Replies

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Many thanks to Jonathan Lowe, Cian Dorr, and Ted Sider for their intelligent and challenging comments on Objects and Persons. It's a real honor that such good philosophers were willing to spend their time thinking about, and criticizing, my arguments.

I. Reply to Lowe

The arguments of Objects and Persons, Jonathan Lowe says, suggest that there are no helium atoms but, instead and at best, nucleons and electrons suitably arranged. Lowe doubts a physicist would be receptive to my "admonition" that there are no helium atoms. Indeed, says Lowe, it is "hubristic" for ontologists to tell the helium experts not to believe in helium atoms. "Philosophers shouldn't feel too comfortable about dictating to physicists in this rather highhanded fashion."

Lowe's invocation of Physics is a red herring. Lowe's objection should have nothing to do with physics in particular. For many types of expertise—the physicist's included, of course—seem to involve objects I eliminate, and which I eliminate without

myself being an expert in the relevant field. Unqualified to run an art museum, I consign paintings and sculptures to Non-Being. Is this humble ontology or, instead, hubristic highhandedness? I'm not sure what exactly a cricket wicket is even supposed to be; but I say that there aren't any. Is this simple ontology or, instead, Ugly Americanism? And so on.

So Lowe's objection is (or should be) quite general. But it is also mistaken. I do not attempt to admonish, or dictate to, the experts about their realms expertise. Cricketers can flourish in their craft without my advice and even without wickets, just so long as they have little bits arranged wicketwise. For the purposes of curating, microparts arranged sculpturewise are just as good as sculptures. And the physicist's (or chemist's) authority requires nothing more than nucleons and electrons (or more fundamental entities) arranged heliumwise. (Cf. pp. 8-12, 175-185)

Lowe says "'redundant causal power' sounds pretty much like a contradiction in terms." So it is not surprising that we find him defending the existence of artifacts like statues (as well as natural objects like helium atoms) on the grounds that their causal powers are non-redundant.

Suppose that Lowe is right. And so suppose we conclude that statues exist on the grounds that they have non-redundant causal powers. This implies only a comparatively small adjustment in my ontology. For Lowe's defense of statues leaves untouched—indeed seems to go along with—a much more fundamental and important conclusion I

defend regarding composite material objects, the conclusion that such objects must be causally non-redundant (pp. 114-116).

Of course, Lowe thinks that we get more than statues. If I read him aright, he thinks that most or all of the composita of folk ontology (and science) manage to be causally non-redundant. Moreover, he seems to concede that alleged objects sanctioned by neither folk ontology nor science—objects like the sum of his left foot and the Eiffel Tower—would be (if they existed) causally redundant. So, if Lowe is right, our folk and scientific ways of carving up the world correspond neatly to wherever novel causal punch is to be found. Again, if Lowe is right, there is a happy coincidence between folk-cum-scientific ontology and the causally non-redundant.

It's not just a happy coincidence; it's a stunning one. And I'm not buying it. For I think Lowe fails to defend adequately the claim that statues—along with all the other putative composita he embraces but I eliminate—have non-redundant causal powers.

Lowe's argument for the causal non-redundancy of statues trades on the claim that atoms arranged statuewise do not have the mass (or velocity or momentum) of the alleged statue. I agree with that claim. After all, if only atoms arranged statuewise strike the window, of course nothing with (for example) the shape or size or texture or color of a statue strikes the window. And so, likewise, if only atoms arranged statuewise strike the window, of course nothing with the mass (or velocity or momentum) of a statue strikes it.

But Lowe seems to think this obvious point implies that statues have non-redundant causal powers. For Lowe seems to reason thus: the statue's mass gives it some "causal power"; if the statue's constituent atoms don't have that mass, then the

statue has a causal power that its atoms lack; and so it has a non-redundant causal power; and so it is causally non-redundant.

Such reasoning is mistaken. 'Causally non-redundant' is a term of art, meant to describe just those objects that can avoid elimination by way of the Overdetermination Argument (pp. 79-80). It is an expression introduced to describe all and only those objects that are not mere overdeterminers. So to be causally non-redundant, and to exercise non-redundant causal powers, an object must cause some effects that are not caused by its parts. And—in reply to Lowe's main objection here—an object can be totally causally redundant even if it has causally relevant properties (such as mass, velocity, and momentum) that are not had by its parts or by anything else. (For example, the sum of Lowe's left foot and the Eiffel Tower—if it exists—presumably causes nothing not caused by its parts; yet it has a mass that none of its parts has.)

As Lowe closes out his comments, he says:

> [Merricks], it seems, would only be prepared to allow that the [composite] statue exists and has the macroscopic momentum ordinarily assigned to it [only if] it can't be explained why it has that momentum in terms of the properties and relations of its constituent atoms. Put that way, his requirement seems quite

bizarre, and to amount to much more than just the plausible requirement that bronze statues should "earn their keep" by doing some genuine causal work.[1]

I'm not sure what Lowe means by a statue's constituent atoms' "explaining" its momentum. So let me put my "requirement" into language I understand. A statue exists only if it causes things not already caused by its constituent atoms. It exists only if it is not a mere overdeterminer. It exists only if it is not wholly causally redundant.

