

What Is It to Compose a Musical Work?

The question which I deal with in this paper is often put this way: "Are musical works created or discovered?" Roughly, the core of the debate can be sketched in the following way:

Platonist: "Musical works are pre-existent and necessary entities. Thus, they must be discovered or selected rather than created. (For it is impossible to create something which already exists.) Thus, composing is discovering. The composer does not bring into existence what he composes."

Creationist: "Musical works are created. Thus, they cannot be pre-existent and necessary entities. (For it is impossible to create something which already exists.) Thus, composing is creating. The composer brings into existence what he composes."

The paper is divided into five sections: In section I, I shall make explicit some ontological presuppositions concerning the nature of the musical work which lay behind the whole debate. After these preliminaries, in section II, I shall outline in more detail the Creationist and the Platonist view, respectively. In section III, I shall distinguish the psychological concepts of creation and discovery from their ontological counterparts, and I shall argue that only the ontological ones are relevant in the present context. After that, in section IV, I shall consider and reject some current Creationist arguments which, on my view, fail to prove the point in question. Finally, in section V, I shall argue that there is not necessarily a conflict between the positions of the Creationist and the Platonist, if they are construed in an appropriate manner. The Creationist view that to compose is to create is compatible with the Platonist view that to compose is to discover, at least if creation is understood in a quite natural and common sense way.