


Some remarks on Wiggins

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1. Wiggins' story: the tree and the aggregate of cellulose molecules

2. The 'is' of material constitution and the 'is' of identity

Wiggins claims that the word 'is' is *ambiguous* when it occurs in sentences of the form 'a is b'. Sometimes it means identity. On other occasions, it expresses a special relation which can hold between two different things. Wiggins calls this relation *material constitution*. When a bears this relation to b, we can say that a is *made of* b; a is "nothing over and above" b.

Thus, Wiggins thinks that all the sentences in the paradoxes are true, provided that 'is' is given this special interpretation. *In a certain sense* he can be thought of as holding that the paradoxes involve equivocation. Either 'is' means material constitution and there is no inconsistency, or 'is' means identity and the identity claim is false. But this won't be fully satisfying to you if you had the intuition not just that the statue "is" the clay *in some sense or other*, but that the statue *is identical to* the clay.

Some questions raised by this theory: What is the relation of material constitution? What laws govern it? Why do we use the same word to express this relation that we use to express identity?

3. Spooky coincidence versus commonplace coincidence

One problem faced by anyone who embraces coincidence as the solution to the paradoxes: to give an account of the difference between the sort of coincidence that happens all the time and the sort of coincidence that never seems to happen: material objects that 'slide into one another and out of another again'.

Wiggins gives the principle S*: 'No two things *of the same kind* can occupy exactly the same volume at exactly the same time.'

So Wiggins doesn't even think it's *possible* for two chairs to interpenetrate!

(On pp. 5-6 Wiggins gives three so-called "sources of support" for this principle: they are very strange and you don't have to bother with them. Also, he expresses doubts about them in the postscript.)

4. How many things are in any region of space?

Consider a strange Tribe in which they use different words for material objects. They don't have the word 'statue'. They have a word 'statch' which they apply when some clay is shaped like a statue of Elvis. When someone reshapes an Elvis-shaped lump of clay so that it looks more like a statue of someone else, they say 'Alas, the statch has been destroyed'.

They also have a word 'flump' which they apply when some clay has at least two 'limbs' that extend from the main mass of clay. When you roll some clay that's shaped that way into a ball, they say 'Alas, the flump has been destroyed'.

Maybe they also use the word 'gollyswoggle' (van Inwagen, *Material Beings*, p. 126.)

Are the Tribespeople speaking the truth when they talk about these objects?

Argument that the answer must be 'yes', if we are right in our beliefs about statues and lumps of clay and the sorts of changes that they can survive: it would be arbitrary to suppose that we were right and they were wrong.

The same argument, spelled out in more detail: if we are justified in holding our ordinary views about statues and lumps, then the Tribespeople must be justified in holding their ordinary views about statches and flumps. Even if we happened to be right and they happened to be wrong, we wouldn't be any better justified in our views than they were. But if Tribespeople would be justified in holding their ordinary views about statches and flumps, then we must also be justified in believing in objects that behave as statches and flumps are supposed to behave, since there's no relevant difference between their evidence and our evidence.

Considerations like this are apt to lead someone who embraces all of the claims in the paradoxes except for the identity claim to believe that in any matter-filled region of space, at any time, there are *many* different material objects with different past and future histories.

Wanted: (i) a general account of all these different things, (ii) an account of our justification for believing in them. One way to make progress on (ii) would be to show that the profusion of things follows from principles that we should accept for independent reasons.