This "requirement" is not an assumption or premise of Objects and Persons; it is, rather, a conclusion. I say that we should resist systematic causal overdetermination if we can. As Chapter Three shows, this leads us—by way of quite a bit of argument—to conclude that the only objects are those that are not causally redundant. Moreover, I consider a variety of puzzles that, I say, give us a good reason to eliminate statues (Ch. 2); I note that some of these puzzles do not support eliminating us given that we are not mere overdeterminers (Ch. 5). Thus the puzzles I consider support (rather than presuppose) that we should eliminate mere overdeterminers but embrace the causally non-redundant.

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[1] At one point, Lowe says that I endorse:

(1) Material objects have non-redundant causal powers.

In the passage just quoted, he says that I endorse:

(2) Material objects have causal powers that are not "explained" in terms of their parts.

Lowe seems happy to go along with the (1); but he finds (2) "bizarre." So presumably he intends these to be two distinct claims, rather than two ways of putting the same point. So he must think I defend two claims regarding objects and their causal powers. But I defend only one such claim, the claim that material objects are causally non-redundant.

II. Reply to Dorr

Cian Dorr concedes that I am entitled to the "claim [that] there are some possible cases in which the fact that some atoms compose a conscious being is not determined by their arrangement." But he objects: "Someone might accept this while holding that there are many other cases where the arrangement of some atoms does determine that they compose a conscious being." (According to Dorr, "the facts about the arrangement of some things [include] all the facts about their intrinsic properties and the spatiotemporal and causal relations among them.")

I think the most reasonable view about instances of supervenience is that they are somehow grounded or explained by a reduction or an analysis of the supervenient in terms of the subvenient. (I have in mind here only non-trivial supervenience; that 1+1=2 supervenes on the shape of my skull, but only trivially.) The claim to which Dorr concedes I am entitled shows that the existence of a conscious composite is not itself reducible to or analyzable in terms of any arrangement of atoms. So we should then conclude that the existence of a conscious entity never supervenes on the arrangements of atoms. So we should deny that there are many cases where the arrangement of some atoms does determine that they compose a conscious being.

According to Ted Sider—whom Dorr here defends—an object is conscious if and only if it is pseudo-conscious and not a proper part of a pseudo-conscious entity.[2] Moreover, according to Sider, many of my largish proper parts are pseudo-conscious. For example, Sider thinks I have a pseudo-conscious proper part that is smaller than I am by only a single atom, an atom in one of my fingers. Call that part my 'atom-complement'. I am conscious. My atom-complement (along with untold millions of my other largish parts) is merely pseudo-conscious. A single atom in a finger makes all the difference.

Keeping Sider's view in mind, consider the fact that whether something has the full and rich consciousness of an awake adult human person or, instead, the total lack of consciousness characteristic of a doorknob should not supervene on whether one has a single atom in a finger. Any view that implies otherwise implies that a trivial and intuitively irrelevant difference can make all the difference in whether an object is conscious; any view that implies otherwise is subject to the "irrelevant triviality" objection.

Although this is controversial, I am inclined to understand "pseudo-consciousness" as tailor-made to render Sider's view obviously immune to the irrelevant triviality objection. So let's assume that his view <u>is</u> immune to the irrelevant triviality objection, and obviously so. So, according to Sider, the difference between having and lacking a single atom in a finger can make only the <u>correspondingly trivial difference</u> between being conscious and being merely pseudo-conscious. So, according to Sider, the

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[2] My discussion of Sider and pseudo-consciousness in <u>Objects and Persons</u> was based on an unpublished paper, which has since evolved into Sider (2003). (Sider (2003) uses the expression 'conscious*' in place of 'pseudo-conscious'.) For more on this topic, see Merricks (2003).

conscious and the merely pseudo-conscious differ only trivially. Therefore, it seems to follow, the conscious and the merely pseudo-conscious do not differ with respect to phenomenology. Things seem to the merely pseudo-conscious just as they seem to the conscious. There is no difference between "what it is like" to be me and "what it is like" to be one of my merely pseudo-conscious parts.

