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A Return to Musical Idealism

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ABSTRACT

In disputes about the ontology of music, musical idealism—that is, the view that musical compositions are *ideas*—has proven to be rather unpopular. We argue that, once we have a better grip on the ontology of ideas, we can formulate a version of musical idealism that is not only defensible, but plausible and attractive. We conclude that compositions are a particular kind of idea: they are *completed ideas for musical manifestation*.

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1. Introduction

Musical idealism—the view that entities such as Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5 in C Minor, Dio’s ‘Holy Diver,’ and Duke Ellington’s ‘Sophisticated Lady’ are best identified with *ideas* or some similar mental entities—has not proven to be very popular. As Lydia Goehr [1992: 19] puts it, identifying such entities ‘with anything existing in the mind has been regarded a most unsatisfactory manoeuvre’. We argue, though, that recent work in the ontology of ideas makes available a new—and quite satisfactory—version of idealism.

In [section 2](#), we clarify some key notions. In [section 3](#), we review standard characterizations of idealism and common objections. In [section 4](#), we present a sketch of recent work on the ontology of ideas. In [section 5](#), we employ this sketch in developing our new version of idealism. Finally, in [section 6](#), we discuss virtues of our version, including advantages that it has over its rivals.

2. Works and Compositions

Much discussion about the ontology of music has focused on musical *works*. The term *work*, however, is less than ideal here. If (as in, *inter alia*, Kania [2006: 404]) we take the works in an art form to be those entities which serve as the primary focus of appreciation and critical attention in that art form, then careful attention to different musical traditions might reveal that the works in those traditions are quite different kinds of entities.

The Fifth is a symphony *and* a work of classical music, in the sense just mentioned. But consider the *song* ‘Holy Diver’, contrasted with its *canonical recording*, released as track two of Dio’s 1983 debut album.¹ Following Theodore Gracyk [1996: 18–21] and Andrew Kania [2006], we might take the work of rock to be that recording rather than the song, as recordings are (or tend to be) the primary focus in rock. Turning to (standard-form) jazz, we might posit standards such as ‘Sophisticated Lady’, but follow Steven Davies [2001: 16–19] in taking works of jazz to be, not those standards themselves, but particular performances initiating from them. (More radically, we might even think that jazz, despite having standards, performances, and recordings, has no works at all: see Kania [2011: 400].) If our aim were to give an ontology of *works* across these traditions and others, we would be hard-pressed to find any single kind of entity that can play the relevant role across all of them.

Instead, we offer an ontology of *compositions*. The Fifth, ‘Holy Diver’, and ‘Sophisticated Lady’ are a symphony, a song, and a standard, respectively, and thus are compositions in the general sense that we have in mind.² Whether compositions qualify as works within a tradition might vary: compositions tend to be works in classical music, whereas, in rock, works tend to be recordings of compositions, and, in jazz, works tend to be particular performances initiating from compositions (if they are anything at all).³ We thereby put aside discussion of *works* and speak instead of *compositions*. The exception will be when we make use of the words of others—although we are confident that, when we do so, they mean by *work* roughly what we mean by *composition*.⁴

If you think that these higher-order ontological claims about distinguishing works from compositions across traditions are dubious, and that univocal talk of works in general is good enough, you are welcome to take all of our talk of compositions as talk of works in that perhaps more familiar sense.⁵

3. Musical Idealism: Take One

The claim that compositions are best identified with ideas (or some similar mental entities) is often attributed to Benedetto Croce [1902] and R.G. Collingwood [1938], and more recently defended by Renée Cox [1986]. Aaron Ridley [1997] and David Davies [2008] have argued against this way of interpreting Collingwood in particular, but settling matters of historical interpretation is not our goal here. Instead, we set out here to examine what philosophers have often taken musical idealism to be and their reasons for rejecting it.

Richard Wollheim [1980: 36–7] claims that idealism—about art in general—can be expressed in three propositions:

First, that the work of art consists in an inner state or condition of the artist, called an intuition or an expression: secondly, that this state is not immediate or given, but is the product of a

¹ On canonical recordings, see Magnus, Magnus, and Mag Uidhir [2013: 362].

² We set aside discussion of pure improvisations, since we take it to be constitutive of the notion of *composition* that being one requires being at least partially composed.

³ For competing rock ontologies, see Davies [2001], Bruno [2013], and Burkett [2015]. For competing jazz ontologies, see Young and Matheson [2000] and Dodd [2014].

⁴ Since much work in the ontology of music has restricted its focus to the classical tradition, it is no surprise that *work* and *composition* tend to get conflated, as, again, the works in that tradition tend to be compositions.

