

Same Again? – Individuation and its Presuppositions

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Abstract

Are there any conditions that are necessary prerequisites in order for the individuation of three-dimensional continuants to be successful? This paper concentrates on the most comprehensive current account of what is involved in singling out an object. It is suggested that the main thesis of the account put forward by David Wiggins, to wit, that all identity statements need to be supplied with covering concepts of a very specific kind, is best defended by isolating the formal conditions of possibility of the conceptual practice in question.

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เหมือนกันหรือไม่? ปังเจกชนและสภาวะเกิดก่อน

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บทคัดย่อ

เราจำเป็นต้องมีแนวความคิดอื่นใดเป็นพื้นฐานในการพิสูจน์ความเหมือนที่ไม่จำกัดด้วยกาลหรือไม่ บทความนี้มุ่งพิจารณาประเด็นที่กำลังเป็นที่สนใจว่ามีอะไรบางอย่างที่ควรนำมาพิจารณา เมื่อนำความคิดหลักของ David Wiggins มาวิเคราะห์ จะเห็นได้ว่าทุกๆ ข้อที่กล่าวไว้จะต้องอยู่ภายใต้สถานการณ์จำเพาะ ซึ่งสามารถโต้แย้งได้ด้วยการแยกเงื่อนไขความเป็นไปได้ของประเด็นความคตินั้นๆ

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“We should treat as predicates in the category of essence all such things as it would be appropriate to mention in reply to the question ‘What is the object before you?’”

Aristotle, **Topics**, 102a32

“... if a man picks up some strange thing and, not yet knowing what it is, keeps it in his pocket or desk drawer, then the diachronically stable mode of persistence which it promises or exemplifies ... provide[s] the man with the assurance that [there is an f] ... f is a well-defined thing kind, and this strange thing belongs in f ...”

David Wiggins, **Sameness and Substance**, p. 218

Introductory Remarks

An understanding of something as fundamental as the everyday singling out of objects is problematized by one’s own immersion in that practice. Rather than attempt to extricate the individuator from the individuation, he or she may be viewed as embarking on a quest for greater self-consciousness regarding the relevant praxis, with the assistance of a theoretically qualified guide. This is what many a well-meaning philosopher, including Wiggins himself, attempts on the behalf of all untheoretical beings.

Imagine, then, an individuator called Angela in the following situation. Having seen a dog at an earlier time, t^1 , she sees a dog again at a later time t^2 , and thinks ‘more dog’ or ‘dog again’. However, she wants to subdivide this new sighting into the case of ‘another dog’ as opposed to ‘the same dog again.’ Why? She fed the dog at t^1 , and does not want to feed the same dog again, although she does not mind feeding another hungry dog right now, at t^2 .

These are the basic parameters involved in individuation: the drawing of spatio-temporal boundaries; the carving of reality in such

a way as to find things of determinate sorts; knowing when the same ones reappear given change and the vagaries of time's arrow.

A critical reading of one attempt at achieving greater self-awareness about the practice of individuation, that of David Wiggins in *Sameness and Substance*, will serve as the focus of the current paper. Although there is much of value in his account, there are also a few problematic aspects, and one should not be browbeaten by Wiggins's claim that he will only take seriously criticisms made from within an alternative, equally detailed account of the matters at hand.

The various ontological presuppositions of his account will be passed over in silence in order to concentrate on epistemological questions relating to human knowledge of the sameness of objects, persistence over time, and the possibility of change. The focus will therefore be on the epistemological 'route' to three-dimensional continuants, for Wiggins himself states that there could be no access to "...the sameness of things that was perfectly independent of x and y 's being the same something or other, ..." (SS, p. 18).²

A Brief Outline of Wiggins's Position

Of the three tasks Wiggins initially sets himself, only one will be taken up in detail here; – what it is for an individuator to individuate an object determinately at a specific time. No attention will therefore be given to what it means to be a continuant, or to an elucidation of the primitive notion of identity.^{3, 4}

Wiggins's main thesis is the claim that identity statements should be provided with a general covering concept such as 'dog' or 'pruning knife'. In his terminology, they should be sortalized. This is the so-called Sortal Dependency of Individuation thesis, or D. Note that it does not imply that identity is not primitive and irreducible, merely that it is supposedly used in practice as 'coincide as a

substance’.

According to Wiggins, a sortal predicate is any predicate, the extension of which consists of things or substances of one particular kind, for example, horses, dogs, or pruning knives. Furthermore, a sortal or individuating concept is what the relevant sortal predicate stands for; it answers, adequately, the question ‘same *what?*’. For any identity statement *S*, then, *x* is the same something as *y*. In the Aristotelian tradition, this question is ontologically basic in a way that questions like ‘where is *x*?’, ‘what is *x* doing?’, and ‘what is *x* like?’, are not. In this sense, the sortal concept in question is a covering concept for *S*, and such concepts are to be represented by the letters *f* and *g*. If the ‘something’ above is a dog, then *a* stands in the relation of identity to *b* as restricted to dogs only.