This view is invulnerable to the irrelevant triviality objection. But this view is not believable. It is incredible that that there are untold millions who think (or pseudo-think) that they are conscious and who are right now wearing (pseudo-wearing?) my shirt. It is false that there are millions and millions of entities now sitting in my chair that are alike as far as consciousness is concerned <u>in every way except for having this or that atom as a part</u>. And if there are these beings who mistakenly think (or pseudo-think) they are conscious, how do I know that I am the lucky one, as opposed to one of the many pseudo-hopefuls? Given the odds, it seems like the belief (or pseudo-belief) that I am conscious is totally unjustified. (Cf. pp. 101-104 and Merricks, 2003)

Dorr says:

> Merricks's objections to [Sider's] view all depend on imputing to Sider the additional thesis that 'there is <u>no phenomenological difference</u> between the conscious and the merely pseudo-conscious' (p. 101). This really is a very odd thing for anyone to think. Surely we should all agree that without consciousness there is no such thing as "phenomenology"; so of course there is a "phenomenological difference" between any conscious being and any being that is not conscious. I see no reason for a proponent of Sider's view to hold this

thesis; without it, the view looks quite promising, and is immune to Merricks's objections.

Suppose, moved by Dorr, we insist that the pseudo-conscious have no phenomenology. Similarly, suppose we insist that there is nothing that it is like to be pseudo-conscious. Indeed, suppose we insist that—insofar as consciousness and phenomenology and subjective experience are concerned—the pseudo-conscious are just like doorknobs. Given all this, the view in question is immune to my objections to Sider. But given all this, the view implies that—because a single atom in a finger can make all the difference between being conscious and being pseudo-conscious—a single atom in a finger can make all the difference between having the subjective life of a doorknob and having that of a fully awake and conscious adult human being. Given all this, the view is refuted by the irrelevant triviality objection.

In the end, I think Dorr and Sider cannot avoid one or another horn of the following dilemma. On the one hand, suppose that being pseudo-conscious turns out to be very much like being conscious. Suppose that the difference between being pseudo-conscious and being conscious really is trivial, a difference that can sometimes consist in no more than having or lacking a single atom. If so, then Dorr and Sider are subject to my original objection to Sider. For it is not believable that I now share my chair and my thoughts with millions of people (or pseudo-people) who are—except for the most trivial of differences—like me in every mental way. This is the first horn.

On the other hand, suppose Dorr and Sider insist that none of my largish parts are anything remotely like me, at least not mentally. Suppose that they insist that the pseudo-

conscious have the inner life of doorknobs. Such a view avoids first horn of the dilemma. But when we add—as Dorr and Sider do—that whether one is conscious supervenes on the microphysical, this view falls upon the second horn. That is, this view runs afoul of the irrelevant triviality objection.

(Suppose—as I suggested above—that instances of non-trivial supervenience are always grounded or explained by a reduction or an analysis of the supervenient in terms of the subvenient. Then the irrelevant triviality objection is equivalent to the obvious claim that the difference between what it is like to be conscious and what it is like to be a doorknob is never reduced to or analyzed as the difference between having and lacking a single atom in a finger.)

Imagine a "consciousness continuum" with doorknobs at one end and us humans at the other. Some might object that my dilemma presupposes that the pseudo-conscious must be at one end of this continuum or the other. But, they might charge, we can undermine the dilemma by insisting that the pseudo-conscious are instead somewhere in the middle. I suppose the idea here is that the pseudo-conscious are dimly conscious, that the light of consciousness flickers faintly in them. But this position seems impaled upon both horns of the dilemma. For it's not believable that I contain within me an army of drowsy half-conscious dimwits; nor is it true—if I may be forgiven a mild boast—that the only mental differences between one such dimwit and me consist in my having a single atom in a finger.

Dorr objects that my arguments commit me to the following claim, a claim he rejects:

> CP: If the facts about the arrangement of some atoms do not determine whether they compose something, then the microphysical facts do not determine whether they compose something.

I think CP is true. I don't feel the force of Dorr's objections to it. (And I'm puzzled by his invocation of van Inwagen, since nothing van Inwagen says implies the denial of CP.) CP seems right to me.

Given what Dorr means by 'arrangement', CP would be false only if whether some atoms composed something supervened on facts about their microphysical environment. With this in mind, suppose O has atoms $A_1...A_n$ as parts. Then surely <u>having all and only $A_1...A_n$ as atomic parts</u> is an <u>intrinsic</u> property of O. After all, O's other intrinsic properties, such as its shape, supervene on the parts it has (and their arrangement). But, as Dorr seems to agree, intrinsic properties supervene locally or not at all. Therefore, <u>having all and only all $A_1...A_n$ as parts</u> does not supervene on facts about O's microphysical environment. I think this supports (even though it does not entail) that whether exactly $A_1…A_n$ compose something does not supervene on facts about their microphysical environment.

Dorr says that my arguments imply that:

> ...the microphysical facts do not suffice to determine that my finger-complement atoms do not compose a conscious being. In other words, there is a possible world microphysically just like this one in which my finger-complement atoms compose a conscious being...

Dorr objects that there is no such world, that the possibility implied by my arguments is no possibility at all. Dorr rightly adds that we know that our atoms arranged finger complementwise, currently attached to a finger, do not compose a conscious being. But he worries that we would not know this if it were possibly false.

