

Good ‘Cat’, Bad ‘Act’

Tim Juvshik

Penultimate Draft – Please Cite the Published Version
(*Philosophia* (2020): <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11406-020-00287-2>)

1. Introduction

Imagine three friends, Lucy, Maggie, and Sam, are walking along the beach and they see a bunch of driftwood wash up in front of them which is coincidentally shaped like C A T. They have the following exchange:

Lucy: “Oh look, it spells ‘cat!’”

Maggie: “We just saw it wash up. It doesn’t spell anything, it just happens to look like ‘cat’. If it’s a word it has to have been written by *someone*. That’s just a bunch of driftwood that washed up in the surf.”

Lucy: “Of course it spells ‘cat’, just *look* at it, that’s exactly how ‘cat’ is spelled: c-a-t.”

Sam: “Hey Lucy, how do you know it isn’t a misspelling of ‘act’ and the ocean just made a typo?”

Lucy: “Don’t be stupid, the ocean can’t make a spelling mistake.”

Maggie: “Yeah, but words can be misspelled so either that’s not a word or it could be a misspelling of ‘act’.”

Sam, getting tired of the exchange, suggests they go for mimosas.

This exchange raises the following puzzle: is the washed-up driftwood a word-token of ‘cat’, a misspelled token of ‘act’ or does it fail to be a word-token at all? Call this the *Individuation Problem*: what determines which type a token instantiates? The literature on words has tended to focus on individuating types, rather than tokens, so while the *Individuation Problem* is raised in the literature on the metaphysics of words, it is typically set aside.¹

¹ E.g. Wetzel (2009, 105-6), Hawthorne and Lepore (2011). Kaplan (1990) is an exception and offers an explicit answer to the Individuation Problem.

The problem arises because of three intuitive commitments which are jointly inconsistent. First, as expressed by Lucy, is the idea that for something to be a token of some type, it only needs to have certain *intrinsic* features relevant to the type. Second is Maggie's denial of Lucy's claim: for something to be a token of a type requires it to be *produced* in the right sort of way. Third, as expressed by Sam, is the idea that something can be a *malformed* token of some type. Call these the *intrinsic condition*, *etiological condition*, and *norm types*, respectively:

- (1) *Intrinsic Condition*: The only individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions on something's being a token of a given type is that it have certain intrinsic properties constitutive of the type.
- (2) *Etiological Condition*: A necessary condition on something's being a token of at least some types is that it must be produced or come into existence in the right sort of way.
- (3) *Norm Types*: Some types admit of properly and improperly formed tokens.

Each of (1)-(3) has some intuitive appeal, but the conjunction of (1) and (2) are obviously inconsistent. Assuming types exist – as many philosophers do – does the driftwood arrangement spell 'cat'? Some philosophers say no, since they think that the arrangement of driftwood didn't come about in the *right way* since it wasn't intentionally produced, thus adopting the etiological condition – Maggie's intuition. It might seem that an obvious solution to the driftwood puzzle is to reject (1) in favour of (2), and indeed, this is the general consensus in the literature on words.² Despite the *prima facie* appeal of (1) – *just look at it*, it looks just like the word 'cat' – brief reflection on the variety of word tokens militates against it. Words can be inscriptions, utterances, or raised bumps (Braille), so it looks like there are no intrinsic features of these tokens that they all share.³

Despite the general consensus in the word literature, some philosophers reject (2) in favour of (1). In the context of defending a platonist account of musical works as abstract types, Julian Dodd

² See e.g. Putnam (1981), Simons (1982), Kaplan (1990), Katz (2000), Hawthorne and Lepore (2011), and Irmak (2018).

³ Stebbing (1935) defends the orthographic or shape view of words, while Simons (1982) argues against it. From these considerations, Wetzel (2002, 2009) argues that what unites tokens as tokens of a given type is simply that they're all tokens of that types.

(2007, 34-5) and Nicholas Wolterstorff (1980, 86-7) adopt (1) over (2). However, they extend this view of musical works to types generally, including words, species, flags, elements, and artifacts. They thereby take the driftwood to be a genuine token of ‘cat’ since it has all the intrinsic features needed to be a token of that type, thus endorsing the intrinsic condition – Lucy’s intuition.⁴ However, Dodd and Wolterstorff also defend (3), taking some types to be *norm types* – types that can have properly and improperly formed tokens (Sam’s intuition). This includes musical works, words, flags, and species types. But the combination of (1) and (3) raises the issue brought out by Sam and Maggie in the dialogue: is the driftwood a proper spelling of ‘cat’ or an improper spelling of ‘act’? (1) suggests the former, but (3) allows for the possibility of the latter.⁵

