

Issues in Contemporary Metaphysics

Lecture 9: Persistence

1. The Problem of the Statue and the Lump



- (1) There cannot be two objects in the same place at the same time. [Premise]
 - (2) The lump of clay exists from 11am to 3pm. [Premise]
 - (3) The statue exists from 12am to 1pm. [Premise]
 - (4) The properties of the lump and statue are different i.e. they are not *qualitatively* identical [from (2) and (3)]
 - (5) They are not numerically identical [from indiscernibility of Identicals]
 - (6) The statue and the lump are in the same place at the same time [Premise]
 - (7) There are two objects in the same place at the same time [from (5) and (6)]
- Contradiction!

2. The Standard Account

SA simply says that there can be two objects in the same place at the same time. So, in the case of Statue/Lump, the paradox is just yielding a relatively reasonable metaphysical result. One that might not even require *any* adjustment to our folk ontological beliefs. So Premise (1) is false.

Problem one: There can be no superposition

You might think that superposition is impossible. Clearly I can't interpenetrate tables and walls. But maybe superposition isn't impossible

Example: Ghosts, sub-atomic particles

And maybe superposition is fine *in this context*?

Problem two: Double counting

There's just one object where a statue is! Not two! But is that a general case? Counting can be *context relevant*.

Example: Is there one object behind this lectern? Or 7×10^{27} objects?

Just as the latter is an odd context, but true; there being two objects there might be an odd context, but true.

Problem three: The Standard Objection to the Standard Account

Mereological coincidence occurs when x and y have exactly the same parts as one another. The statue and the lump (allegedly) have exactly the same parts. The sub-atomic particles that compose one, compose the other.

The first problem is a brute intuition that things with exactly the same parts must be identical. After all – what would make the difference between the two? This is called a commitment to *mereological extensionality*. But, I suppose, we could drop that commitment.

The bigger problem is one about *supervenience*. The Standard Objection is (roughly) that various properties supervene on the arrangement of your sub-atomic particles. So the arrangement of your particles at this moment fixes the properties you have at this moment. But yet the statue and the lump have *different* properties and the *same* sub-atomic particles composing them.

Example: Sortal properties; Persistence conditions; Aesthetic properties; Conscious properties (for non statue/lump analogous cases).

So if there were two objects, they would have different properties and the same particles composing them. So how's this meant to work? If the properties an object has supervene on the sub-atomic arrangement of parts, how can the statue and the lump have different properties? This objection is covered in the Olson reading. Also, it's covered in the Wassermann reading (where he argues *perdurantism* can't do any better)

3. Nihilism

The nihilists are meant to be able to get off the hook. They don't believe in statues *or* lumps. So they deny premises 2, 3 and 6. We spent a large portion of last week discussing nihilism. So we won't so much more except that this is another motivation for that thesis. And, similarly, a motivation for those closely related *eliminativist* theories.

4. Other Anti-Realisms

Naïve Anti-Realisms

We might say that in the statue/lump case there's only one object all the way through. So rather than saying there are two objects, the statue and the lump, there's just one. On the more naïve version, the theory is that when we shape the lump into a statue there is no *substantial change* (there is substantial change =_{df} something new comes into existence).

This is naïve because it seems implausible. We deny premise (3), but what cost this brings! Now we have to say that either: (i) no statue came into existence because *there are no statues*; or (ii) no statue came into existence because the lump is the statue. Given this second option, the lump became the statue. In the same way that a young child may become a man without there being substantial change. But this is implausible – surely the statue did not exist at that point, and *is* destroyed when it's crushed.

Burkean Dominant Sortal Theory

But a more sophisticated version might: Burke's *Dominant Sortal Theory*. On this view, we are anti-realists *not* about the statue, but (in a sense) about the lump of clay. Burke endorses *sortal essentialism*. That is, what *sort* of thing something is, it is essentially.

Example: Humans are essentially human; walruses are essentially walri; pandas are essentially pandas; statues are essentially statues etc.

This means that when the lump is shaped into a statue, it would become a statue. But it can't! It would have to be essentially a statue. So what happens is that the lump of clay *ceases to exist*.

So Burke thinks that you have one object, a lump of clay, that is shaped into a statue. That lump of clay then *ceases to exist* and is replaced by a statue. When the statue is crushed, *it* ceases to exist. It is replaced by another lump of clay. So Burke denies premise (2).

Note that Burke doesn't think that the clay magically vanishes and is replaced by new clay. The *bits of clay* stay in existence. That is, the bits of clay that *compose* the lump stay in existence. It's just the lump itself which ceases to be (and is replaced by a statue).

5. Deviant Identity

The last option we'll look at (which doesn't exhaust the possibilities) is deviant identity. We may start treating the identity relation in a way we otherwise normally wouldn't. For instance, we may *relativise* identity. We may relativise it to *sorts* or to *times*.