There are many possibilities—some far weirder than the one that concerns Dorr—that we know are not actual. And we know these are not actual even if we can't explain how we know this. I don't think Dorr's example differs relevantly from them, either with respect to possibility or with respect to our knowing they are not actual.

For example, there is a possible world where every supposed human being but you has an empty skull. In this world, let us add, the empty-headed humans—better, the atoms arranged brainless-human-organismwise—have no conscious experience, yet behave, or seem to behave, in exactly the way their more fortunate stand-ins behave in this world. But this possibility notwithstanding, you know your friends and family members and colleagues have brains and are conscious. And so do I.

It is metaphysically possible that the world came into existence five minutes ago, complete with misleading memories and other "traces of the past." You know this didn't happen; and so do I. Something's being merely possible doesn't mean we have to worry about it.

And finally, perhaps there is a possible world where every caused event is systematically overdetermined. (Perhaps in some such world this is a result of a staggering coincidence.) But, again, I know that our world is not like this, our world is not a world of systematic causal overdetermination. And I hope you agree.

Chapter Four argues that because the existence of an object with causally efficacious conscious mental properties does not supervene on the microphysical, we should deny microphysical causal closure. We should deny, that is, that every microphysical event has purely microphysical causes, causes to which conscious entities are causally irrelevant. But Dorr is not convinced by those arguments. He objects that "whether facts about consciousness supervene on microphysical facts seems to be more or less irrelevant to" whether the microphysical is causally closed.

I could respond to Dorr here by emphasizing one or another point defended in Chapter Four. But instead, I want to reply with an argument that I did not give, but definitely should have given, in the book. That argument starts by asking us to pretend something. Let's pretend that there are ghosts causing many microphysical events. Moreover, let's pretend that the actions of the ghosts do not supervene on microphysical doings.

Causal closure of the microphysical, given these ghosts, would of course imply systematic overdetermination. But it would also imply something even worse. It would imply bizarre coincidence on a staggering scale. It would imply that, without exception, whenever one of the ghosts causes a microphysical event, that very microphysical event

just happens to also have a microphysical cause. Surely, if we believed that these ghosts caused microphysical events, we'd have an overwhelming reason to deny microphysical closure.

Suppose, as I argue, that the existence of objects with mental properties does not supervene on the microphysical. And suppose that those objects, in virtue of their mental properties, cause some microphysical events. Then the claim that, without exception, such microphysical events are also caused by other microphysical events, to which the objects with mental properties are causally irrelevant, would imply more than overdetermination. It would imply bizarre coincidence on a staggering scale. If the existence of an object with mental properties that cause microphysical events does not supervene on the microphysical, we have an overwhelming reason to deny that the microphysical is causally closed. (Cf. Sider's discussion of the "Coincidence Objection" to systematic overdetermination)

Suppose that property P would supervene on more fundamental properties $Q_1...Q_n$. And suppose that anything an object would cause in virtue of having P, that object or some other thing or things (such as its parts) would already cause in virtue of having $Q_1...Q_n$. We should avoid property-causal overdetermination. So we should deny that any object does cause anything in virtue of having P. That is, we should deny that any object causes anything in virtue of having a causally redundant property.[3]

[3] This goes beyond positions defended in Objects and Persons. But in the book I do argue that many alleged composite events should be eliminated, lest we face systematic

There are at least two ways to go about denying this. The first is to endorse "the sparse theory of properties," according to which the only properties are "fundamental." Roughly, fundamental properties are just those properties needed to have an appropriate supervenience base for all the truths about the world. Fundamental properties might be causally efficacious (e.g., having negative charge) or they might be epiphenominal (e.g., existing or being prime). But, let us add explicitly to this theory, no causally efficacious fundamental properties are causally redundant. Perhaps "ideal physics" will tell us what most of the causally efficacious fundamental properties are. But—in light of Chapter Four's arguments—some are not physical at all. Some are conscious mental properties. [4]

A second strategy for denying that objects cause things by having causally redundant properties is to endorse "the two-tiered theory of properties." Unlike the sparse theory, the two-tiered theory does not say that the fundamental properties are the only properties. But it does say that all causally efficacious properties are fundamental.

The two-tiered theory is therefore "inegalitarian." Inegalitarian theories of properties are familiar. For example, according to David Lewis, negative charge—a fundamental property—might be a genuine universal; but not so for the property of "having been slept in by George Washington" (1986, 67). Interestingly enough, Lewis says that the properties that would be picked out by universals are "the ones relevant to

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event-causal overdetermination. And I also noted that similar reasoning has been applied to properties in the philosophy of mind, and could probably be fruitfully exploited elsewhere (see pp. 81-82). So assuming for the sake of argument (and as Dorr's final objection requires) that property-causation is a genuine form of causation, the moves made here are a natural extension of the argument of the book.