⁵ For further discussion of issues pertaining to higher-order music ontology, see Brown [2000, 2011, 2012] and Kania [2012a].

process, which is peculiar to the artist, and which involves articulation, organization, and unification: thirdly, that the intuition so developed may be externalized in a public form, in which case we have the artifact which is often but wrongly taken to be the work of art, but equally it need not be.

The first tells us that the art object is some sort of ‘inner state or condition’ of the artist and, presumably as a result, *private*. The second tells us that this private entity is the product of some variety of characteristically *artistic* activity. Finally, the third clarifies that, despite common thought and talk, the public manifestation most naturally associated with this private product is not the art object itself.

Jerrold Levinson [1980: 5] characterizes idealism—specifically, about music—similarly, stating that the puzzlement over what sort of entity compositions might be ‘has led some philosophers (e.g. Croce) to maintain that musical ... works are purely mental—that they are in fact private intuitive experiences in the minds of composers and poets’. Cox [1986: 133], an advocate of musical idealism, claims that ‘while musical works usually exist apart from any particular human being, they do not exist apart from human beings as a whole: they are repositated and exist in and only in conscious and unconscious human minds.’ Julian Dodd [2007: 26] takes musical idealism to be a variety of ‘*anti-realism* in the ontology of music’, ‘the doctrine that works of music are mental entities or, at least, mental constructions’.

We do not mean to suggest (or deny) that these characterizations are all of exactly the same view. The received characterization of idealism has, thus far, remained rather nebulous. But even this nebulous characterization has been deemed worthy of severe criticism. Levinson [1980: 5] observes that, if compositions are ‘private intuitive experiences in the minds of composers,’ they ‘never can be played ... nor heard’. Furthermore, they become ‘inaccessible and unsharable’. Dodd [2007: 26] elaborates on this point, stating that ‘[if] musical works were such mental entities, there would not be one work accessible to us all, but as many works as there were occasions on which a work was imagined, remembered, or otherwise thought about.’ These objections have merit: if compositions are ideas and ideas are private, unplayable, and inaudible, then compositions are private, unplayable, and inaudible. In so far as our ontology should, as much as is possible, preserve common thought and talk about compositions, this is a bad result.

Dodd [ibid.] goes further:

Finally, there has tended to be a lack of clarity concerning the precise nature of the mental entities with which works of music are identified. Such entities have been claimed to be: imaginary tunes, where such things have been viewed as tunes in the composer’s head (Collingwood 1988: 142); ‘conceptions’ (Cox: 1986: 136); as well as thoughts (Cox 1986: 136). Clearly, if an identification of musical works with mental entities is to stand a chance of convincing us, we need to know in no uncertain terms what the said mental entities are.

While we disagree with the letter of Dodd’s claims—if progress in any aspect of ontology required that we know in no uncertain terms what *anything* is, we would not get very far—we do agree with its spirit. Characterizations of idealism have been rather imprecise, relying on vaguely understood ‘mental entities’ of some sort or another. If we’re going to say that compositions are *ideas*, we had better have at least some idea of what these *ideas* are. Dodd’s point, we take it, is that we don’t.

From this, Dodd [ibid.: 29] concludes that the idealist project is a non-starter: ‘the ontology of mind resolutely refuses to offer up entities suitable for the musical idealist’s

project.’ This claim, however, is overly pessimistic. If the ontologist of mind were to come up with an adequate characterization of what ideas are, and it turns out that those entities *are* suitable for the idealist’s project, then idealism might turn out to be a contender.

4. What Ideas Are

In a discussion of the ontology of fictional characters, Anthony Everett and Timothy Schroeder [2015] sketch an ontology of ideas. Wesley Cray and Schroeder [2015] present a more fully fleshed-out version, called the *Systems Account*. Here, we present the essentials of the Systems Account; we will not argue for or defend the account here. With that said, we think that something like an argument for it can be extracted from the present discussion. When engaging in metaphysical disputes, it is a best practice to evaluate accounts based in large part on their theoretical virtues and vices. Metaphysicians look at ontological and ideological extravagance and parsimony; explanatory power and fit with intuition and data; internal consistency and consistency with antecedently accepted positions; etc. Also among these virtues is *fecundity*: positions that offer advantages in other areas are, *ceteris paribus*, to be preferred over those that don’t. The Systems Account, we argue, makes available an attractive ontology of compositions. This is a feather in its cap, and that feather constitutes a reason to prefer it over less virtuous accounts of the nature of ideas. While this argument is obviously not decisive, it is a notable part of a cumulative case.