In more formal terms,

a = *b* if and only if there exists a sortal concept *f* such that:

- (1) *a* and *b* belong to a kind which is the extension of *f*;
- (2) to say that *x* falls under *f* is to say what *x* is;
- (3) *a* is the same *f* as *b*; or *a* coincides with *b* under *f*

Wiggins subsequently elaborates the Sortal Dependency thesis, *D*, into *D*(i) and *D*(ii), which are therefore also true of all continuants, on his view. If it is granted that, if *a* = *b*, then *a* is the same something as *b*, as well as that indiscernibility is an incomplete account of identity in the sense that “... the idea of a traceable path or a life story is what any elucidation ... must recapitulate if it is to catch hold of the use ... of the identity concept.” (SS, p. 50), it is plausible that *D*(i) is also true for continuants:

$$(\forall x) (\forall t) [(\exists x \text{ at } t \supset (\exists g) (gx \text{ at } t)]$$

i.e., for all things and all times, if *x* exists at a specific time, then there is a sortal predicate applicable to *x* at that time.

From here Wiggins can move on to *D*(ii):

$$(\forall x) (\exists g) [(\exists x \text{ at } t \supset (\exists g) (gx \text{ at } t)]$$

i.e., for all things and all times, there exists a sortal g such that, for any time at which x exists, g applies to x at that time.

‘ g ’ is said to range over individuating predicates which answer the question, ‘what is x ?’, i.e., substance sortals. These are further glossed as those sortals for which ‘ x is no longer g ’ entails ‘ x is no longer’.

To summarize the implicit knowledge of untheoretical individutors when individuating continuants: ‘Everything is something’ provides no satisfactory answer to the ‘What is it?’ question, as an object could be something at a time t by simply falling under a phased sortal that it may outlast. The fact that Socrates satisfies ‘boy’ at t_1 does not determine what is to count as the persistence of the object dubbed Socrates, for Socrates still exists when he ceases to satisfy the phase-sortal ‘boy’. Since a substance sortal, unrestricted temporally and purified of phasals, determines identity, persistence and existence conditions for its instances, one can argue for (Dii) by saying that x must fall under at least one substance sortal on pain of lacking a determinate principle of individuation. Necessity here is quantification over all times. If Alexander the Great’s horse, Bucephalus, falls under ‘horse’ at t_n , it must fall under ‘horse’ at all times at which it exists.

At this point, it may be asked why (Di), that everything is something, is viewed as self-evident and tautologous by Wiggins? Could something not be so indeterminate at a time so as not to be, at t , any kind of thing at all? Or sticking to the nominalist mode, so that there is no sortal under which to subsume it? Wiggins states that he is not concerned with such entities (SS, p. 205, fn. 2.11), and that the universal quantifiers in his formalizations are to range only over determinate entities, i.e., those with clear identity and persistence conditions.

Now, it may be conceded that there are indeed determinate things, things which determinately come into and go out of existence. But if Wiggins’s D-principles concern only such entities, they

are all trivial in the way that (Di) is. For example, (Dii) is an analytic consequence of a conceptual scheme operating with the the notion of determinate individuation. If objects can only be thought of as determinate under substance sortals, and individuation is of determinate objects only, then each determinate object will trivially satisfy a substance sortal as long as it exists.

With these materials in hand, Wiggins will proceed to deny that there can be relative identity statements, that is, that *a* and *b* can be the same *f* but different *gs*. Call this the Relative Identity view, or R (most intimately associated with the work of Geach). We are all familiar with such intuitive cases, ones where the river Heraclitus swam in yesterday is not the one he swam in last week, but only if we pay attention to the water's flow, so that he can swim in the same river again, but one constituted by different water than last time.

The typology⁵ of R cases that Wiggins develops during his critique of Relative Identity, serves as the occasion for the important distinction between phase- and substance sortals. The claim is that there are sortals which present-tensedly apply to an individual *x* at every moment throughout *x*'s existence, e.g., *human being*, and those that do not, e.g., *girl*, for our dog-feeding individuator Angela earlier on. The former is to be called a substance sortal, the latter a phase-sortal.

The Need for a Substance/Phasal Sortal Distinction

Substance sortals are said to be the covering concepts *par excellence*, insofar as they provide the fundamental and ultimate answer to the 'same what?' question. There is thus a direct link between between this Aristotelian question and the need for covering concepts of a specific kind in statements of identity. Wiggins

frequently talks about the ‘need’ to make this distinction between substance and phase-sortals, presumably because individuation would not amount to much without it.

The link is plausible, in Wiggins’s own terms. To see why, one needs to realize that the case against Relative identity, hence in favour of the ‘absoluteness of sameness’, does not relate to any kind of semantic indeterminacy, but to what is required in the singling out of substances. Individuation is linked to identity, therefore, in that every alternative procedure which yields a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer, under alternative covering concepts, to identity questions concerning x and y , must yield the *same* answer (SS, p. 18). For instance, whether one singles out John Doe⁶ as mayor or managing director, the answer as to his identity with the dunce-like schoolboy, will be the same in each case. This implies that there is an ultimate covering sortal concept which regulates such alternative individuations. And the most plausible candidate for this role is the substance sortal answering the question, ‘What is the object before you?’. In this way, phase-sortals do not conflict with or relativize the following schema (where P represents properties, cf. Appendix, p. 19):

$$(\forall x) (\forall y) [(x = y) \supset (Px \text{ iff } Py)]$$

The schema is unaffected by phase changes in the values of x and y insofar as the antecedent depends, for individuation determinacy, on a sortal subsuming entities which survive such changes (which emerge unscathed when, for example, ‘boy’ ceases to be true of them). The young Socrates is never the same boy as the man he will become, but that is uncontentious. As long as he is the same something as the man he will become, viz., a human being.