[4] I allow for epiphenominal properties but not for epiphenominal macrophysical objects. As I say in the book, for macrophysical objects, to be is to have causal powers. But an exceptionless causal-power requirement doesn't seem appropriate for, say, numbers or sets—or properties (see p. 81).

causal powers" and he seems to suggest that the others are "causally irrelevant" (1999a, 13). And it is plausible that negative charge is genuinely causally efficacious, but not having been slept in by George Washington.

At any rate, it should be clear the two-tiered theory has the resources to block systematic property-causal overdetermination. So does the sparse theory. Thus either is acceptable. Let's call their disjunction "the sparse theory of causally efficacious properties" or, for short, "the sparse-causal theory."

The main motivation for the sparse-causal theory is that it blocks systematic property-causal overdetermination. But there are other reasons to find it attractive. Let me here note two. First, a theory of properties should explain why, for example, I did not cause the Bulls to win their most recent NBA championship in spite of my having been such that Jordan steals the ball from Malone. The sparse-causal theory does explain this. For if there were such a property as being such that Jordan steals the ball from Malone, it would surely be non-fundamental and supervenient. Therefore, according to the sparse-causal theory, either there is no such property at all or, instead, there is such a property but it is epiphenominal.

Another motivation for the sparse-causal theory begins with this comment from Lewis:

> It reeks of double-counting to say that here we have a dishpan, and we also have a dishpan-shaped bit of plastic that is just where the dishpan is, weighs just as much as the dishpan weighs (why don't they weigh twice as much?), and so on (1986, 252).

Lying behind Lewis's parenthetical query seems to be the general principle that a scale registers the sum of the weights of each of the objects placed upon it. Obviously, this principle makes trouble for an ontology of dishpans co-located with dishpan-shaped bits of plastic. But the principle is a threat to more than just allegedly co-located objects. It seems to make trouble for any composite object. For consider a forty-pound child placed upon a scale. One of the objects on the scale—the child—has a weight of forty pounds. Naturally enough, his parts are also on the scale. Let's suppose that the sum of the weights of his smallest parts is forty pounds. Given the general principle—and adding up the weights of the child and each of his smallest parts—the scale should register (at least) "eighty." But of course it doesn't.

Maybe we can save the general principle. And maybe we can also explain why the scale registers "forty." Adjust the general principle so that it claims only that a scale registers the sum of the causally efficacious weights of each of the objects placed upon it. Given the sparse-causal theory, these will all be fundamental properties. (For ease of exposition, let's ignore the fact that masses, not weights, are fundamental.) Add, speculatively, that a person is composed of simples. Then, presumably, it will be the person's simples—and no other parts of the person—that exemplify fundamental physical properties. And so only the person's simples exemplify causally efficacious weight properties. If so, then the general principle may be true. For it may be that the sum of the weights of the child's constituent simples is forty pounds.

So much for motivating the sparse-causal theory. Let me now explain its relevance to Objects and Persons. You throw me through the window. But—so I said in

Chapter Six (§II)—I shatter the window only indirectly, by mentally causing my atoms to shatter it. My atoms shatter the window directly, in virtue of their causally relevant physical properties. This might seem implausible. For, one might object, if I am thrown through the window, then surely I directly shatter it in virtue of my causally efficacious macrophysical properties, properties such as my mass. (Let 'macrophysical properties' be the physical properties of a macroscopic object, such as you or me.)

I respond to this objection in the book. And I stand by what I said there. But I am also happy to add a further response. That response is that, given the sparse-causal theory, there are no causally efficacious macrophysical properties. (I assume macrophysical properties would not be fundamental.) So, obviously enough, I have no causally efficacious macrophysical properties. And so it follows that I do not shatter the window in virtue of having macrophysical properties. If I cause the window to shatter by having any properties at all, I do so in virtue of having mental properties.

We can now see that, in reply to Dorr's final question, a composite human being does not cause anything by having straightforwardly macrophysical properties. For, given the sparse-causal theory, either there are no such properties or they are epiphenominal. But Dorr thinks there is trouble with this reply. He objects that denying that we cause things by having such properties...

> ...conflicts with a piece of common sense which Merricks is very concerned to respect: the claim that people can be seen. As Merricks recognizes, in order for one to see something, it must be a partial cause of one's visual experience. But obviously not just any causal relation to visual experiences is enough... What is

> required, it seems, is that the object seen should cause one's visual experiences by having certain visually detectable properties: colors, shapes, textures, etc. If this is right, the claim that people don't cause anything to happen by having straightforwardly physical properties will force us to conclude that people are invisible.

In light of the arguments above, I deny that we are perceived by causing perceptual experiences in virtue of having straightforwardly macrophysical properties. Nominalists join me in denying this. And so will believers in any sparse theory of properties that eliminates properties like having a humanoid shape. But none of us should concede that we are invisible. We should, however, tell a story about what it means to be seen. Here is mine: Someone is seen if she causes her constituent atoms to appropriately cause visual experiences of her. (If I could spell out 'appropriately cause', I'd have a substantive theory of perception.)