Here, then, are the essentials: ideas are *systems of appropriately related token mental states*. By *appropriately related*, we mean that the token mental states are (i) tokens of the same type, with the relevant types individuated by the content of their tokens, and (ii) sufficiently causally and historically related.⁶ When we speak of an idea’s content, we take that content to be inherited from the idea’s component tokens: if the tokens in the system have content *C*, the idea has content *C*.

Consider Plato’s idea that there exist entities called *the Forms*. This idea originated as Plato’s novel token mental state with the content of some proposition along the lines of *that there exist such-and-such entities*. At that point, the idea was the system of that single token. As Plato communicated his idea to others, successful communication resulted in those others coming into distinct tokens that shared content with Plato’s original token. Since those new tokens are sufficiently causally and historically related to Plato’s original token, they, too, are included in the system. We say, then, that the idea has spread. Plato’s interlocutors tell their friends, and it spreads further.

Not everyone who comes to share Plato’s idea learns about it through verbal communication. Plato *wrote his idea down*: he created a text such that someone who read it with understanding would be caused to come into a token of the same mental state type. Since those new tokens would be sufficiently causally and historically related to Plato’s original token, they, too, are included in the system. But now suppose a contemporary of Plato’s entered into a token with the same content, in a manner that is causally and historically *isolated* from Plato’s token. Since that token isn’t appropriately

⁶ We leave open the question of whether the tokens involved in an idea *qua* system must be tokens of the same *attitude* type—i.e. all beliefs, desires, fears, etc. We lean toward saying ‘no’, while acknowledging that certain kinds of ideas might require more strict uniformity. Whether compositions *qua* ideas require such uniformity is an issue that we will not pursue further here.

related to Plato's, it is the foundation of a new system—an idea distinct from Plato's. The two ideas have the same content, but they differ in origin and causal history and are thereby distinct. We can account for the intuition that these ideas are still, in some sense, the *same* by pointing to a type-token ambiguity: they are distinct *token ideas* of the same *idea type*. They are of the same type in so far as they are tokens of the type *idea with such-and-such content*; they are distinct tokens of that type in so far as they differ in origin and causal-history.

We follow Cray and Schroeder in taking mental states to be physical states. So, Plato's idea is a (potentially) spatially discontinuous concrete particular.⁷ It came into existence when Plato 'came up with it', and it spread from there, giving it an origin in space and time as well as a dynamic lifespan. The Systems Account thereby treats Plato's idea as an in-principle *public* and *shareable*, rather than essentially *private*, entity: we can all, in the right circumstances, engage with *that* idea. The tokens are private, but, in so far as we have our own tokens, we engage with the same system, and that system has a location, history, and lifespan that are not confined to any particular thinker's head. It is in this sense that ideas, made up of private entities, are nonetheless public and shareable: an idea is *shareable* if multiple thinkers can contribute tokens to the same system, and being shareable is, we think, sufficient for being public.

What is a system? Cray and Schroeder [2015: 765–70] consider taking systems to be *sets*, *pluralities*, *mereological compounds*, *mereological aggregates*, or a new kind of entity.⁸ These last two options, we take it, are the most plausible, as the first three threaten to provide improper individuation and survival conditions. If systems are aggregates, they are fusions of components such that the fusion exists partly at any time that, and partly at any place where, those components exist. If ideas are systems *qua* aggregates, they are fusions of appropriately related token mental states, and they exist partly at any time and place that those tokens exist. Ideas, then, are not just potentially spatially discontinuous, but also potentially temporally discontinuous: they go out of existence at times when there are no relevant mental states.

If systems are a new kind of entity, one proposal is to say that they are entities that come into existence when the first of their components come into existence, exist partly at any time and place that those components exist, but continue to exist as long as any component *could* come into existence. If ideas are systems *qua* this kind of entity, they are fusion-like entities of appropriately related token mental states, and exist partly at any time and place that those tokens exist—but, furthermore, continue to exist *even if* there are temporarily and contingently no components, as long as (i) there were components, and (ii) there could be components again. Ideas, then, are potentially spatially discontinuous, but are temporally continuous: once in existence, they stay there, even when there are no relevant components.⁹

We will not try to settle the question of whether systems, and hence ideas, should be thought of as aggregates or instead as this new kind of entity. For now, either will suffice. And, clearly, much more can be said about both ideas and the Systems Account.

⁷ We say *potentially* because a system of one will be spatially continuous (assuming that individual token mental states *qua* physical entities will be spatially continuous).

⁸ On compounds and aggregates, see Fine [1994].