It would seem, at this stage, that the substance/phase-sortal distinction is a necessary prerequisite of the denial of R . When Wiggins says that “ ... every concept that *adequately individuates* x

for any stretch of its existence yields the same answer, either directly or via the principle of individuation for the predicate it restricts, ..." (SS, p. 25, emphasis added) to the question of x's identity with y, he is saying that the falsity of R implies that co-satisfiable sortals are co-restrictive.

However, the appearance of indispensability here is misleading. It is not at all obvious that it follows directly from the falsity of R that there are substance sortals in Wiggins's sense. Wiggins has shown nothing more than how the distinction in question fits into a programme such as his, the distinction itself needs to be presupposed throughout. Of course, current employment of 'boy' and 'human being' proceeds more or less as Wiggins outlines it, but is there anything in reality grounding this usage, or is mere usage-conservation justification enough? Since there is no *a priori* guarantee that language has not gone on holiday in this area, other theorists are well-advised to attempt to find another rationale for the distinction.

Perhaps, then, substance sortals serve to isolate that which things are but do not become or cease to be (without ceasing to be). While it is true that Julius Caesar may have become a consul, a crook, bald, bankrupt or debauched, he does not ever become a human being. If he could become a human being, what was it that pre-existed such a change? Surely not a mere lump of matter, for matter is indeterminate, and any imagined Julius Caesar-lump could just as easily, *qua* lump, have become a tiger or a tulip.

This attempt to capture the intuitive cash-value of substance sortals does more harm than good. Surely, what pre-exists Julius Caesar's becoming a human being need not be a bare conglomeration of fleshy matter, it is simply a zygote. It is the latter which became a human being, *he* did not. Consider all such zygotes at a specific moment in time; some become tigers, some cows, some dogs and some human beings. If it is objected that this still presupposes

something which involves the sortal human being although it itself was never human, namely, the zygote in question, the correct response is that this changes the subject. The initial problem was to find a subject for ‘becoming a human being’; one has now been found. The ‘humanness’ of the zygote itself is explicable in relational terms, i.e., via the nature of the donors.

It is useful, in these kinds of contexts, to distinguish between two senses of ‘becoming an f’. In the first sense, it can mean ‘coming to be identical with f’. This is obviously not the sense intended above; a zygote is never identical with a human being. A second sense of ‘becoming an f’ is that of ‘coming to constitute an f’. It is clear that the preceding comments refer to the second sense.

Now, it is true that Julius Caesar, the adult specimen, does not become a human being in the way he at some point becomes an adult. However, it is not clear that the original claim concerning substance sortals has been vindicated. In order to attempt vindication, it was necessary to import a relation of constitution weaker than that of identity. A skeptic about Wiggins’s distinction could conceivably refuse to discern such a twofold ambiguity in the notion of becoming.

Another attempt to clarify the distinction between phase-sortals and substance sortals proceeds by employing the notion of conceivability. While it is conceivable that John Doe should cease to be a dunce or a mayor, it is not conceivable that he should cease to be a human being. This approach, despite the fact that it is one that Wiggins himself highly prizes, is not unproblematic. For is it not conceivable that Socrates should become an alligator, and thus cease to be a human being? Plantinga (1974) certainly thinks so, and how is one to legislate against him purely on the basis of what is and what is not conceivable? Perhaps, in the present case, this does not matter in principle, as long as one has ‘animal’ as a substance

sortal. But then there are still problems concerning, for instance, the conceivability of Socrates's becoming a rock or a rose.

That conceivability is a misguided way to attempt to systematize intuitions concerning the modalities of necessity and possibility, may be shown as follows. It may be conceivable 'from the inside', from a first-person perspective, that a certain stream of consciousness be linked to an alligator's body or a beetle's husk. That does not make it possible in any real sense other than that of a broad logical possibility, where the conceiver does not contradict himself. It is upon this aspect that Kafka's short story, **Metamorphosis**, trades, and that is why the story works and entertains. In the story, the character Gregor Samsa wakes up one day in the body of a beetle, but his human stream of consciousness continues unchanged. Nevertheless, Kafka has not thereby alerted the reader to a certain natural possibility; he has not alerted the criminal courts to the fact that some cockroach-squashings might be homicides.

The upshot of these considerations seem to be that serious use of the notion of conceivability in this context can only succeed if accompanied by a relativization of sortals to speakers. If Plantinga has no problems with Socrates as an alligator, then 'human being' is simply not a substance sortal for *him*. But this is on condition that he does more than utter a sentence to that effect; it must be a genuine conceptual possibility for him (i.e., given the way the already slices reality into substances with their accompanying principles of individuation).

