirical debate. Some people, such as Gracyk, believe that works of rock music are tracks. Other people believe that a more standard ontology applies to such works. There is, however, no disagreement on the empirical facts. Gracyk and his opponents all agree that this recording of *Back in the U.S.S.R* is 2:43 long, that it begins with the sound of a jet aircraft, that it was recorded in 1968, that Ringo Starr does not perform the drum part, that it is a parody of a Beach Boys song, and so on. The differences of opinion about the ontology of this song are due to a priori considerations. Once again, a priori judgements cannot have empirical consequences.

Nevertheless, writers such as Kania continue to maintain that the type debate has aesthetic consequences. The burden of proof is on those who claim that the type debate has aesthetic consequences. They need to give an example of an ontological view that

entails some aesthetic judgement. This turns out to be difficult. Even Kania allows that it “is difficult to give clear examples” of cases where the type debate has had implications for aesthetic judgements. He has, however, presented two cases in which, he suggests, ontological views have implications for aesthetic judgements. In the first instance he claims that a (possible) mistake about the ontology of works of rock music affected his own judgement about the aesthetic value of works in this genre. He read Gracyk and became convinced that the works in rock music are tracks. Having discovered that he “might well have been listening to the *wrong thing* when appreciating rock music (a work for performance rather than a constructed track) affected a kind of Copernican revolution in [his] experience of the music.” (Kania 2012: 101) In the second instance, Kania suggests that debates about the ontology of music have implications for debates about the aesthetic merits of authentic (or historically informed) performances. Neither of Kania’s putative examples shows that the type debate has aesthetic implications.

First consider how the knowledge that the works of rock music are tracks, not songs, might affect aesthetic judgements about rock music. My general strategy has been to argue that the adoption of a new ontological view does not entail a change in one’s aesthetic views: ontological views have no empirical consequences and aesthetic judgements are empirical. Kania, however, claims that a change in an ontological view did change his aesthetic views. Kania does not tell us how Gracyk’s ontology of rock music changed his experience of the genre so we can only speculate. Perhaps the knowledge that many rock recordings are not recorded performances but rather the product of combining many different recordings, of layering tracks on top of each other, changed how Kania listened to rock music. This is not, however, an instance of an ontological position having an aesthetic consequence.

The process by which rock recordings are produced is an empirically discovered art historical fact about rock recordings. Whether a recording is a combination of various tracks is arguably relevant to its aesthetic evaluation. Facts about the ways in which rock recordings are produced are relevant to questions about the aesthetic categories to which rock music belongs. The fact that rock recordings are engineered in a certain way is not an ontological fact nor does it entail ontological facts. One can consistently believe that rock recordings are produced by an engineering process

without believing that rock recordings belong to a particular ontological category: tracks for playback or some other category. It is hard, however, to see what other fact about rock music could have affected the Copernican revolution in Kania's views. I take it that my point here is similar to one made by Kraut (2012).

Turn now to a consideration of how ontological views could have implications for aesthetic judgements about authentic performances of early music. It is difficult to see what has led Kania to the conclusion that ontology has influenced aesthetic judgements about authentic performance. For a start, little of the philosophical literature on authentic performance has anything to do with ontology. (For a review of the literature see Thom 2012.) Mostly philosophers have simply analyzed the conception of authenticity held by members of the early music movement. I do not deny that philosophical reflection on authentic performance has influenced some aesthetic judgements about certain performances. Someone could, for example, read Kivy 1995 and come to the conclusion that historically authentic performances are aesthetically worthless because they lack personal authenticity. Kivy has not, however, made an ontological claim about historically authentic performances. Rather he has made the claim (a false claim, in my view) that historically authentic performances are necessarily derivative and unoriginal.

Perhaps Kania has in mind an argument of this sort. One can imagine advocates of authentic performance saying that an inauthentic performance is not, say, a performance of the *Goldberg Variations*. (These advocates of authentic performance are, perhaps, timbral sonicists and believe that a performance on piano cannot be a performance of BWV 988.) From this someone might conclude that the performance is, consequently, an aesthetic failure. (I do not know of anyone who accepts this argument.) This looks like an argument with an ontological premise (P is not a performance of the Goldberg variations) with an aesthetic conclusion (P is an aesthetic failure). The problem is that the argument is invalid and consequently we do not have a case of an a priori judgement with an empirical (aesthetic) conclusion. If you doubt that the argument is invalid consider this inference: Glen Gould's first recording is not a recording of the *Goldberg Variations*. Therefore, Glen Gould's first recording is an aesthetic failure. Of course, one can conclude from the premise that P is not a performance of W that P is not an

aesthetically valuable performance of *W*. However, this conclusion is known a priori and not an example of an aesthetic judgement following from ontological premises.