My main claim is that the combination of (1) and (3) lead to some rather unintuitive and undesirable consequences which can be brought out in cases like the driftwood puzzle. In order to avoid these consequences, Dodd and Wolterstorff need to abandon either (1) or (3), and I’ll argue that, following the consensus in the literature on the metaphysics of words, rejecting (1) is preferable to rejecting (3). Thus, the aesthetics literature can learn a lesson from the literature on the metaphysics of words.⁶

The paper is structured as follows. In section 2 I discuss Dodd’s and Wolterstorff’s commitment to the combination of (1) and (3). In section 3 I argue that such a commitment leads to implausible and unintuitive consequences and that neither biting the bullet nor one strategy that Wolterstorff could pursue would ultimately be plausible responses. In section 4 I consider which of the two commitments – the intrinsic condition or norm types – should be rejected in order to avoid

⁴ See Wetzel (2009, 60-70) for criticism of both Maggie’s and Lucy’s intuitions.

⁵ As far as I’m aware, no one in the literature has appreciated the difficulty the combination of these theses leads to.

⁶ The aesthetics literature is far from being in agreement with Dodd and Wolterstorff on this point. Eaton (1969) argued early on in favour of (2) over (1), albeit in the context of poetry rather than music. In fact, Dodd and Wolterstorff seem to be in the minority here; the etiological condition is far more widespread than the intrinsic condition. As I’ll argue, the driftwood puzzle adds further support for (2).

these consequences and argue that on balance, (3) norm types, should be retained over (1) intrinsic types, before concluding in section 5.

2. Dodd and Wolterstorff on Types

Both Dodd and Wolterstorff defend a platonist account of musical works whereby a work of music is an abstract type of sound sequence event. Their views are largely similar.⁷ Musical works are abstract, and thus lack a spatial location, in order to explain their repeatability.⁸ They are also eternal (they exist at all times) and modally and temporally inflexible (their intrinsic properties don't change across time or under counterfactual scenarios).⁹

Abstract types are unstructured, but have what Dodd and Wolterstorff call a *property-associate* which determines the conditions a token of the type must meet in order to be a token of that type. Types are individuated by the intrinsic properties that their tokens must bear to be tokens of that type, not how those properties come to be instantiated. Examples of such intrinsic properties are having an A minor chord at the start of the first movement, having a token of the letter-type 't' followed by a token of the letter-type 'h' and followed by a token of the letter-type 'e' (for the word-type 'the'), being made of a rectangular piece of cloth with certain dimensions, coloured red, blue, and white in *this* particular way (for the flag-type The Union Jack), and so on (Dodd 2007, 83). No extrinsic properties, such as a particular etiology, are required.¹⁰ Further, both Dodd and Wolterstorff accept a plenitude of abstract types: for any metaphysically possible combination of properties, there is a property-

⁷ One principal difference is that Dodd (2007, 11-15) takes abstracta to be causally efficacious, while Wolterstorff (1970, 171-172) does not. Dodd's view is controversial, but see Friedell (2019) for a recent defense and see Juvshik (2018, 2020) for recent support of the more orthodox view that Wolterstorff takes.

⁸ For Dodd, abstracta are only distinguished by their lack of spatial location where normally they are taken to lack both a spatial and temporal location. See Christmann (2019) for a recent defense of this view.

⁹ Wolterstorff (1980, 89-90), Dodd (2007, ch. 2).

¹⁰ Although, as Hugly and Sayward (1981) argue, physical objects aren't *intrinsically* tokens, but are only tokens relative to a type, language or system. However, Dodd (2007, 77-78) argues that while work tokens must be relative to a type, they need not be relative to a language and thus we can have a word type without a language, though a word type might later enter into a new language in virtue of new patterns of use by speakers.

associate of some type corresponding to those properties. That's just to say that every possible type exists.¹¹

However, some types can have proper or improper tokens. Wolterstorff (1980, 56-57) introduces the notion of a norm type (or norm kind) to accommodate the seeming fact that say, works of music can be performed improperly or that word types can be spelt incorrectly, but still be tokens of their respective types.¹² The general idea is that certain features are *normative* within a type, so that to be a *properly* formed token a token must have all of the normative features. By contrast, an improperly formed token is missing some of the normative features of the type.¹³ Some performances of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* are improper tokens insofar as they have some wrong notes. As long as a performance isn't missing too many of the features normative within the work, then the performance is a genuine, albeit improper, token of the type (Dodd 2007, 32-33).

Dodd and Wolterstorff are thus committed to both of the following:

- (1) *Intrinsic Condition*: The only individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions on something's being a token of a given type is that it have certain intrinsic properties constitutive of the type.

- (3) *Norm Types*: Some types admit of properly and improperly formed tokens.