Before proceeding, it should first be observed that most individuators in fact divide reality in the same way. It is not that other ways are not possible, but only that some of these will yield inadequate conceptual schemes, ones making no "... headway with causality – with the explanation of anything." (SS, p.145, fn. 18). Communities of people tend to endorse systems of concepts

and ways of dividing reality which maximize prediction and control. This seems to suggest, contrary to the above attempt at relativization, that necessities and possibilities are circumscribed by something like natural laws, and hence that substance sortals are grounded in the nomological. If it should turn out that human beings can, as a matter of natural law, become beetles, then ‘human being’ will be a phase-sortal. Implausible as this may sound in the human being case, the leeway to be recognized here is of some importance in science.

“Did that electron just turn into a positron?”; “It can’t have”; “I know it couldn’t, but it just did”. This is a possible dialogue in the physics laboratory, where things are often indeterminate.

This concludes the discussion of the substance/phase-sortal distinction per se. None of the considerations offered in its support are conclusive, and D itself has not therefore been conclusively established. Before an attempt is made to ground the distinction in transcendental terms, some comments about the notion of substance and its presumed self-subsistence are in order, specifically because Wiggins characterizes himself as an Aristotelian nominalist.

To say that an Aristotelian substance, that is, an individual horse or dog, is self-subsistent, is not to say that it is independent of all its properties. While it may be that each of a dog’s properties is ontologically dependent on it, in the sense of only being present in the world because the dog is, this does not imply that the relation of dependence is asymmetrical. No substance, in the sense of a thing with properties, an individual, can exist without any properties. And this is not simply a definitional matter concerning the notion of a substance. While our imagined individuator’s nose need not be any specific shape, it must qua (part of) a material object have some shape or another. Angela might not like its actual aquiline shape, and wish for a different one, but that wish is not a wish for a shapeless nose.

It is best to speak of degrees of ontological dependence. Individuals can be construed as more independent than properties in that the latter exist only if exemplified by some individual. On the other hand, while individuals can exist without having to exemplify a specific set of properties, they must exemplify some properties or other. This is an acceptable cashing out of the Aristotelian thesis that the only things capable of independent existence are all severally a *this such*, this dog with long black fur and droopy ears. The individual (this), with its properties (such), form a state of affairs from which its components are mere conceptual abstractions.

The Transcendental Stance

The ‘need’ for a substance/phase sortal distinction is best justified by examining the conditions of possibility of individuating practice itself, those conceptual elements necessarily presupposed in anything recognisable as a successful individuation.

The transcendental argument attempted here is Kantian in spirit, but the purpose is one of systemization, and not the isolation of some central ahistorical core of human thought.

At this stage, before committing to an outright transcendental argument, one might be content with merely arguing for the idea of numerical identity, and hope to show that substance concepts are a necessary condition of such identity, which in itself is a condition for something else indispensable (the following draws on Strawson’s *Individuals*).

There are well-known problems with non-demonstrative reference, since such reference cannot be secured by means of general descriptions only (there being no guarantee that any description is individuating in the sense of applying uniquely). What is needed is the common reference point of the ‘here-and-now’ by means of which to relate the objects of non-demonstrative picking

out. That is, one requires both a coordinate system and a specific point of view. However, since the here-and-now is itself not stable, some elements of the scheme itself must be (re-) identifiable as common to different occasions of identification and individuation. This is where numerical identity comes in. One can reidentify any particular *a* ‘as the same thing again’ if and only if one has criteria of re-identification. But since re-identification is a necessary condition of the very idea of numerical identity, which in turn is a necessary condition of the notion of a unified spatio-temporal scheme, and since the current conceptual scheme contains the latter, there must be such criteria of re-identification over time. The only concepts which embody criteria of re-identification are sortals. Therefore, sortals are a necessary condition of the idea of numerical identity; the latter idea has empirical application only if there are sortals.

A skeptic might not be convinced, for it is open to him to claim that, in fact, all such embodied criteria of re-identification are *bad faith* fabrications. Things pop in and out of existence with a shift of attention, and it is only the ontological discomfort consequent upon this realization which induces one to postulate sortals. Criteria, far from guaranteeing numerical identity, merely serve to disguise a reprehensible cowardice in the face of the metaphysical facts.

At this point, the skeptic should be appeased with a transcendental argument.

A Transcendental Justification of D(ii) Attempted

Two kinds of transcendental argument are employed in this section. The Option A argument arrives at necessary conditions of experience in terms of what the world is like. The Option B argument is concerned only with concepts presupposed by experience as in fact conceptualized. It does not establish the independent existence of substances.