It might sound odd to say that each of us causes our constituent atoms to cause visual experiences. But all I mean by this is that each of us causes his or her atoms to be distributed in a certain way, which in turn causally affects the sort of visual experiences that those atoms cause. (For example, I intentionally raise my hand, causing my atoms to cause you to have the visual experience of a human with a raised hand.) I am not causally irrelevant to whether my atomic parts cause particular visual experiences. (See pp. 146-155)

Some might charge that, on my view, people are seen only "indirectly," by way of seeing something else. (If so, I'd arguably be no better off than the substance dualist who

says that immaterial people are "seen" by way of first seeing their bodies.) I deny the charge. After all, no one can see my constituent atoms, for they are too small; thus—obviously enough—no one sees me by way of first seeing my constituent atoms. Indeed, I say that the most direct way for a person—or for any visible object—to be seen is for that object to cause its atomic parts to appropriately cause visual sensations of it.

We have in all this the makings of a new argument for the metaphysics I defend. For I can imagine someone coming to accept the sparse-causal theory of properties before thinking about the positions defended in Objects and Persons. I can imagine someone coming to believe, for example, that the only real properties are the fundamental ones, and coming to believe this without having considered my arguments against chairs and baseballs. But once one has accepted the sparse-causal theory, one thereby acquires compelling reasons to accept the two central claims of Objects and Persons.

To see why I say this, combine the sparse-causal theory with the (I insist) obvious truth of mental causation. It follows that mental properties are fundamental. And this implies that the existence of objects with mental properties does not supervene on microscopic doings. It also implies that objects with causally efficacious mental properties are not mere overdeterminers. Thus we have one of the central claims of the book.

Moreover, even if they exist, baseballs and statues and rocks exemplify no fundamental properties, aside from presumably causally inefficacious properties like existing. So—given the sparse-causal theory—baseballs (etc.) would exemplify no causally efficacious properties. So they would cause nothing at all. But if they did exist,

surely they would cause something. So they do not exist. Thus the second central claim of the book.

III. Reply to Sider

As Ted Sider notes, one of my arguments involving overdetermination is "epistemic." And Sider says:

> ...the epistemic argument is a reasonable one. But let us be clear about one thing. The epistemic argument is not an argument against the existence of non-living macro-entities. It is only an argument against one argument for those entities. It ... only shows that such an ontology cannot be supported merely by the simple causal argument that non-living macro-entities must be postulated as causes of our sensory experience.

Sider takes the epistemic argument to undermine only the "simple causal argument," an argument defended by few (if any) philosophers. But the epistemic argument's target is not the rarely (if ever) defended simple causal argument; indeed, its target is no argument at all. Instead, it aims to discredit all our perceptual evidence for statues, baseballs, rocks, etc.

To begin to see how the epistemic argument works, consider the following:

(I) We have no good perceptual evidence that—in addition to my neighbor's dog

and the tree in my backyard—there is a physical object composed of exactly (at one level of decomposition) that dog and that tree.

Some philosophers believe in arbitrary sums. But none of these philosophers would say that perception is what justifies their belief that, in addition to the dog and the tree, there is also a further object they compose: "the dog-and-tree." None would say, for example, that their belief in that further object is justified because they can hear it barking at a cat while creaking in the wind. (I) is true; (I) is even uncontroversial.

An important point in all this is that the dog-and-tree, if it exists, is a mere overdeterminer. Maybe the dog-and-tree does cause you to hear barking and creaking. But what you hear is not a good reason to believe that the dog-and-tree exists in addition to the dog and the tree. For even if there were no object composed of the dog and the tree, you'd hear the barking and the creaking all the same.

Even if there were no dog-and-tree, your perceptions of "it" would be the same, caused by the dog and the tree working in concert. And even if there were no statues, our perceptions of "each statue" would be the same, caused by atoms arranged statuewise working in concert. A statue (if it exists) overdetermines "statue" sensory experiences in exactly the same way that the dog-and-tree (if it exists) overdetermines "dog-and-tree" sensory experiences. Thus I endorse:

(II) Insofar as perceptual evidence is concerned, the question of whether a statue exists (in addition to atoms arranged statuewise) is analogous to the question of whether the dog-and-tree exists (in addition to the dog and the tree).

On the basis of (I) and (II), I conclude:

> (III) We have no good perceptual evidence that—in addition to atoms arranged statuewise—there is a physical object composed of exactly (at one level of decomposition) those atoms.

Because of (III), I say that our perceptual reasons for believing in statues are no good.

You gaze upon the Emerald City. Its buildings appear to be green. You are then informed that your glasses have green lenses. Thus you learn that the buildings would appear green to you even if they were some other color. And so you are no longer justified in believing that the buildings are green. Let us say that your belief about your glasses <u>defeats</u> any justification, based only on your "green building" sensory experiences, for your belief that the buildings are green.