Dodd and Wolterstorff take the arrangement of driftwood to be a genuine token of 'cat', since it satisfies the *intrinsic condition*. But they must say that the arrangement of driftwood is also a bad token of 'act', given their commitment to *norm types*. (1) and (3) seem to yield conflicting judgements about which type the driftwood arrangement is a token *of*, so Dodd and Wolterstorff are faced with the *Individuation Problem*. Is the arrangement of driftwood a properly formed token of 'cat' or an improperly formed token of 'act'?

¹¹ Wolterstorff (1980, 46ff.), Dodd (2007, 60ff.).

¹² Dodd and Wolterstorff both use 'type' and 'kind' interchangeably (Dodd 2007, 32n19; Wolterstorff 1980, 194).

¹³ Kaplan (1990) and Wetzel (2009, 60 and n.5) also recognize the normativity of certain types, especially word-types.

It may be thought that the driftwood puzzle, being about words, doesn't apply to the views of Dodd and Wolterstorff since they're concerned with musical works. However, a similar case to the driftwood can be constructed for musical works; indeed, both Dodd and Wolterstorff offer such a scenario. Wolterstorff argues that "an occurrence of 'Greensleeves' might be brought about by the wind whistling through the rocks of Bryce Canyon; and as a corollary, a person might hear 'Greensleeves' without the occurrence that he hears being produced by performing or playing." (1980, 86). Similarly, Dodd writes that

Suppose, by some gigantic fluke, a sound-sequence were produced naturally (perhaps by the wind rattling through an empty house) that was recognizable as a note-for-note facsimile of the sounds indicated by Marsalis' score for *In This House, On This Morning*. Would not this also count as an instance of the work? To my mind, there is no harm in treating such a pattern of sounds as a genuine token of *In This House, On This Morning*. (2007, 34)

Thus, on their view, musical works can be tokened before they are composed because the abstract type exists at all times and composition is just creative discovery of the type. That is, they reject (2), the etiological condition.¹⁴ Such patterns of sounds are thereby tokens of the respective musical types. Moreover, given their commitment to norm types, a naturally occurring sound sequence that was note-for-note similar to *In This House, On This Morning* but had several wrong notes would count as an *improper* performance of the work.

Both Dodd and Wolterstorff are clear that their views generalize from musical works to other kinds of types. Dodd (2007, 33ff., 50-53, 77-86) frequently uses word-types as examples and argues that "types surely form a unified ontological category" so that what applies to word-types applies to all types (2007, 53). Dodd takes his view to apply to types as diverse as the Tango (2007, 49), species like the Polar Bear and Daffodil, flags such as the Union Jack (ibid., 38), cars such as the Ford

¹⁴ See especially Dodd (2007, 112ff.) for a defense of composition as creative discovery.

Thunderbird as well as other artifact kinds like the Jet Engine (ibid., 68-69),¹⁵ and other repeatable artworks as such as films (ibid., 15-16). Similarly, Wolterstorff (1980, 46ff.) argues that repeatable entities (types/kinds) exist so long as there's a property-associate determining the conditions that their tokens must meet.¹⁶ This applies as much to words and other repeatable entities as it does to music (1970, 235-236). As a result, Dodd and Wolterstorff face the driftwood puzzle (or the wind puzzle, if you prefer, but I'll focus on the former).¹⁷

Given a commitment to both *Norm Types* and *Intrinsic Types*, how do we solve the *Individuation Problem*? In the case of misspelled words that are intentionally produced we have an easy answer: they're tokens of the word-type that their author or utterer intended to produce so long as they don't lack too many of the features normative within the type. If I intend to write 'cat' but write 'catt' instead, this seems like an improper token of the type 'cat', but if I instead write 'koahht' this doesn't seem to be a token of 'cat', improper or otherwise. Those who, like Dodd and Wolterstorff, adopt the view that tokens of norm types need not be intention-dependent find themselves in a difficult position: which types are such tokens types of? Next, I'll show how answering 'both' leads to unintuitive and implausible consequences.

3. Consequences of Norm Types and the Intrinsic Condition

Dodd and Wolterstorff need an answer to the driftwood puzzle. The conjunction of the intrinsic condition and norm types entails that the driftwood arrangement is both a proper token of 'cat' and an improper token of 'act'. But couldn't Dodd and Wolterstorff simply bite the bullet and say that any given token can be a token of multiple, distinct types? In fact, when introducing the naturally occurring

¹⁵ The example of the Ford Thunderbird is originally Levinson's (1980, 81), also introduced in the context of a theory of music.

¹⁶ For Dodd as well, this just follows from their commitment to a plenitude of types and their forming a unified ontological category.