1. A Transcendental Justification for D(ii), 1st version

1.1 Version A

(1) Current use of the notion of identity is committed to the notion of a traceable path or life-history;

(2) A necessary condition of the idea of a traceable path is that of continuity under a concept, there are no pure matter-paths that are identifiable by beings employing concepts, hence no bare continuity;

(3) But continuity is only intelligible on the supposition that it is determinate when any one instance of a continuity begins and when it ends, i.e., if there are criteria of coming into existence and of ceasing to be for different kinds of continuants;

(4) Hence the concepts under which continuity is apprehended must embody such criteria in order for there to be justifiable use of the notion of a life-history, and hence identity;

(5) The only concepts which clearly demarcate the beginnings and endings of their instances in time, are substance concepts; hence substance sortals are a necessary condition of coherent sense to the notion of the transtemporal identity of a continuant;

(6) If, in order to single out a determinate object in time, one must single out an object with a definite past and future, all individuations which are determinate with respect to certain stretches of an object's existence will proceed by means of predicates which are restrictions of one subsuming the object's life-history as a whole.

(7) But these are substance sortals, hence the possession of substance sortals is a condition of possibility of determinate individuation.

At a first glance, this seems in order as far as the transcendental *form* of the argument goes. The first premiss is synthetic, based on the current use of the concept of identity, while the rest of the premisses and conclusion are analytic in terms of it. Closer examination

of the mechanics of the argument, however, reveals certain hidden assumptions which are not self-evident. For instance, premiss (5) is a purely definitional matter, and may be questioned. It is allowed to stand in order to bring to the fore the relation of this definition to Wiggins's overall project. Another problem relates to premiss (1), (2) and (3). It is not clear that the 'current' notion of identity is anything more than a strict Humean one of identity at a time. Whether or not it is *used* as if transtemporal identity is unproblematic, is not at issue. It may even be granted that such a use of a formal notion in a world of flux necessitates additional assumptions, but then the A-argument hardly establishes that the assumption of a more than grammatical noun/adjective distinction rests solely on *a priori* knowledge of the formal properties of identity. Wiggins explicitly postulates such *a priori* knowledge of the notion of identity, but it is unclear how information about reflexivity, transitivity and symmetry renders the diachronic extension of identity unproblematic.

It is open to the Wigginsian to reply that there has been a misunderstanding. To say that identity is committed to the idea of a life-history, is precisely to imply that transtemporal identity is *not* unproblematic, but mysterious. What is basic and unproblematic is coincidence, being in the same place at the same time. Using C to represent coincidence, this claim may be spelt out as:

Cab if and only if a and b occupy the same place at a time t

Now, if it is granted that things coincide, if they do, only under concepts, the above may be expanded into an equivalence with the Wigginsian ' a is the same f as b ', as follows:

a is the same f as b iff $fa \ \& \ fb \ \& \ Cab$ for all times at which a exists and at which b exists

But if the object of the A-argument is to establish the plausibility of D(ii), this modification is not of much help. It is once again assumed that there are sortals which apply throughout something's

existence. Moreover, there is an independent implausibility in construing coincidence as basic if that implies a version of the Identity of Indiscernibles, $(\forall P) [(Px \text{ iff } Py) \supset (x = y)]$, the converse of Leibniz's Law rendered second-order by means of second-order quantification over properties. For it would then be possible to say that someone has two noses, such that a is a nose and b is a nose, and a and b coincide whenever each one of them exists, and therefore, that they are the same nose.

The point is that Wiggins vehemently rejects the Identity of Indiscernibles, even for relational predicates (SS, pp. 55 – 57). He cannot therefore be committed to anything which implies it. But it seems that he is. Finally, the coincidence claim above has the counterintuitive consequence that a table and the matter comprising it do not coincide because they are not identical. This is surely outrageous.

The main objection to the A-argument is that the first premiss does not sit well with the conclusion. After all, Wiggins's concern is with 'individuating sortalism', so the synthetic premiss of the transcendental argument should concern individuation *per se*. This thought may be developed by means of another transcendental argument, call it B.

2. A Transcendental Justification for D(ii), 2nd version

2.1 Version B

(1) Individuation is determinate in the sense that *de re*⁷ thoughts about impinging objects are the result of singlings out;

(2) To say that individuation is thus determinate, is to say that the objects singled out have determinate identity and persistence conditions, i.e., determinate principles of individuation;

(3) But objects have determinate principles of individuation only if they have determinate beginnings and endings in time, i.e.,

determinately bounded histories;

(4) Hence, in order to think of individuation as determinate, it is necessary to think of some questions of persistence as having definite assertions and denials;

(5) But many things have definitely ceased to exist;

(6) To think of any x that it has ceased to exist, is to think of x as having ceased to exemplify those functions and properties definitive of it;

(7) There must be some one predicate such that its ceasing to apply to x , entails x 's non-existence;

(8) Such a predicate must be one which applies to x at all times during its existence, if x is an 'individuable' object;

(9) Every individuation proceeds under some predicate(s) or other;

(10) But no qualitative predicate needs to be constant for any object, i.e., change is possible;

(11) A necessary condition of having a distinction between change and destruction, is the survival of the entity undergoing the change;

(12) But then a condition of possibility of making such survival intelligible, is that there be a sortal satisfied by the entity in question both before and after the time of the change;

(13) Such a sortal will specify possible changes the entity can survive, and hence provide criteria of persistence;

(14) But any sortal with these characteristics will apply to x at all times it exists, it will therefore be a substance sortal making an Aristotelian identification of the form of ' x is an f ';

(15) Any objects individuated under Aristotelian identifications have determinate principles of individuation as the instances of kinds;

(16) A condition of possibility of the determinacy of individuation

is the existence of substance sortals which apply to objects at all times at which they exist.