Kivy has an argument that Kania may have had in mind when he claimed that ontological debates about authentic performance influence aesthetic judgement. Kivy does not adopt a position in the type debate, but he does have what may appear to be an ontological position with aesthetic consequences. Kivy holds that, “Performing classical music is most akin to, though not, of course, literally, arranging music.” “The performer’s art is,” he adds, “...akin to arranging, the performer’s product, a performance, [is] a work of art in its own right.” (Kivy 2002: 236) A musician who is not creative or original and who simply imitates another musician does not, on Kivy’s view, produce a performance. That is, Kivy builds an evaluative element into his ontology of performances. This view is a departure from usual ways of talking about performances. Usually we say that musicians produce a performance of a work even if their interpretation is not original. However, Kivy can, if he likes, adopt an ontology according to which something must be original in order to count as a performance. Here I only want to ask whether Kivy’s views on performance provide an instance of an ontological position entailing aesthetic judgements.

On the face of it, this seems to be a plausible claim. Kivy uses his ontology of performances as a means to argue that authentic performances are aesthetically flawed. When, he argues, a musician aims for historical authenticity, “the performer ceases to be an artist in her own right and becomes something else.” (Kivy 1995: 131) Instead of being artists, he believes, those who aim at authenticity are mimics or copycats. According to Kivy, performances are produced by artists, that is to say performances are original and the product of creativity. Consequently, members of the early music movement, who aim at authenticity, do not produce performances. (Those who aim for authenticity may be said to produce “music productions” rather than performances.) Even if this conclusion is right, which I doubt, it is not an instance of an aesthetic conclusion that follows from an ontological premise. Rather, it is an attempt to make aesthetic views have ontological consequences.

Kivy makes aesthetic views have ontological consequence by stipulating that they do. Kivy believes that an original performance can be aesthetically valuable while an unoriginal imitation of a previous performance is doomed to aesthetic failure. He

then simply stipulates that he will only call something a performance if it has an aesthetic feature (namely, originality). In this way, an aesthetic view (the view that originality is an aesthetic virtue) has an ontological consequence, but we do not have an instance of an ontological view with aesthetic consequences. The aesthetic problem with authentic “music productions” is not that they are not performances. The problem is that they are unoriginal. Saying that authentic “music productions” are bad because they are not performances (which are always original) is just another way of making the same point. The point has been dressed up in ontological garb, but it is an aesthetic claim: authentic music performances are aesthetic failures because they are unoriginal. The only reason that Kivy’s views on performances have aesthetic consequences is that they have an aesthetic component.

Of course, I regard Kivy’s line of reasoning as illegitimate. The question of whether authentic “music productions” are original has to be determined empirically and not stipulated. How anyone can listen to performances (and this is what they are, contrary to what Kivy would have us believe) by today’s advocates of authentic performance and think that they are unoriginal is beyond me. I have in mind the violin playing of Andrew Manze, the singing of Sandrine Piau, and performances by Il Gardino Armonico. For present purposes, however, the crucial point is that Kivy’s thoughts about authenticity are not an instance of an ontological view having aesthetic consequences.

6. Conclusion

This essay contributes nothing to the understanding of musical works and their meanings. It simply clears away, as Locke might say, some of the rubbish in the way of apprehending musical meaning. Ontology will be of no assistance whatsoever in this regard. In this essay I do not deny that the ontology of musical works is intrinsically interesting. The views expressed here can be accepted without accepting the view that the ontology of music is a pseudo-problem, a view advocated by Young (2011). I simply maintain that ontological views about musical works (whether fundamental or higher-order) have no implications for judgements about the meaning, interpretation, or

aesthetic value of musical works or performances. The ontology of musical works, like virtue, must be its own reward.¹

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¹ Earlier versions of this paper were presented at the Dubrovnik Conference on Philosophy of Art, April, 2013, and the Western Canadian Philosophical Association Conference, October, 2012. I am particularly grateful to Chris Tillman, David Davies, and Edwin Mares for their comments and criticisms.

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