¹⁷ Since word tokens can be utterances, we can construct a similar wind puzzle but with word tokens. All the same considerations apply; the case of words and works of music are parallel.

token of ‘Greensleeves’, Wolterstorff seems to accept this view: “it is possible for two distinct works to share some of their examples. Indeed, it is possible for them to share all their examples. This is so because a sound-sequence occurrence which has enough of the properties required for a correct (or indeed incorrect) occurrence of work W might also have enough to be an occurrence of a distinct work W^* ” (1980, 87).¹⁸ While Dodd doesn’t seem to discuss this issue, it seems a simple way to deal with the driftwood puzzle.

However, I don’t think Wolterstorff appreciates the consequences of this view. Given the plenitude of abstract types that Dodd and Wolterstorff accept, this response entails that there’s a vast number of word-types tokened by a single arrangement of driftwood. The arrangement of driftwood is a token of ‘cat’ and an improper token of not just ‘act’ but any relevantly similar word-type like ‘hat’, as well as words of other languages or words that have not yet been introduced into a language. Similarly, a correct token-performance of *Moonlight Sonata* is also an improper token of multiple other works, all of which we hear when we hear the single performance. Granted, because Dodd adopts the view that at some point the departure from the intrinsic structure of the type results in a failed token rather than an improper token, he’s able to place *some* limits on how many types any single token can be a token of.¹⁹ However, there’s still a counterintuitively large number of candidate types that are similar enough to one another for any given token to instantiate.

But this strikes me as absurd. When we hear a musical work performed we generally take ourselves to be hearing a single work. Imagine a case like Wolterstorff imagines, where a performance of one work W is done so poorly that the orchestra played something sonically similar to some other work W^* . We wouldn’t tell the conductor that despite attempting to conduct W , she actually conducted W^* . The same applies to word-types: I hear or read a good ‘cat’ not a bad ‘act’, let alone a

¹⁸ Wetzel (2009, 59) also entertains this idea.

¹⁹ Dodd (2007, 32-33).

bad ‘hat’, ‘pat’, ‘sat’, ‘mat’, ‘fat’, ‘tat’, ‘bat’, or whatever else. The absurdity is perhaps most acute in the case of flag-types. It entails that a properly formed Belgian flag is simultaneously an improperly formed German flag in virtue of the stripes being vertical rather than horizontal and slightly out of order. Or consider a properly formed Polish flag: it has two horizontal stripes, the bottom red and the top white. This is also an improperly formed Indonesian flag, proper tokens of which have a red stripe on top and a white stripe on the bottom. These examples can be easily multiplied.²⁰ I do not experience a bad Indonesian flag every time I see a good Polish flag. To bite the bullet here is to radically depart from our practices surrounding various kinds of types. With words, music, and flags we don’t experience (read, hear, see) a plethora of distinct types by interacting with a single token. Accepting that tokens can instantiate multiple types is just to deny that there is a tension between norm types and the intrinsic condition, but it doesn’t seem like a plausible way of avoiding the difficulty.

In order to avoid this counterintuitive result, Dodd and Wolterstorff could amend the intrinsic condition such that there is an etiological condition but only on *improper* tokens. They could claim that anything that has all the normative features within a type is a proper token of that type but to be an improper token of some type requires that there be a failed intention to produce a correct token of that type. The arrangement of driftwood is only a properly formed token of ‘cat’ not an improperly formed token of ‘act’. If I write ‘catt’ then *this* is an improperly formed token of ‘cat’ but only because I intended to inscribe ‘cat’ and failed. If Dodd and Wolterstorff were to go this route, I take the appeal to intentions to be necessary, since it’s otherwise not clear what would constrain the improper tokens.

This response seems *ad hoc*. It makes the conditions for being a token of a type disjunctive – if the token is intentionally produced, then the intention can fail and if the token was non-intentionally produced then it can only be properly formed – and *only* to avoid the *Individuation Problem*. If Dodd and Wolterstorff think that tokens of music- or word-types don’t need to be the product of an

²⁰ E.g. the Andorran, Romanian, and Chadian flags; the flags of Italy, Ireland, Bulgaria, and Hungary, etc.

intention to produce a token of that type, then this arbitrarily constrains their view simply to account for improper tokens.

