



“Doing a Double Take: (Further) Against the Primary Sound Account of Echoes”

Jeffrey A. Hawley — University of Arizona

Theoretical Basis:

As noted by philosopher Robert Pasnau, “our standard view of sound is incoherent” at best (309). A quick perusal of how we discuss and represent sound in our day-to-day language readily highlights a number of inconsistencies. Sound might be described roughly as emanating from the location of its material source (the ‘crack of the snare drum over there’ *distal theory*), as a disruption somewhere in the space in-between the sounding object and the listener (the ‘longitudinal compression waves in the air’ *medial theory*), located with the hearer (the ‘inner sensations’ *proximal theory*), or perhaps as devoid of spatial characteristics at all (*aspatial theory*). Beyond these topographic ruminations on the location of sounds, even deeper disagreements arise around just what sorts of things sounds are. A broad array of theories treat sounds as events, as object-like particulars that travel through space, as properties of their sounding objects, etc.—with many subtle ontological variations springing up along the way.

The philosophical plot further thickens as we expand from defining the ontology and spatial position of simple primary sounds through to the phenomenon of echoes, with certain theories arguably faring better than others. We’ll focus here on Casey O’Callaghan’s formulation of sounds as disturbance events which bind primary sounds and their echoes together as one (*Sounds* 41, *Sounds - A Philosophical Theory* 126). In short, the claim that echoes are identical to their associated primary sound and are not distinct sounds in their own right. Described as the ‘*Primary Sound Account of Echoes*’ (‘PSAE’) in Gregory Fowler’s “Against the Primary Sound Account of Echoes,” the intricacies of this particular aspect of O’Callaghan’s theory of a primary sound’s connection to its echo bears greatly upon the workability of distal theories of sound in general (466).

Interdisciplinary Element:

In this session, I expand upon Fowler’s work by demonstrating instances where the PSAE fails to hold true, presented via novel thought experiments (and audio sample demonstrations) set within natural acoustic space (similar to O’Callaghan’s original formulations) as well as relevant

examples from the viewpoint of the non-philosophical domains of musical instrument performance, audio production, recording and sound reinforcement.

Thesis Statement — Research Aims:

What I seek to achieve in this presentation is to illustrate how O'Callaghan's PSAE fails when subjected to increased scrutiny across a broader range of echo scenarios, which in turn presents a significant issue for proponents of distal theories of sound.

Select References:

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