This is an impressive argument for the view that there are some sortals which individuator have to treat as invariant. It is more convincing than the A-argument in that it explicitly introduces the problematic of persistence through change, a fundamental datum for the users of the current conceptual scheme. Not all of the premisses are analytic in terms of (1) though; an important hidden premiss which guides the argument from (10) onwards is that of mutually irreducible predication in the category of substance as opposed to those of quality and relation. It might therefore be objected that any transcendental argument attempting to prove D(ii) cannot proceed with an assumption which virtually entails it. But there are independent grounds which a Wigginsian can give for the thesis of irreducible substantial predication.

Firstly, there are Wiggins's arguments against indiscernibility as an adequate account of identity: "... to determine correctly the answer to our continuity question about the traceability of things through their life-histories *is* ... to settle that $[Pa \text{ iff } Pb]$: and ... that it is impossible *even in theory* to conceive of a way independent of the prior discovery that $a = b$ by which to establish that, for all $[P]$, *no matter what property $[P]$ is*, $[Pa \text{ iff } Pb]$." (SS, p. 50). If this is right, indiscernibility as an account of identities puts everything back to front. How can the applicability of some predicates to a and b only be settled by first inquiring whether $a = b$, if indiscernibility for all possible predicates is to tell one when things are identical?

This argument is convincing in Wiggins's own terms, and it may therefore be conditionally granted that the identity of things are not independent of the sorts of things they are. Of course, this view is built into (1) of the A-argument, and also (10) through (15) of the B-argument via the irreducibility of substantial predication. But a

transcendental argument is not thereby invalidated, its interest lies in its showing how such presuppositions fit into a more general picture.

A second reason Wiggins might give, at this stage, in favour of his 'dual-predication' view, is the falsity of Relative Identity, or R. Invocation of its falsity has been avoided to ascertain how much can be accomplished without it. But it obviously can and does play a crucial role in substantiating D(ii), and through it, the substance/phasal sortal distinction.

The B-argument underplays continuity and coincidence in order to examine the necessary conditions of change. This is the strongest case, on the transcendental front, for the claim that individuation requires substance sortals.

Conclusion

It is evident that Wiggins's painstaking account of present individuating practices is substantial and thought-provoking, and the value of his overall project is beyond dispute. However, it has been noted that there are internal tensions in his work, and that he often over-describes what he observes given his own theoretical predispositions. Wiggins has been offered a transcendental argument as the best possible systemization of his diverse claims about individuation. He might not necessarily be keen on such a move, as he thinks that "Semantical fact is almost always more interesting than transcendental philosophical fiction; and for the imagination a hundred times more potent." (SS, p. 81/2, fn. 4). Perhaps not.

Appendix: The Semantic Underlabourer as Modest Essentialist

Wiggins claims to be a 'modest' essentialist and to be guided by nothing but the semantical facts in his philosophical quest. In the latter respect, he follows the tradition of philosophers like Locke, who view themselves as 'underlabourers' sweeping the

ground so science can advance unimpeded. As Locke puts it in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, “The commonwealth of learning is not at this time without master builders...it is ambition enough to be employed as an under-labourer in clearing the ground a little, and removing some of the rubbish that lies in the way to knowledge.”

The following remarks contain some criticisms of both positions.

1. Semantical Fact and Fancy

For Wiggins, what the philosopher should do is to elucidate notions such as same, substance, identical, change, and persistence from within the same conceptual practices already engaged in by unphilosophical practitioners. Empirical facts are therefore acquired by observation of those commonplace human beings who successfully individuate continuants, relying only on rudimentary pre-theoretical ideas gleaned by means of participative understanding in individuation itself. That is, because individuation is an untheoretical business, philosophy should not despise the ordinary ideas used by ordinary people during the ordinary run of things.

However, Wiggins also states that all of this theoretical labour and philosophical attention is engaged in by him, qua theoretical being, in order to better answer questions centring around bitterly contested points relating to identity. Who contests them? Other theorists and philosophers. They might observe the same data, but arrive at different conclusions, given the underdetermination of theory by data and other philosophical commonplaces.

This is what is potentially problematic about Wiggins’s procedure, for another philosopher might contest many of his ‘descriptive’ claims about current individuating practice as prescriptions or over-descriptions. And over-descriptions because, as is clear from recent work in the philosophy of science, there can be no gathering of data

in a conceptual vacuum, no collection of bare (semantic) facts. In fact, the facts that Wiggins will prioritize will be those that tend to support his own hypothesis, to wit, that he will find a Leibnizean conception of identity immanent in everyday individuation, or anything recognisable as such. But this is extraordinary. For now a very specific theory, that of the philosopher Leibniz, is discerned in the semantics and syntax of English. Even if the unthinking, untheoretical Angela turns out to be much more thoughtful than suspected, it is doubtful that Leibnizean controversies cause her to lose much sleep. Or, even if these levels of abstraction are attained, perhaps she is as Humean about identity as exhausted by identity at a time, and Wiggins cannot exclude this possibility by saying that “We do not at the moment think of matters like this, however.” (SS, p. 67).