Further, this doesn't fully avoid the problem, since it leaves room for a given token to be a *proper* token of multiple types. If the driftwood arrangement spelt 'read', then on this view it'd still be a token of multiple word-types, not only of English but any possible language. If I'm in a spelling bee and I'm asked to spell a certain word that's homonymous such as 'red' and 'read', then that token utterance is in fact a proper token utterance of both 'red' and 'read', which are sonically indistinguishable. But it's hard to see why we then allow participants to request the word be used in a sentence in order to disambiguate the word-type – there's a fact of the matter as to whether the token utterance is of 'red' or 'read' and the speaker's intention determines which. The participant would be making a *mistake* if they spelt 'read' but the utterer was uttering 'red'. The participant wouldn't get the correct answer by arguing that the token was ambiguous so their answer should be accepted. Platonist views like theirs don't sit easily with such 'default' views, since it seems arbitrary that a single mind-independent, eternal type is tokened 'by default' over its peers and moreover, it doesn't avoid having to postulate tokens of multiple types. Besides being *ad hoc*, a view like this isn't going to win any spelling bees.²¹

4. What to Give Up?

Given the unappealing consequences of accepting that tokens simultaneously instantiate multiple types, Dodd and Wolterstorff should abandon one of the two commitments which jointly lead to the

²¹ Wolterstorff (1980, 86-87) comes close to adopting this view since he acknowledges two distinct kinds of musical work, the A and B senses. These correspond to the etiological condition and the intrinsic condition, respectively. However, both senses of musical work are norm types, so on the B sense the driftwood puzzle is a problem. Acknowledging a second kind of musical work doesn't avoid this. Wolterstorff thinks both senses are present in our musical practices but admits that the A sense is more intuitive, but he conditionalizes (1980, 88) his view on the future possibility that some considerations be found that decide univocally in favour of either A or B.

driftwood puzzle, norm types and the intrinsic condition. But which to give up? I'll consider each in turn, but on balance things clearly support retaining norm types over the intrinsic condition.

Dodd and Wolterstorff could give up norm types. Tokens of a type are individuated by the intrinsic properties that determine the type and how those properties came to be instantiated is irrelevant. The arrangement of driftwood is a token of 'cat', however, types are no longer normative: there aren't any improper tokens of a type, just proper ones. Similarly, there are just tokens and non-tokens of musical works; any improper performance, no matter how small the deviation from the score, fails to instantiate the type.

A similar view is held by Nelson Goodman (1976) with respect to musical works as a response to his infamous 'wrong-note' paradox. Goodman thought that if we allow that a musical performance that plays a wrong note can still be an improper performance of a work, then one can construct a series of cases such that a performance of *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star* is actually an improper performance of *Moonlight Sonata*. Goodman thought this was absurd, so took *any* deviation from the score to be a failed token of the work.²² On such a view there are only tokens and non-tokens.²³ My inscription of 'catt' isn't an improper token of 'cat' – it isn't even a word.²⁴

This response vitiates the intuitive difference between a misspelt word or misplayed piece of music and a *failed* word or performance. Again, 'catt' is a misspelt attempt at 'cat' but 'koahtt' isn't a word at all. Such a view can't accommodate the phenomena of misspellings or musical works with slightly wrong notes or flags that don't match the exact specifications, such as an American flag with only 49 stars. Yet these are clearly distinctions that we want to retain – our practices surrounding

²² Although Goodman was a well-known nominalist, so wouldn't have had any truck with types.

²³ Note that Dodd (2007, 32-3) avoids Goodman's paradox by embracing vagueness between an improper token and a failed token. For Dodd, an improper token is missing a few features normative within the type and at some point the number of missing normative features is so great that the performance isn't an improper but a failed token.

²⁴ Moreover, an utterance of 'red' is simultaneously an utterance of 'read' since the token satisfies the intrinsic condition for both types. Thus, rejecting norm types leads back to tokens of multiple types.

words, music, flags, and other types clearly point to their being good and bad instances. Indeed, it's absurd to think that if I hear a performance of Beethoven's *Ninth* but with one wrong note, then I have failed to hear an instance of the work, but just a string of sounds that happens to be pretty close. Similar absurdities arise for other types: minor spelling mistakes frequently don't hinder our ability to identify the word the author was intending to inscribe. A misspelt word, so long as it isn't too misspelled, is clearly a token of the type.²⁵ Norm types are an important subkind of type and should only be rejected in the face of overwhelming theoretical pressure. This is not the case, so Dodd and Wolterstorff should retain norm types.

Instead, Dodd and Wolterstorff could reject the intrinsic condition on tokens. This strikes me as the best option since it allows us to retain the intuitive distinction between improper and failed tokens. Indeed, I think intuitions strongly suggest that the arrangement of driftwood on the beach isn't a *word* at all, just a highly improbable look-a-like. While I do feel *some* of the pull of Lucy's intuition, the etiological condition seems far more intuitive. Happening upon such a scene, one would naturally assume that the driftwood was intentionally arranged that way and thereby assume that someone was trying to write something. But if one later found out that it was just a freak result of the surf, then the driftwood wouldn't be viewed as a word at all.

This kind of reaction is familiar to many: you think you hear your name but it was just the wind whistling through a door that's partially ajar. One would be inclined to reason as follows: 'I thought I heard my name, but it was just the wind. I should shut the door'. Word-tokens are used to communicate, but absent their intentional production, they can't communicate anything – they lack meaning. One could appropriate the driftwood arrangements and use them to communicate, but as

²⁵ A similar issue arises with malapropisms – we understand the author's meaning even though they tokened the wrong word. See Davidson (1986) for discussion of malapropisms.