Similarly, once a perceiver realizes that her perceptual experiences of statues would be the same whether or not statues existed, it seems clear that those experiences no longer justify her belief in statues (in addition to atoms arranged statuewise). It seems clear that this realization "defeats" any justification that might have come from seeing statues. Thus at least part of what makes claims like (I), (II), and (III) true is the work of "defeaters."

(The point here, which follows a line of thought in Chapter Three (§III), is only to suggest a way of filling in some epistemological details. The point here is not to <u>defend</u> either (I) or (II) or (III) on the basis of those details. For I am more sure that (I) and (II)

(and so (III)) are true than I am of this diagnosis of why they are true.)

If this diagnosis is correct, we can see that even the most "externalist" epistemologists must concede the truth of (III). For even those who think justification (and warrant) are for the most part of a matter of "external" facts, such as facts about the way in which one's beliefs are caused, concede the force of defeaters of which one is aware (see Bergmann, 1997). In this way the "defeater diagnosis" strengthens the defense of (III).

On the other hand, there is a way in which that diagnosis weakens the defense of (III). For that diagnosis, if it is the whole story behind the truth of (III), allows that belief in statues may be initially justified on the basis of perception. For it allows that (III) is not true with respect to those perceivers unaware of the relevant defeaters.

Maybe (III) is not true with respect to every perceiver. But it is true with respect to each reader of this reply. For each reader of this reply is familiar with the epistemic overdetermination argument. And so each reader of this reply has a defeater for any perceptual evidence for the existence of statues. Thus each reader of this reply lacks good perceptual evidence for believing that, in addition to atoms arranged statuewise, there are statues.

Sider says, in a footnote, that the epistemic argument "is like the challenge of more familiar external-world skeptics." [5] I think Sider's idea is that the epistemic argument trades on a claim like:

> (1) Possibly, statues do not exist and some thing or things other than statues cause our "statue" sensory experiences.

An external-world skeptic might defend (1). She might argue, for example, that it is possible that statues do not exist and our "statue" sensory experiences are caused by signals sent down wires connected to our envatted brains. And perhaps Sider thinks that the epistemic argument—like the brain-in-a-vat argument—begins with a defense of (1). (Perhaps he thinks it turns on the claim that it is possible that statues do not exist and our "statue" sensory experiences are caused by atoms arranged statuewise.) I agree that if the epistemic argument did involve defending (1), and then wielding it against our perceptual evidence for statues, it would be akin to the familiar arguments of external-world skeptics.

But the epistemic argument does not trade on (1) or on anything remotely like it. The epistemic argument's key premise, unlike (1) above, asserts nothing about the possible non-existence of statues. Indeed, that premise says nothing at all about mere possibility and instead makes a claim about the ways things actually are. That premise is:

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[5] I don't know how to square this with Sider's idea that the epistemic argument successfully rebuts the simple causal argument. Does he think the brain-in-a-vat hypothesis successfully rebuts that argument?

(2) Actually, some thing or things other than statues cause our "statue" sensory experiences (and statues—if they exist—are causally irrelevant to whether those things cause those experiences).

Statues, if they exist, are mere overdeterminers. And this means that anything a statue causes is also fully causally explained by some other thing or things, fully causally explained without invoking the statue itself at any point. As a result, our "statue" sensory experiences are not just possibly fully causally explained without ever invoking statues. Our "statue" sensory experiences are actually fully causally explained without statues. They are fully causally explained by the work done by atoms arranged statuewise. The claim that statues are mere overdeterminers entails that (2) is true.

The mere possibility of envatment implies nothing like (2). So an argument that trades on (2) is not a variation on the familiar skeptical theme. And so replies to brain-in-a-vat type arguments do not generate replies to the epistemic overdetermination argument. For example, one reply to skeptical arguments is the claim that, in ordinary contexts, we can properly ignore the bizarre possibility of envatment. Nothing like that is relevant to the epistemic overdetermination argument. For our "statue" experiences' being caused by something other than statues is not a bizarre possibility; it is, instead, what actually occurs.[6]

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[6] Consider, for example, David Lewis's theory of knowledge, which says certain possibilities (in certain contexts) can be properly ignored. Lewis explicitly endorses the "Rule of Actuality" according to which the "possibility that actually obtains is never properly ignored; actuality is always a relevant alternative" (1999b, 426).

Of course, (2) does not show that statues do not exist. Nor does it show that statues do not cause our "statue" experiences. Just so long as statues would be mere overdeterminers, their existing and causing such experiences is consistent with (2). Nevertheless, in light of (2) (and the epistemic overdetermination argument), I conclude that perception yields no good reason to believe in statues in addition to atoms arranged statuewise.