We'll concentrate on the type that relativises to *times*. That is that at one time *x* is identical to *y*; but at another time *x* isn't identical to *y*. So the statue is identical to the lump of clay *between 12 and 1*. But it isn't identical to the lump of clay at other times (as it doesn't exist!). How does this help? (remember, they *have* to deny one of the steps of the argument). *They deny Indiscernibility of Identicals, ergo the move from (4) to (5)*

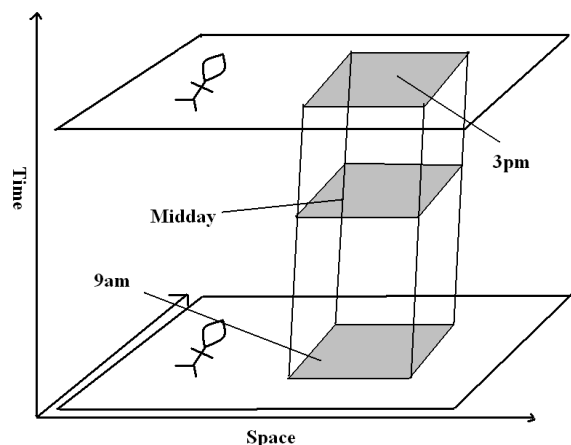
So what's the downside? These options are deeply unpopular. Most people say identity *isn't deviant*. For instance, if the statue *just is exactly the same thing as the lump of clay at any time* then how is it that *it isn't that self-same thing later on*. What part of 'that very thing' didn't you understand?! There's obviously a little more to it than that. But not much...

6. Perdurantism I: Temporal Parts

Objects have parts (unless you're a nihilist). I have a head, hands, feet etc. A car has wheels, a steering wheel, a crankshaft etc. They are *spatial parts*.

Maybe objects also have *temporal parts*. A temporal part would be a bit of extended not through space, but through time. So maybe I have a temporal part consisting of all of me throughout 1990. That part of me starts to exist in on 1st January 1990 and then ceases to exist on 31st December 1990. And if I lived to 80 then I would be composed of 80 such one-year long temporal parts.

Just as spatial parts come in different extensions, so do temporal parts. So a temporal part might be one year long (my '1990 temporal part'). But the temporal parts theorist thinks the are smaller parts as well. So I have a one day temporal part. And



my one year long temporal part is composed of 365.2425 one day long temporal parts. And so on. They get smaller and smaller and smaller. Indeed, many theorists think we have *instantaneous* temporal parts:

x is an *instantaneous temporal part* of y at instant t =df (i) x is a part of y at t ; (ii) x exists at, but only, at t ; and (iii) x overlaps every part of y that exists at t . (Sider 2001: 60).

Having an idea of what a temporal part is, we can now define *perdurantism*.

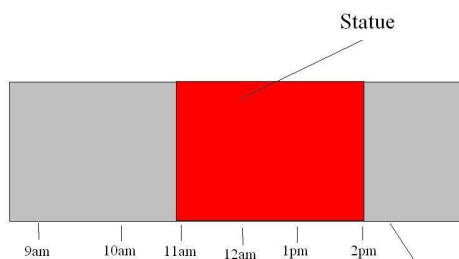
Perdurantism: At every instant that an object exists at, it has an instantaneous temporal part.

So if perdurantism is true, standing before you right now is an instantaneous temporal part of me.

It is sometimes called *four-dimensionalism* as I turn out to be extended in time. I'm a four-dimensional object, with three-dimensional instantaneous temporal parts. It is to be compared with *three-dimensionalism* or *endurantism*. So the SA, the Burkean theory, the nihilist theory, the temporary identity theory – they all *exclude* temporal parts. They're *endurantist* theories. Take 'endurantism' to simply mean that you *aren't* a perdurantist. As always, terminological problems abound, but this'll do for now.

7. Perdurantism II: Solving the Statue and the Lump

Perdurantism seems to say something similar to the Standard Account. It acknowledges that the statue and the lump *both* exist and are *both* different. But the statue is a *part* of the lump.



Statue is part of the lump doesn't occupy the same region.

How does this help? Well, the statue and the lump don't occupy one and the same region whereas (so the perdurantist says) they do according to the Standard Account. So premise (6) is false (see last lecture's handout for what those premises were).

Moreover, they can have different properties because they've got different *parts*. Recall the problem of coincidence was that the statue and the lump had exactly the same parts, and so had to have the same properties. But for the perdurantist they *do* have different parts – different temporal parts. So that explains the difference in their properties.

Problems

One problem is covered in the Wasserman reading. Here's another. Imagine a statue that pops into existence from nowhere. It remains for a while, and then God smites it from existence. That's all logically possible. Now we have the statue and the lump with *exactly* the same parts and in *exactly* the same region, and we are back to where we originally began.

8. Perdurantism III: Solving Cultural Prejudice

The normal thing is to endorse *both* universalism and perdurantism. Recall the yam, taytu, yowanna case. The perdurantist/universalist gets to say that the yam exists, *so too do the taytu and the yowanna*. They're just *temporal parts* of the yam. So it looks like it's the theory that can really avoid that kind of problem.