Marcia Eaton (1969) argues in a similar case, they wouldn't be word-tokens until they are so appropriated.²⁶

In the case of musical works, the intuition is the same: a random assortment of notes that results from the wind whistling through a forest doesn't produce a performance of *Moonlight Sonata*, just an eerily similar sound-sequence. It's more difficult to imagine, but in some cases one could try to appropriate such a sound-sequence as a musical work. Until some agent does so it's just a remarkably similar sound-sequence, not a token of *Moonlight Sonata*.

Part of what's motivating the intuition to deny the intrinsic condition is that musical works, words, and flags seem to be *artifacts*, that is, they are the result of an intention to make *one of those kinds of things*.²⁷ Dodd and Wolterstorff are denying this by taking the type to be mind-independent – the type is eternal and unchanging, so a musical work can be tokened before it's ever composed and a word can be tokened before it enters into a language. Their commitment to the intrinsic condition is a denial that all tokens of the type need to be artifacts. Performances and playings of a musical work are certainly artifacts in virtue of being intention-dependent, but it isn't *necessary* that tokens of such types be artifacts. The case of the driftwood and the wind whistling through the trees are putative instances of non-artifactual tokens of a word and musical work, respectively.

It's these intuitions that drive the plausibility of (2) – the etiological condition – and on balance (2) seems far more plausible than (1) as a condition on tokens. In the above cases, tokens all need to be intentionally produced to count as a token of a word-type, musical work, or flag or other artifact types. But the problems with the intrinsic condition aren't limited to the greater plausibility of the

²⁶ Eaton uses this to support the claim that a monkey hammering away on a typewriter wouldn't produce a poem, but the resulting string of letters can become a poem if someone intentionally presented it as such. We seem able to appropriate things for such uses as when I move a piece of driftwood from the beach to an art gallery and 'make' a sculpture or into my kitchen so as to 'make' a wine rack.

²⁷ As Irmak (2018) has recently argued in the case of words. For general accounts of artifacts along these lines see Hilpinen (1992), Bloom (1996), Thomasson (2003), and Evnine (2016). Evnine explicitly extends the account to languages.

etiological condition; there are independent problems with it as a condition on work tokens especially. Words can be inscription or utterances. I can write ‘cat’ or say ‘cat’ and both are tokens of the type. Further, the word-type can be tokened in other languages using completely different alphabets or pronunciations. The orthographic or structural account of words looks radically implausible.²⁸ As Hawthorne and Lepore write, “First, we wish to emphasize that we quite agree with Kaplan that a philosophically satisfying theory of words cannot proceed within a shape- or form-theoretic framework. Simple reflection on the fact that the same word can be written, uttered, signed, Brailled, or semaphored already renders such a conception dubious: after all, there is hardly anything shape- or form-like in common among an utterance, an inscription, a hand gesture, and a bump on a panel” (2011, 451). But other than orthography or structure, it’s hard to see what intrinsic properties all tokens of a word-type could share.²⁹ While structural accounts are more plausible for works of music or flags, it doesn’t appear to generalize to all types. Musical works often seem to be individuated by their sonic structure, just as novels may be individuated by their arrangement of words, but even this is highly contentious in the aesthetics literature. Indeed, many authors think historical context or instrumentation are necessary for a proper token of a musical work.³⁰ Moreover, assuming tokens of musical works are individuated by their sonic structure and can occur naturally, John Cage’s infamous *4’33”* – a work where the orchestra sits in silence for four minutes and thirty-three seconds – would be instantiated anywhere there’s an absence of sound for that length of time.³¹

²⁸ See Stebbing (1935) for an early version of this view.

²⁹ More plausible candidates like meaning are extrinsic and seem to rely on intentional production. Wetzel (2002, 2009) thinks all such accounts fail and argues that what all tokens have in common is merely that they’re tokens of that type, which is also an extrinsic property.

³⁰ E.g. Levinson (1980). In the case of literature, Borges’ *Don Quixote* is intended to show that historical properties are relevant in individuating works since otherwise identical sequences of words can have different aesthetic properties. Dodd, of course rejects this (2007, chapters 8 and 9).

³¹ Although Dodd (2018) would push back here since he’s recently argued that, while *4’33”* is individuated by silence (rather than environmental sounds), it isn’t a work of music, but a piece of performance art in the genre of conceptual art. However, if performance art is repeatable, as *4’33”* seems to be, then Dodd’s type-account would presumably apply to such cases as well.

