

COINCIDING OBJECTS

Ted Sider
Intro Metaphysics

1. The statue and the lump of clay

Suppose you take a lump of clay, and make a statue out of it on Monday.

1. The lump of clay existed before Monday
2. The statue did not exist before Monday
3. If one thing exists before Monday and another thing does not, the things aren't identical
4. The statue and the lump of clay have exactly the same parts and location
5. Things that aren't identical can't have exactly the same parts and location

This is an “antinomy”: a set of statements that are inconsistent with each other, but which individually seem true.

2. Tibbles and Tib

Tibbles: a certain cat

Tib: all of Tibbles except the tip of its tail

One day, the tip of the tail is cut off and the matter is destroyed.

1. Tibbles once had a tip of a tail
2. Tib never had a tip of a tail
3. If one thing once had a tip of a tail and another never did, the things aren't identical
4. Tibbles and Tib have exactly the same parts and location
5. Things that aren't identical can't have exactly the same parts and location

3. The temporal parts solution

Central to the perdurantist account of temporary coincidence is the claim that, while it is bizarre to think that two distinct objects could entirely coincide, there is nothing bizarre about two objects partially coinciding by sharing a part, and nothing bizarre about an object partially coinciding with one of its own parts. Recall the example of you and your conjoined twin. If you share a hand, there is no puzzle about how you can both be in the same glove without jostling for space: you and your twin partially coincide by sharing a part. And think of your left foot: there is no mystery about how you and your foot can both be in the same sock, nor about how you can be partially in the same place as your own foot. According to perdurantists, cases of temporary coincidence involve objects which partially overlap by sharing temporal parts, or objects which partially overlap because one is a temporal part of the other (we can think of this as a limiting case of sharing parts). (Hawley)

4. The standard account

Distinct objects *can* have exactly the same parts and location.

Problem of similarity: since the statue and the piece of clay are made of the same matter, how can one be more fragile than the other?

Problem of parts: things are nothing over and above their parts. So how can two objects be made up of the same parts?

5. The just-matter theory

The only objects that exist are *quantities of matter*. These are things that are “defined by their parts”, i.e., a necessary and sufficient condition for their continued existence is that all of their constituent matter persists (no matter what it is like or how it is arranged).

6. Nihilism

The only objects that exist are *simples*. These are things with no smaller parts. So the objects involved in the antinomies don't actually exist!