I do think, however, that we have good perceptual reasons to believe in human organisms. For there is an important disanalogy between supposed statues and the alleged dog-and-tree, on the one hand, and us humans, on the other. We humans are not causally irrelevant to the visual experiences that our constituent atoms cause. We cause them to cause those experiences. And that makes all the difference.

Here is one way to see how it makes all the difference. I am no skeptic about other minds. So I assume that when you have a normal perceptual experience as of a human saying "I was thinking about you yesterday," you thereby have good evidence for the claim that a cause of that experience has mental properties. Assuming that human organisms have mental properties—and so assuming we are human organisms—you have good evidence that a human organism exists and caused that experience.

To run the epistemic argument against this example, your experiences as of a human saying "I was thinking about you yesterday" would have to be fully caused by things—atoms—that have no mental properties at all. But, so I argue in the book, such experiences are not caused in this way. Moreover, the claim that they are so caused—along with its implications regarding skepticism about other minds—is far less plausible than the claim that everything a statue causes (if it exists) is also caused by atoms

arranged statuewise.

We have no good perceptual reasons to believe in statues. But I think that our only ordinary reasons for believing in statues are perceptual. Therefore, I conclude, the belief that statues exist (in addition to atoms arranged statuewise) is justified, if at all, by philosophical means. In this respect, belief in statues is exactly like belief in the dog-and-tree or in other arbitrary sums. It must be supported by philosophical argument. And it merits only the degree of certainty appropriate to that of a speculative philosophical hypothesis. That is the point of the epistemic overdetermination argument.

(As already noted, I think we do have good perceptual reasons to believe in human organisms. Moreover, even if we didn't, it wouldn't follow that the justification of belief in humans was held hostage to philosophical argument. For each of us has an ordinary reason for believing in at least one human that is not perceptual. What ordinarily justifies my belief that I myself exist is not perceptual. I can somehow just tell that I do. And you can just tell that you exist without relying on any sort of sense perception. Nothing similar can be said about anyone's belief in any statue.)

Sider disagrees with some of what I say in defending Chapter Three's Overdetermination Argument (this is <u>not</u> the epistemic overdetermination argument discussed above). Our disagreement can be summarized by saying that I accept, and he rejects, the following:

(A) Everything else being equal, an ontology free of systematic causal overdetermination is preferable to one that implies systematic causal overdetermination.

In Chapter Three, I try to motivate claims along the lines of (A) in a variety of ways. Unsatisfied with my motivations, Sider says I have a "phantom objection" to overdetermination. (Unsatisfied with Sider's motivations, I'm tempted to remark upon his "phantom defense" of overdetermination.)[7]

Oddly enough, Sider himself—despite his protests to the contrary—suggests an argument for (A). Sider suggests that Ockham's razor implies, with respect to mere overdeterminers, that "parsimony dictates their elimination." If Ockham's razor favors ontologies without mere overdeterminers, it supports (A).[8]

And consider this theory:

Interactionist substance dualism is true. But so is the causal closure of the physical. P's brain state B causes him be in brain state B*. And P's soul causes

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[7] With his happy embrace of systematic causal overdetermination, I suspect Sider of making a virtue of what he and others think is a necessity. I suspect they think there is just no way to avoid systematic causal overdetermination. I do think overdetermination is avoidable, and I think the ontology of Objects and Persons avoids it.

The list that opens Sider's discussion may suggest that overdetermination occurs any time there are two causes of one effect. (If this suggestion were true, overdetermination might indeed be unavoidable.) But this suggestion is false. For example, if A causes B and B causes C, then C has two causes (A and B) but is not thereby overdetermined. See Chapter Three.

[8] Sider takes his remark about Ockham's razor to support only the epistemic overdetermination argument. Yet the Ockham's razor argument—unlike the epistemic argument—concludes that mere overdeterminers should be eliminated.

him to be in brain state B* (directly, not by causing B). More generally, whenever a mental state causes a brain state it overdetermines that brain state.

One objection to this theory—perhaps not the most serious—is that it posits systematic causal overdetermination. Suppose the theory could be adjusted to get rid of the systematic overdetermination. And suppose further that the adjustment came for "free," without any theoretical cost of any sort at all. Then surely that adjustment would improve the theory. Its being an improvement shows that, everything else being equal, a metaphysics that entails systematic causal overdetermination is less attractive than one free of such overdetermination. Its being an improvement illustrates that (A) is true.

My ontology gets rid of systematic causal overdetermination. Given (A), that's a mark in its favor. Of course, (A) carries the caveat of "everything else being equal," thus acknowledging that avoiding overdetermination is but one consideration. In the end, which ontology of the material world should we accept? Sider rightly says: "This cannot be settled quickly or easily; as Merricks agrees, global theoretical study is needed." A final judgment about whether to accept an ontology should turn both on whether the considerations in its favor outweigh the costs it incurs and also on how it stacks up against competing ontologies. Objects and Persons tries to make the case that, taking all of this into account, its ontology is the best.

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