⁹ Where does the system exist when it has no components? Nowhere. A system can exist at *t* even if it has no components at *t*—which is akin to saying that a fusion can exist at *t* when it has no parts at *t*. This is, perhaps, strange, but the strangeness might be abated by noticing that we can still provide identity conditions for these entities at *t*. Those who find this objectionable can still take systems to be aggregates.

Can formerly distinct systems merge? What should we say about contents too complex to hold the entirety of them in our minds at once? These questions deserve answers.¹⁰ For now, however, enough has been said that we can put the account to work, saving further elucidation for another occasion.

5. Musical Idealism: Take Two

Everett and Schroeder [2015: 292] and Cray and Schroeder [2015: 758] suggest idealism, but neither elucidate nor defend this suggestion. The goal here is to do just that. Our proposal is this: compositions are *completed ideas for musical manifestation*.

Idealism has intuitive appeal. When Cooper composes a song on his diddley-bow, he comes up with an idea for how to manifest an event involving the movement of the slide on the neck, the strumming of the string, and the vocalization of words and sounds in the form of a melody. More complicated compositions involve more complicated ideas. Sometimes we encode these ideas into scores; sometimes we verbally communicate them to others. Sometimes (when ‘playing by ear’), those witnessing the manifestation can work backwards and get access to the idea by figuring out how the composition came to be manifested in that form. Sometimes our musical ideas are very highly composed, such as with symphonies. At other times, such as with many jazz standards, they are very lightly composed. Sometimes they include specifications of particular instrumentation; sometimes not. When Cooper and Rowan co-write songs, they come up with musical ideas together. When Cooper comes up with a musical idea and Rowan, sufficiently isolated from him, comes up with an exactly similar one, we have a coincidence: they have independently come up with exactly similar yet distinct compositions. But when Cooper comes up with a musical idea and Rowan, appropriately related to him, nonetheless tries to take credit for coming up with an exactly similar one, they might have a plagiarism dispute.

But, again, the proposal is not that compositions are just *ideas*, but rather that they are *completed ideas for musical manifestation*. *Manifestations* are artifacts—such as performances or recordings—that are intended to realize, and are sufficiently successful in realizing, the idea in some perceivable form. To *realize* the idea is, to some degree, to satisfy the conditions imposed by the content of that idea. There are, of course, many types of manifestation outside the realm of music—those of theatre, film, dance, and the like—and the musical idealist will need to say something to distinguish among these categories. Here, the musical idealist has options: as long as she has, in principle, some way of distinguishing *music* from these other categories, she need not worry much now. Our characterization of musical idealism is thereby neutral in this respect: as long as *music* can be distinguished from *non-music* in some meaningful, plausible, and motivated manner, which manner we should settle upon is not something that need concern us now.¹¹

¹⁰ A tentative answer to the first question: since systems are individuated in part by origin, distinct systems that ‘merge’ will end up remaining distinct systems that have come to overlap entirely. To the second question: we think that we *can* have mental states with very complex contents without being able to simultaneously attend to every aspect of those contents, just as we can see physical objects without simultaneously seeing every part of those objects.

¹¹ For relevant discussion, see Levinson [1990], Kania [2010], Davies [2012], Ridley [2012], and McKeown-Green [2014].

Ideas of manifestations should be distinguished from ideas *for* manifestations. My idea of a performance is not the same as the composer's idea *for* that performance. Intuitively, an idea being *for* something involves some notion of action missing from mere ideas of that something. We do not want to say, though, that an idea is an idea *for* something just in case its originator *intends for agents to act on or in accordance with that idea*. You might come up with an idea for how to rob a bank, after all, without ever intending to do so. Similarly, when Dick Higgins composed *Danger Music Number Nine (For Nam June Paik)*, the score of which reads 'volunteer to have your spine removed,' or when Nam June Paik composed *Danger Music for Dick Higgins*, the score of which reads 'creep into the vagina of a living whale,' we take it that both had ideas *for*—not merely *of*—performances, despite neither probably intending that anyone ever perform such performances.

Our proposal is that an idea is an idea *for* some kind of thing *K* (or action *A*) when its originator intends for that idea to be, in principle, able to serve as the basis for the generation of a *K* (or for the act of *A*-ing). An idea *serves as the basis* for such when its content is intended to prescribe an outcome, and perhaps a means for realizing that outcome.¹² You come up with an idea for *how to rob a bank* in so far as you intend your idea to be able, in principle, to serve as the basis for an action of *bank-robbing*. Similarly, Higgins and Paik come up with ideas for musical manifestation in so far as they intend their ideas to be able, in principle, to serve as the basis for the generation of *musical manifestations*.¹³