The intrinsic condition has more plausibility as a condition on non-artifacts such as species- or mineral-types. Dodd and Wolterstorff take the Polar Bear and Gold to be species- and mineral-types, respectively. However, gold clearly isn't a norm type: there can't be any improper tokens of Gold, something is either gold or it isn't and this is determined entirely by its atomic structure. Dodd and Wolterstorff take species kinds like the Polar Bear to be norm types.³² Dodd (2007, 33) claims that a three-legged polar bear or an albino raven are genuine but improper tokens of their respective species-types. Such a claim raises legitimate concerns about ableism,³³ but even if we grant Dodd that species-types are norm types, a three-legged polar bear seems importantly different from an improperly performed musical work or a misspelt word. Since polar bears aren't artifacts, it's more plausible that their tokens need not have any extrinsic condition on their existence. Nonetheless, species-types are often individuated *extrinsically* by their evolutionary origin. Thus, for something to be a polar bear, it must have ancestors of a certain sort. On Dodd and Wolterstorff's view, an animal in a remote galaxy that is indistinguishable from a polar bear on Earth is a polar bear, since the token's etiology is irrelevant. Most biologists and many philosophers wouldn't take this to be a polar bear but an animal of a remarkably similar species.³⁴

Despite Dodd's claim that "types surely form a unified ontological category" (2007, 53) there seem to be important differences between kinds of types. Dodd himself already admits that some types are norm types and some aren't. This fact alone shows that their properties don't fully generalize. While the intrinsic condition looks plausible for chemical types like gold and maybe species types like

³² Wetzel (2009, 70, 119-120) also takes species kinds to be norm types.

³³ In what sense is a three-legged polar bear an 'improper' polar bear? Disabilities such as congenital deafness are now usually taken to be 'abnormal' only relative to whatever is normal in the population. Thus, a three-legged polar bear is only an improper polar bear because most other polar bear tokens have four legs. This seems importantly different from why a performance with a wrong note is an improper performance, since the normativity comes from, perhaps, the composer or the nature of the type.

³⁴ Although there are two distinct conceptions of species, the causal-historical conception that individuates species by evolutionary origin, and an intrinsic conception that individuates species by relations between organs ultimately governed by DNA. Dodd and Wolterstorff could adopt the intrinsic account to alleviate the implausibility.

the Domestic Dog,³⁵ it looks implausible for works of music, flags, cars, and the tango, and it looks downright absurd in the case of words. In these latter artifactual cases, the etiological condition seems appropriate and it may also be necessary for species types. Perhaps in some cases, such as musical works, the etiological condition and the intrinsic condition are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for being a token of a given music-type but we need to be aware of and responsive to, the vast differences between types.

Rejecting the intrinsic condition, at least as a *sufficient* condition on tokens, therefore seems like the best way to handle the driftwood puzzle.³⁶ Most if not all norm types seem to require some kind of extrinsic or etiological condition on their tokens. Tokens of norm types must have certain features normative within the type to be a properly formed token of that type, but they also need to be *produced* in the right way. With such an etiological constraint, we can see why the Belgian flag isn't a bad German flag, why spelling 'red' as 'read' commits a mistake, and how we can distinguish between an improper and a failed musical performance. The above considerations provide reasons for our intuitive judgements in the driftwood case. Maggie was right in the dialogue above: the driftwood is neither a good token of 'cat' nor a bad token of 'act', it isn't a word-token at all.

5. Conclusion

The driftwood puzzle shows the unpalatable consequences of adopting both (1) and (3) – the intrinsic condition and norm types. Since Dodd and Wolterstorff accept these two commitments, they need an answer to the driftwood puzzle. I've argued that they shouldn't bite the bullet in this case, as remarks of Wolterstorff's suggests he would be willing to do, because the consequences that result are so counterintuitive and implausible. Instead, I argued that Dodd and Wolterstorff should give up (1)

³⁵ This is Dodd's example, but domesticated animals are plausibly artifactual. See Sperber (2007).

³⁶ Kaplan (1990) rejects the intrinsic condition as neither necessary nor sufficient. For him, all that matters for something to be a token of a given word type is the intention behind it. See Hawthorne and Lepore (2011) for recent criticism of Kaplan's view.

while retaining (3) since the existence of norm types seems so firmly rooted in our linguistic, musical, and other practices. By contrast, the appeal of the intrinsic condition largely rests on a small subset of types – chemical types – without readily generalizing to other types, despite Dodd’s claim that types form a unified ontological category. Therefore, Dodd and Wolterstorff would be well served in following what has long been the consensus in the literature on the metaphysics of words: the intrinsic condition is implausible as a condition on word tokens. This equally looks to be the case for musical works and other repeatable artworks such as literature and film. Adopting an etiological constraint on tokens is an eminently plausible way of avoiding these difficulties.