Furthermore, even if Wiggins never actually indulges in overdescriptions of the semantical facts based on his theoretical interests, the whole method might still seem to be a rather tedious replay of what is to be explained, without any attempt at overall systemization of the facts at hand.

2. *Aposteriori* Tempering of *Apriori* Stipulations

At the end of *Sameness and Substance*, Wiggins attempts to derive a ‘modest’ essentialism.⁸ He pats himself on the back for modal abstinence in the preceding chapters, by which he means that he used no overt *de re* modal formulations. But surely a thesis can have essentialistic import independently of how it is formulated. Nor will modal enrichment of language which scorns a possible worlds idiom make of one a more modest essentialist than enrichment which does not. It is therefore questionable to suppose that modality is kept at bay by simply refraining, in formalization, from possible worlds. It is, however, in line with Wiggins’ concern for the untheoretical

Angelas, who know nothing of the new scholasticism around possible worlds modal logic, and such a style cannot therefore feature in an account based on what the thinker does in practice, not in philosophy.

Apart from these stipulations on the part of Wiggins, Angela and her kin might remain unconvinced that : (1) *de re* necessities present in the vernacular have ontological import; (2) that their presence justifies acceptance of the *de re* necessities of essence and constitution, which Wiggins arrives at as follows.

Counterfactual speculation is seen as a suitable method to arrive at essential properties. That is, what can and cannot be conceived determines necessity and possibility. The position is that:

- (i) x can be ϕ if and only if it is possible to conceive of x that it is ϕ ;
- (ii) x must be ϕ if and only if it is not possible to conceive of x that x is not ϕ ;
- (iii) the boundary between what one can conceive of x and what one cannot conceive of x depends on what x is

The seemingly uncontentious principle that ‘Anything cannot just be anything’, implies that, for any conceiving by a thinker of x as ϕ (where ϕ is a place-holder for any kind of predicate), ϕ cannot assume just any value. So, counterfactual speculation about members of a kind is a route to their essential properties.

The procedure is first demonstrated by means of sets. In set-theory, the axiom of extensionality states that membership determines set-identity, and that any set cannot have members other than its actual ones. This leads, however, to ‘necessities of constitution’ for three-dimensional continuants. If ‘man’ as a natural kind term (I follow Wiggins’s usage here), and some genetic feature G is definitive of the hypothesized generic constitution, any specific man is said to have G as an essential property (hence, a *de re necessity*). In Wiggins’s words: “Suppose that ‘man’ has its sense

fixed by reference to some hypothesized generic constitution . . . And suppose G is some (not too specific) genetic feature that is scientifically partially definitive of that constitution. Now consider anything that is a man. He is then necessarily if-a-man-then-G.” (SS, p. 118).

In order to give content to his abstract conditions on sortals, Wiggins avails himself of Putnam’s theory of natural kind terms. The link to Putnam is based on the admirable insight that there can be no knowledge of language that is not knowledge of the world. So a real definition of what x is will depend on real specimens, *a posteriori* science tempers the *a priori* conditions on identity and individuation. Note the deference to science to supply the content for the theorist’s abstract musings.

Putnam’s theory is a broadly Lockean⁹ one, insofar as substances are what they are in terms of their internal, unknown constitution (the details of the account are not of interest here). For modern urban sophisticates enarmoured of science, this might seem obviously true, but Putnam’s account might still be a form of cultural and philosophical parochialism in its uncritical acceptance of the hegemony of science. For example, if Angela, who grew up in a remote culture in Africa, values gold not for its atomic number, but for its yellowness, gold’s turning blue is a destruction of all the gold in the world, not a mere accidental change. Assurances about an unchanging atomic number of 79 will prove to be small consolation to her.

Now, if Putnam is, like Wiggins, putting forward an empirical claim by outlining one aspect of language-use, then the claim cannot apply generally as it is false in the above imagined case.

Which brings us to back to the necessities of constitution that Wiggins argues for as a form of essentialism implied by the formal conditions on determinate individuation, and argues for on the basis

of conceivability. He puts it as follows: “The essential necessity of a trait arises at that point of unalterability where the very existence of the bearer is unqualifiedly conditional upon the trait in question. Here, at this point, a property is fixed to its bearer by virtue of being inherent in the individuation of it – inherent in the very possibility of drawing a spatio-temporal boundary around it.” (SS, p. 121).

Taking the example of Caesar, it is said to be impossible to conceive of Caesar not having been a man; ‘man’ being the highest individuating sortal for Caesar, indicating what kind of thing he is and cannot cease to be without ceasing to be.

However, what constitutes an adequate answer to the question ‘What is it?’ might be context-dependent. In some contexts, the statement that ‘Toby is a dog’ may be enough, but not for Angela and her dog-loving friend discussing breeds at a dog show. For them, the news that Toby is a dog, as a response to the question ‘What is it?’, would merely be an attempt at wit. As Cassam (1986) puts it: “... if Toby is a dog, and necessarily a dog, why is he not also necessarily a spaniel or a Pekinese or whatever? If this extension is admitted, the result is that if Toby is a spaniel, then he not only necessarily has the generic constitution of a dog, but also the generic constitution of a spaniel.” (p. 104).