Finally, compositions are *completed* ideas for musical manifestation, a qualification which marks off *compositions-in-progress* from those that are *finished being composed*. Here, we appeal to Kelly Trogdon and Paisley Livingston's [2014: 226] notion of *completion dispositions*: that is, dispositions 'to refrain from making significant changes to the work that [are] grounded in certain cognitive mechanisms'. According to Trogdon and Livingston [ibid.: 228], these cognitive mechanisms are

rational capacities of artists consisting in various beliefs, desires, and further cognitive dispositions. The general idea is that when an artist has a completion disposition, she is disposed to refrain from making further changes to the work in virtue of having exercised her capacity to reason about art and its production in a certain way. The artist's rational capacity in this case includes, for example, beliefs about which configurations of observable properties have artistic and aesthetic value, the disposition to cease working on projects once certain artistic or aesthetic standards are met or a certain amount of time has passed (in the case of a deadline), the desire to work within a certain budget, the belief that one is working within a certain genre or canon, and so on.

If a composer's disposition to refrain from revising her idea is grounded in these considerations, her idea is *complete*. If, on the other hand, her disposition is grounded in other considerations—coercion, say, or threat—her idea is *not* complete.

¹² This discussion leads us into complicated issues in the philosophy of action. While we do not have the space to properly address these issues, we have tried not to beg any important questions.

¹³ Suppose, following Cray [2016], that one can create a composition so difficult as to be unmanifestable by any possible human being—perhaps even *logically* unmanifestable. Such a composition could still be *for* manifestation. To accommodate this, we must modify our account: to be an idea *for* some kind of entity *K* (or action *A*), the originator of the idea must intend that it be considered alongside the sort of ideas that are *characteristically* able to serve as the basis for the generation of a *K* (or for the act of *A*-ing). Thus, even if the idea is not manifestable, it is intended to be considered alongside similar ideas that are. Our account can thus accommodate the possibility of unmanifestable compositions, at least against the backdrop of an antecedent practice of generating manifestable ones.

Recall that ideas are individuated in part by content. So, what is it to *revise* an idea? If revision involves changing content, then revision would involve changing ideas—making revising *an* idea impossible. We might address this by individuating ideas in a more coarse-grained fashion: appropriately related tokens count as components of the same system provided that their contents are merely sufficiently similar. Revising an idea would then involve a process of tokening new mental states with contents slightly distinct from, but still sufficiently similar to, the original token. Our worry with this approach is that it raises more problems than it solves. In particular, we now face tough questions about just how similar the contents of new tokens need to be before we find ourselves with a new system.

Our preference is to take the act of composing to be the act of considering various candidate ideas, tentatively settling on one and ‘revising’ by jettisoning that idea and opting for some other, until the composer decides on *the one*. (This is similar to the picture of composition described in Evnine [2009: 2014–15].) Once it is settled that *this* idea will be the final stop in the compositional act, and the composer has a disposition, grounded in the right cognitive mechanisms, to not prolong that act by discarding that idea for some other, we say that that idea is *complete*. We are committed, then, to saying that the *compositional act* is what is ‘in progress’, and that the only occasion on which the idea that becomes the complete idea is really ‘in progress’ is when it is selected and considered for that status. Accepting this picture of composing, however, does little, if any, violence to our practices.¹⁴

6. Idealism Vindicated

We take there to be two chief rivals to our idealism. According to *type theory*—held by Peter Kivy [1983], as well as Levinson [1980] and Dodd [2007]—compositions are some variety of abstract sound structure. According to *musical materialism*—as defended by Ben Caplan and Carl Matheson [2006, 2008], and Chris Tillman alone [2011] and with Joshua Spencer [2012]—compositions are either composed of, or coincident with, their concrete manifestations.¹⁵ We submit that our idealism has advantages over both.

Recall that the earlier version of idealism—which we can call *simple* idealism—was initially rejected as follows. If simple idealism were true, compositions would be private, and hence unshareable, inaudible, and unplayable. Common thinkers and speakers, however, take compositions to be public, shareable, audible, and playable—and our ontology of compositions should, as much as possible, conform to that common thought and talk. Hence, simple idealism is fatally flawed, especially if other ontologies can capture the bulk of what common thinkers and speakers think and say.

Our idealism—*sophisticated* idealism—is immune to these charges. For starters, it accommodates the belief that compositions are public and shareable. According to the Systems Account, ideas are concrete particulars that are public and shareable: people

¹⁴ For further discussion of *completeness*, see Livingston [1999], Hick [2008], Gover [2015], Trogdon and Livingston [2015], and Rohrbaugh [forthcoming].