However, the implausibility of both the consequences of biting the bullet and rejecting norm types largely rests on running afoul of our practices. But such concerns are unlikely to sway Dodd, who holds a realist approach to metaphysics which takes theoretical concerns as paramount and our practices as revisable in the face of tensions between theory and practice (Dodd 2012).³⁷ Thus, while I think Dodd and Wolterstorff should abandon their commitment to the intrinsic condition, given how fervently Dodd holds the view and his metaontological commitments, this is unlikely. As a result, Dodd (and Wolterstorff) will probably bite the bullet and accept the weird consequences that arise from the driftwood puzzle. While the consequences of their commitments are unattractive, they should be acknowledged.

Acknowledgements: Thanks to Patrick Grafton-Cardwell, Hilary Kornblith, Ned Markosian, Linda Wetzel, and the audience at UMass Amherst for helpful comments and criticisms.

References

Bloom, Paul. “Intention, History, and Artifact Concepts” *Cognition* vol. 60 (1996): 1-29.

Christmann, J. A. 2019. “The Power of Negativity: A Theory of Abstract Entities” *Philosophia*
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11406-019-00105-4>

³⁷ Contrast this with Amie Thomasson’s (2006) descriptivist approach to ontology (or what she calls easy ontology) whereby the project is largely one of codifying and clarifying our practices. Davies (2016) is an attempt at a middle ground between these two approaches whereby the commitments of our theories and our practices are balanced against each other in a process of reflective equilibrium.

- Davidson, Donald. "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs." In *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. Ernest Lepore, 433-446. Malden: Blackwell, 1986.
- Davies, David. "Descriptivism and Its Discontents" *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* vol. 75 no. 2 (2016): 117-129
- Dodd, Julian. "Defending the Discovery Model in the Ontology of art: A Reply to Amie Thomasson on the *Qua* Problem" *British Journal of Aesthetics* vol. 52 no. 1 (2012); 75-95.
- . "What 4'33" Is" *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* vol. 96 no. 4 (2018): 629-641.
- . *Works of Music: An Essay in Ontology*. Oxford: OUP, 2007.
- Eaton, Marcia. "Art, Artifacts, and Intentions" *American Philosophical Quarterly* vol. 6 no. 2 (April, 1969): 165-169.
- Evrine, Simon. *Making Objects and Events*. Oxford: OUP, 2016.
- Friedell, David. "Abstracta Are Causal" *Philosophia* (2019) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11406-019-00073-9>.
- Goodman, Nelson. *Languages of Art*. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1976.
- Hawthorne, John and Ernest Lepore. "On Words" *The Journal of Philosophy* vol. 108 no. 9 (September, 2011): 447-485.
- Hilpinen, Risto. "On Artifacts and Works of Art" *Theoria* vol. 58 (1992): 58-82.
- Hugly, Philip and Charles Sayward. "Expressions and Tokens" *Analysis* vol. 41 (1981): 181-187.
- Irmak, Nurbay. "An Ontology of Words" *Erkenntnis* DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10670-018-0001-0> (2018).
- Juvshik, Tim. "Abstract Objects, Causal Efficacy, and Causal Exclusion," *Erkenntnis* vol. 83, no. 4 (2018): 805-827.
- . "Relativity and the Causal Efficacy of Abstract Objects," *American Philosophical Quarterly* vol. 57, no. 3 (July 2020): 269-282.
- Kaplan, David. "Words" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes*, vol. 64 (1990): 93-119.
- Katz, Jerrold. *Realistic Rationalism*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2000.
- Levinson, Jerrold. "What a Musical Work Is" *Journal of Philosophy* vol. 77 no. 1 (1980): 5-28.
- Putnam, Hilary. *Reason, Truth and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

- Simons, Peter. "Token Resistance" *Analysis* vol. 42 no. 4 (1982): 195-203.
- Sperber, Dan. "Seedless Grapes: Nature and Culture." In *Creations of the Mind*, ed. Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence, 124-137. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Stebbing, Susan. "Sounds, Shapes and Words" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* Supp. Vol. no. 14 (1935): 1-21.
- Szabó, Zoltán. "Expressions and Their Representations" *Philosophical Quarterly* vol. 49 (1999): 145-163.
- Thomasson, Amie. "Debates about the Ontology of Art: What Are We Doing Here?" *Philosophy Compass* vol. 1 (2006): 245-255.
- . "Realism and Human Kinds" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* vol. 67 no. 3 (November, 2003): 580-609.
- Wetzel, Linda. "On Types and Words" *Journal of Philosophical Research* vol. 27 (2002): 237-263.
- . *Types and Tokens: On Abstract Objects*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009.
- Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *On Universals: An Essay in Ontology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.
- . *On Works and Worlds of Art*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980.