That is to say, unless the Wigginsian can block these kinds of extensions, there will be an overabundance of necessities of constitution, an embarrassment of riches of a philosophically vacuous and undesirable type. This is surely a considerable problem for Wiggins’s appropriation of the Putnamian account of natural kind terms.

Once this relativity to human contextual interests is recognized, it would appear that internal essences cannot be inherent in the very possibility of individuation. If attention is being paid to semantical

fact, and the history of those facts, it should be evident that the contemporary Angela, as well as all of her ancestors, succeed, and have always succeeded, in individuating objects without any notions or ideas about scientifically discoverable generic constitutions

Endnotes

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2. References to Sameness and Substance in the body of the text will henceforth be abbreviated as SS.

3. It might help to keep in mind, as a signature sentence of the overall Wigginsian account, the following cashing out of Socrates as essentially a man and necessarily to be individuated as a man: ‘If and only if Socrates is a man, then Socrates is identical with some man.’

4. As for identity, it might be more primitive than Wiggins’s account can allow, and therefore enjoy some sort of logical priority over other notions regarded as equally primitive on his view (e.g., substance). As Quine puts it in *Methods of Logic*, “When we do propound identity conditions for bodies, or persons, or classes, we are using the prior concept of identity in the special task of clarifying the term ‘body’ or ‘person’ or ‘class’; for an essential part of the clarification of a term is clarification of the standard by which we individuate its denotata. ”

5. The typology comprises the following types, of which type 3 is the most important, necessitating a substance/phasal sortal distinction. The formulation in (1.1) is to be viewed as representing the general import of R, or Relative Identity: (1.1) “A is the same f as B, but A and B are different gs” (using Geach’s symbols). TYPE 1: where g is the wrong sortal for both a and b, although a = b. “Phosphorus is the same planet as Hesperus, but they are different stars”,

is not an instance of R because Venus is not a star; TYPE 2: where a and b are distinct entities, so that the first clause in (1.1) is violated and no relative identity arises. Venus is not the same anything as Mars; TYPE 3: when both clauses of (1.1) are satisfied, and one has (fa or fb) & (not-gb). John Doe, the boy thought to be a dunce at school, is the same human being (f) as Sir John Doe the Lord Mayor, but not the same boy, because Sir Doe is not a boy (g); TYPE 4: where both clauses of (1.1) are satisfied, and one has (fa or fb) & (ga & not-gb). The jug and the coffee pot are the same quantity of china (f), but not the same utensil (g); TYPE 5: again, both clauses of (1.1) are satisfied, and one has (fa or fb) & (ga & not-gb). The Lord Mayor is the same human being (f) as the managing director of Gnome Engineering, but these are distinct official positions (g), which are contingently realized by one man. In Wiggins's discussion of cases of type 4 and 5, everything hinges on the imputation of ambiguity to one of the referring expressions, or the uncovering of a weaker, non-identity relation such as constitution or realization, thus rendering the second conjunct of (1.1) vacuous.

6. A favourite example of Wiggins's; - John Doe who struggled at school, but later became the mayor of London as well as a successful businessman, and was also knighted to become Sir John Doe.

7. *De re*, of the object; as opposed to *de dicto*, of the proposition.

8. Wiggins's essentialism is modest, he claims, because it remains neutral on issues such as the necessity of origin. This is as it should be. Such origin scenarios are often descriptive 'set-ups'. Philosophers like Kripke, who argue explicitly for the necessity of origin, - of this table's being made of a specific hunk of wood in all possible worlds in which it exists, - provide one with nothing but the kind of object in question (table, oak tree, human being), and its

material origin (wood, acorn, zygote). It is consequently hardly surprising that origin proves essential in the transworld identification of the relevant tree or table, for what else is there by means of which to identify it? Consider a dress which plays a very specific role in a woman's life, say the life of the female individuator concerned about dogs. She searches for it under the description 'the dress I shall be married in'. Now, depending on what else is intended with the above description, it makes sense to say something like the following: "This dress would not have creased as much if it had been made of silk rather than satin." That is, the dress would be the same dress even if it had had a different origin, viz., the one she gets married in. The dress made of silk would still be this dress, but then it would be uncreased. In the present case then, sameness of origin is not a constraint as the dress need not satisfy criteria not included in the search-guiding description. If the description were, for instance, satin-specifying, then the dress could not have had a different origin from its actual one. But notice that the essentiality of origin is then explicitly stipulated; it is neither an implication of ordinary language nor a course prescribed by intuition. Considerations such as these do not conclusively refute views in favour of the necessity of origin, but do cast doubt on the legitimacy of the standard arguments in favour of the doctrine.

9. The work of Putnam has substantially improved the fortunes of essentialism in modern analytic philosophy, enabling the discussion of 'real essences' in the Lockean tradition once again. Cf. Locke's Essay concerning Human Understanding, III, iii. Substances are what they are because of the " ... real internal, but generally ... unknown constitution ... whereon their discoverable qualities depend".

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