¹⁵ Other notable ontologies not discussed here include the action-based accounts offered by Davies [2003] and Currie [1989], and the fictionalism offered by Kania [2012b]. Rohrbaugh [2003] offers an account on which compositions are historical individuals ontologically dependent on their manifestations. We leave further discussion of this view to the side since both our idealism and materialism might be versions of it, depending on how one settles the details.

can come up with ideas together, bounce them around, share them, spread them, and so on. Since our idealism is parasitic on the Systems Account, it dispels the worry that compositions would turn out to be private and unshareable.

Additionally, our idealism makes compositions audible. Once it is seen how ideas for manifestation admit of manifestations, we have a straightforward account of how such ideas can be heard: listeners hear them indirectly, through hearing their manifestations. The type-theorist can provide a similar account, according to which, although compositions (as abstract structures) are not directly audible, they are heard indirectly, through the direct audition of their manifestations. The materialist can pursue a slightly different strategy from the idealist and the type-theorist: although a listener typically cannot listen to *all* of a composition—as doing so would involve the (often prohibitively) onerous burden of hearing *all* of its manifestations—she can directly listen to any *particular* manifestation in its entirety. So, we see that idealism, type theory, and materialism can all account for audibility. None of them, however, would render compositions as standardly and directly audible in their entirety.¹⁶ Each account can claim partial success with respect to audibility, and idealism's answer counts as no more obscure or incomplete than those of its rivals.¹⁷

Common thought and talk takes compositions to be, not just shareable and audible, but *created* through various compositional activities. Both sophisticated idealism and what we might call *sophisticated* materialism—that is, materialism that does *not* limit the relevant concrete manifestations to just performances but also includes, say, recordings, scores, composer's ideas, etc.—are able to account for creatability.¹⁸ According to sophisticated idealism, compositions are ideas that are created as other ideas are created. According to sophisticated materialism, compositions are created alongside the appropriate completed idea of the composer, which we might call the *originary idea*. In this respect, the idealist and the materialist say quite similar things.¹⁹

In taking compositions to be abstract types, however, the type-theorist has problems with creatability. If abstract types are eternal and, as such, cannot be brought into existence by the composer at the time of composition, then type theory fails in this respect. To answer such a worry, type-theorists such as Kivy [1983: 113] and Dodd [2007: 112–21] appeal to *creative discovery*: while compositions aren't genuinely created, they are *discovered* in a manner that requires some degree of creativity. Adopting this manoeuvre is, by their lights, enough to account for common thought and talk.

Accounting for common thought and talk, however, requires accounting not just for what people entrenched in the practice *do* say, but also for what they most likely *would* say when presented with reasonable questions. And here is a reasonable question: would the entity that we call 'the Fifth' have existed if no intelligent being had ever existed? We suspect that most, unburdened by some

¹⁶ Almost none: Tillman's [2011] *musical endurantism*, which takes compositions to be wholly located at each manifestation, would score well on this front. But, as we'll argue, our idealism still comes out ahead.

¹⁷ For discussion of audibility across ontologies, see Davies [2009].

¹⁸ The *simple* materialism explicitly defended by those mentioned earlier restricts manifestations to just performances. We think of manifestations as encompassing performances and recordings, but, unlike the sophisticated materialist, not scores, composer's ideas, etc.

¹⁹ The similarities go further. Both take compositions to be *concreta*—the disagreement is simply over which *concreta* they are. As such, the views might naturally be grouped together under the umbrella of *concretism*.

stock in this debate, would say ‘no.’ The creative discovery manoeuvre, however, cannot account for that intuition; only genuine creatability can do so. In taking ideas to be particulars that are brought into existence by particular thinkers at particular times and places, the Systems Account takes ideas to be genuinely creatable. Since our idealism is parasitic on the Systems Account, it makes compositions genuinely creatable. Similarly, materialism, which takes compositions to be composed of (or coincident with) concrete particulars originating with the ideas and actions of their composers, makes those compositions genuinely creatable as well. In this respect, both idealism and materialism claim a significant advantage over type theory.

Levinson [1980] attempts to reconcile type theory with genuine creatability by introducing an ontology of *indicated types*: that is, abstract types that are created upon some agent’s act of indicated some pre-existing, non-created type. So, when composing the Fifth, Beethoven indicated a pre-existing, non-created type, and, in doing so, brought into existence a new, created type—roughly, *that-type-as-indicated-by-Beethoven*. We agree with Gregory Currie [1989: 58], however, that this notion of creation-by-indication is ‘metaphysically obscure’. While, in the final cost-benefit analysis, the results might add up such that the benefits of accepting some obscurity outweigh the costs, it would be better, *ceteris paribus*, to avoid it if and when we can. Both our idealism and materialism allow us to do that, and thereby they enjoy an advantage over the Levinsonian.²⁰

In identifying compositions with ideas *qua* potentially spatially discontinuous concrete particulars, the idealist must concede that, when you have an idea for musical manifestation while driving down the road, that composition has a component that is moving down the road with you. It might strike you as strange, initially, to think of compositions travelling down the highway. The idealist is not alone here: the materialist faces the same consequence. Ultimately, though, we take this consequence to be a good one: people often *do* talk of music in spatial terms. Hip-hop started in Harlem and spread from there, and we can argue about whether punk *really* started in England, in New York, or in Detroit. This is to speak in terms of genres or traditions, but the point also holds when we talk about particular compositions. It can sometimes take new pieces of music—particular compositions!—quite some time before they reach listeners in remote locations, if they ever do, and we might spend time tracing the spatial origin and subsequent spreading of folk tunes, such as ‘Matty Groves’. Idealism allows us to take such talk literally.

Moving on, our idealism also makes compositions playable. Consider the following (idealized) example. Coraline composes ‘Hamster Requiem: The Wheel of Unslaked Desire’ for solo piano. The composition is subsequently published by Edith and flawlessly performed by Priscilla from Edith’s score. Priscilla’s performance is a performance of ‘Hamster’ because (i) its sound structure—part of the content of the idea—matches that which Coraline intended for manifestation, and (ii) Priscilla’s act of performance is appropriately causally linked to Coraline’s idea. Here, the appropriate linkage can be unpacked as a chain, whereby Edith intends to encode the sound structure that serves as the content of Coraline’s idea, and Priscilla intends to generate an event

²⁰ See Levinson [2012: 56–7] for more recent discussion of the question of whether indicated types are really *types* at all.

that realizes the structure encoded by her copy of the score. In other words, to be a performance of a given composition, that performance must pass tests regarding both content and causal history. Our idealism is well-suited, then, for accounting for playability.²¹

Sophisticated materialists can use the same conceptual machinery to provide an account of what it is to perform a composition: the composer's originary idea and the performer's action must be appropriately related in terms of both content and causal history. Sophisticated idealism and materialism use the same elements (appropriately related composers, performances, scores, originary ideas, etc.) to tell basically the same story of what it is to perform a composition. The chief difference between idealism and materialism here lies in how they group those elements. For the idealist, performances are of compositions but not parts of (or coincident with) them; scores are encodings of the contents of ideas, but not manifestations of them. For the materialist, performances, scores, and ideas are literally all parts of (or coincident with) compositions.²²

Type theory can account for playability if it allows that a composition is performed whenever an intentional sound event realizes its structure (perhaps admitting of reasonable degrees of error). However, if performances of compositions are restricted to being realizations of structures via causally appropriate routes, then type theory will encounter difficulties as it attempts to incorporate genealogical elements into the relevant types. Because these genealogical elements are built into his indicated structures, Levinson can offer an account of performances of compositions much like those offered by us and by the sophisticated materialist. However, as we have noted, Levinson's account depends on the claim that compositions are indicated types. Since our idealism and sophisticated materialism can address this issue without recourse to mysterious entities, we believe it to be superior.²³

The type-theorist more aligned with Dodd and Kivy can claim that we perform *Beethoven's* Fifth when there is an appropriate causal connection between the sound event and Beethoven's *compositional act* (conceived of in terms of creative discovery). Thus, even if the Fifth is an abstract structure existing independently of Beethoven, a performance is properly thought of as a realization of Beethoven's achievement only if the

²¹ For present purposes, we do not consider deviations from our idealized case. In most traditions, scores are less specific than in, say, 19th-century classical music. Performances are rarely flawless. Performers often intend solely to play a score as written, with no accompanying overt intention to produce a performance in accord with the composer's intentions. There are also issues about manifestation through recording, where the aim is not to realize the sound structure *per se*, but rather to encode it for playback. We hope to address these considerations in another essay.

²² Both sophisticated idealism and materialism are also able to account for unperformed and unscored compositions: such compositions come into existence with the originary ideas of composers, and their content is determined by those ideas. Both can also resolve the so-called *inheritance problem*: if every performance (and even every score) of a composition differs from that specified by the composer, then the performances and scores are in error, not the composition itself. The scores and performances do not determine the sound structure of a composition.

²³ Given the causal constraints that we endorse, it turns out that, upon hearing a realization of, say, a sound structure that serves as part of the content of a composition *qua* idea, you still only hear *that* composition if the realization is causally connected to the composition in an appropriate way. That is, if you hear a realization of the structure that serves as part of the content of the Fifth, but that realization is *not* causally connected to Beethoven's idea in the right way, you haven't heard the Fifth. In endorsing this causal constraint, then, we are ruling out sonicism (such as that defended by Dodd [2007])—but we think that it is among the objectionable features of sonicism that it denies this causal constraint. This might leave the idealist and the sonicist at a stalemate, at least in this respect. Unfortunately, given limitations of space, we're unable to do more here than acknowledge the stalemate.

intentions of the performer(s) are appropriately linked to Beethoven's act. Putting aside our earlier worries about creative discovery manoeuvres, we think that our idealism comes out ahead in so far as it involves a more direct story of the relation between performances and compositions. On our view, the relation is literally between the performance and the composition, whereas type theory captures the relation between performances and compositions only by paraphrasing our talk of compositions away in terms of compositional acts.

We can now provide an overall evaluation of the accounts under consideration. The best ontologies of compositions should meet at least the following two criteria. First, compositions are contentful in that they specify, in some manner and to some degree, that which a manifestation should manifest: call this constraint 'CONTENTFUL'. Second, compositions are entities sufficiently related to the concrete world in that they are creatable, spatiotemporally locatable, and able to interact causally with concrete objects (performers, performances, etc.). Call this constraint 'CONCRETE'.²⁴ Until now, the chief competitors for the crown have been type theory, according to which compositions are abstract sound structures, and materialism, according to which compositions are composed of (or coincident with) their manifestations. Here, we have introduced sophisticated idealism, according to which compositions are completed ideas for musical manifestation—ideas that are at once contentful, creatable, spatiotemporally located, and straightforwardly capable of engaging in causal interactions with concrete objects. Both materialism and idealism satisfy CONTENTFUL and CONCRETE. Type theory satisfies CONTENTFUL but not CONCRETE. Therefore, both idealism and materialism are superior to type theory.

Another constraint figures significantly, at least for some theorists—that manifestations are, as mentioned before, literally *of* compositions. Call this constraint 'OF-NESS'.²⁵ Both type theory and idealism straightforwardly satisfy OF-NESS. Materialism does not satisfy OF-NESS, because the materialist regards manifestations as parts of (or coincident with) compositions but not, strictly speaking, *of* them. That is, the relation between a manifestation and a composition, when that manifestation is literally *of* that composition, is a relation of *conformity* or *compliance*.²⁶ It admits of degrees of success, even failure. The relations upon which the materialist relies—parthood or coincidence—are simply the wrong kinds of relations when it comes to offering a proper understanding of the relation between manifestations and compositions. So, even if the materialist can tell an initially plausible story about linking manifestations with originary ideas, the ending of that story will suffer from an inadequate account of OF-NESS.

Sophisticated idealism thereby satisfies each of CONTENTFUL, CONCRETE, and OF-NESS. Type theory satisfies two of the three: CONTENTFUL and OF-NESS, but not CONCRETE. Similarly, sophisticated materialism satisfies CONTENTFUL and CONCRETE, but not OF-NESS. For those who attach significant weight to each of the three criteria, idealism wins the day. For those who weigh them differently, their

²⁴ On some accounts, abstract entities might satisfy CONCRETE. A more fitting name for the constraint might be 'RELEVANTLY-CONCRETE-LIKE'. We prefer our name as a matter of aesthetics.

²⁵ As mentioned, many jazz performances might be best thought of not as performances *of*, but as performances *from* compositions. For ease of presentation, we'll continue to speak just in terms of performances *of*, but it would be an easy extension of OF-NESS to allow it to pertain also to performances *from*.

²⁶ Or, in the case of performances *from* compositions, perhaps *suggestion* and *inspiration*.

ontology of choice is at best tied with idealism.²⁷ In sum, then, idealism emerges as either the *best* or the *tied-for-best* ontology of compositions.²⁸ Regardless of how one weighs one's criteria, idealism—heretofore dismissed out of hand—should be taken seriously. It deserves a place at the ontological table.²⁹

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²⁷ Another potential advantage of both sophisticated idealism and sophisticated materialism over type theory is the ability of the former two (and the inability of the third) to account for unmanifestable compositions. See again note 13.

²⁸ Does our defence of sophisticated idealism lead to a defence of even simple idealism? Suppose that ideas really are private entities 'in the heads' of particular thinkers. Such ideas would still be playable, in that intentional sound events could conform to their contents in causally appropriate ways. They would also be indirectly audible, through the direct audition of particular manifestations. A problem remains, however: if ideas are private entities 'in the heads' of particular thinkers, they are co-terminal with those thinkers. Our idealism allows compositions to outlast their composers, which we take to be a decisive advantage.

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