Introduction: Issues and Options

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The metaphysics of ordinary objects has seen a flourishing renewal in recent years, with a number of novel approaches being developed, and there is currently no anthology of essays on the topic. The essays in this volume aim to provide new directions in contemporary metaphysical debates about the nature of ordinary objects, such as composition, persistence, perception, the relationship between the manifest and the scientific images, artefacts, truthmakers and metaontology.

Paradigmatic 'ordinary objects' are objects that we can see with the unaided eye, for instance the tomatoes and lemons beloved by philosophers of perception. These ordinary objects have what we can call 'ordinary qualities' – colours, textures and so forth. Familiarly, the idiosyncratic nature of our perceptual systems seems to unmask ordinary qualities as imposters: despite appearances, tomatoes and lemons are not coloured. Somewhat less familiarly, the idiosyncratic nature of our perceptual systems seems to unmask ordinary objects as imposters too: despite appearances, tomatoes and lemons do not exist. The opening essay of the collection by Alex Byrne, 'Perception and Ordinary Objects', examines whether these two threats to common sense stand or fall together.

According to Thomas Hofweber, a crucial question in the metaphysics of ordinary objects is how the classic metaphysical considerations relate to empirical evidence that we have about ordinary objects. Is there empirical evidence one way or another in relation to the metaphysical questions, and do metaphysical considerations have to overcome empirical evidence, or are they largely separate enterprises? On Hofweber's view, a crucial question here is whether we have defeasible evidence in perception for ordinary objects and what they are like, and whether this evidence is defeated in light of metaphysical considerations. 'Empirical Evidence and the Metaphysics of Ordinary Objects' argues, contrary to Merricks, Korman, Sider and others, that

there is no such defeat: the question about the existence of ordinary objects is settled empirically, but not all metaphysical questions about what ordinary objects are like are settled that way.

In 'Basic Objects As Grounds: A Metaphysical Manifesto', Bill Brewer claims that according to our commonsense world-view, macroscopic material objects endure, are never precisely collocated with each other and may survive the loss of at least some of their parts, and he notes that these commitments are notoriously difficult to reconcile. Brewer's project is to elaborate an account that succeeds in reconciling them in the most basic cases, and to explore its potential as an adequate overall theory by explaining how such basic objects may serve as the grounds for various other material things.

What relation do ordinary objects – tomatoes, rocks, human beings – bear to the objects of fundamental physics? Suppose, for instance, that physics tells us that the universe comprises dynamic, interactive arrangements of particles. What relation do these bear to ordinary things? One possibility is that only the particles are fully real and that ordinary things enjoy a kind of attenuated, non-fundamental reality: ordinary things are 'grounded' in the fundamental things. Or perhaps ordinary objects are fully real existents alongside the particles: there is the cloud of particles that makes up the tomato and there is the tomato. A third possibility is that ordinary objects, or most of them, are fictions. In 'Objects, Ordinary and Otherwise', John Heil discusses these options and develops a fourth possibility framed in terms of truthmakers: the particles serve as truthmakers for truths about ordinary things; fundamental physics provides the deep story about the nature of ordinary things.

In 'In Defence of Ordinary Objects and a Naturalistic Answer to the Special Composition Question', Jonas Waechter and James Ladyman discuss the meaning of the English expression 'ordinary', its vagueness and its context-sensitivity. They illustrate the diversity of types of ordinary objects using data from comparative linguistics, and then they argue that many such objects must exist, despite their composite nature, at least at 'close' possible worlds. Waechter and Ladyman give two arguments. First, they give a charity argument, which is roughly that the development and survival of cognitive and linguistic capacities and contents require that, for any human linguistic community *c*, a 'large number' of expressions/concepts purporting to refer to/apply

to objects and used by normal, healthy adult thinkers of *c* must successfully refer/have a non-vacuous extension, at least at 'close' possible worlds. Second, they give an argument against the van Inwagenian rephrasing strategy for mereological nihilism, which is roughly that it offers only a simulacrum of rephrasing, and that nihilism is incompatible with virtually all current scientific and 'everyday' reasoning and knowledge. Then Waechter and Ladyman explain how ordinary objects can exist given their composite nature by defending a naturalistic answer to the special composition question, according to which, roughly, objects compose something at time *t* if and only if they form a chain of bound states at *t*, and they illustrate this thesis with examples drawn from classical and quantum physics.

Gary S. Rosenkrantz's essay, 'Compound Natural Beings: Varieties of Compositional Unity', argues that the most extreme and counter-intuitive forms of ontological deflation and inflation for substances can be avoided by requiring that individual physical substances instantiate natural kinds that figure in irreducible scientific laws. Rosenkrantz assumes a broadly Aristotelian framework for individual physical substances, according to which each such substance consists of matter instantiating an essential form. The price to be paid for obtaining this salutary result is rejecting the reality of artefacts as individual physical substances, a small price, he maintains, given that artefacts are ontologically suspect for a variety of reasons.

The 'pluralist' view that distinct material things may coincide should explain the possibility of selective thought about such things. In 'How Can Thought Select Between Coincident Material Things?' Rory Madden criticises traditional sortalist and more recent perceptualist approaches to this selection problem, and presents an alternative approach on behalf of pluralism. The discussion highlights respects in which pluralism runs counter to appearances and suggests pluralist explanations of those appearances.

In 'Against Analytic Existence Entailments', Peter van Inwagen rejects a central thesis of Amie Thomasson's metaontology: that there are analytic existence entailments. Two examples of analytic existence entailments are: if there are *x*s arranged chairwise, then there is a chair; if there are *x*s arranged cupwise, then there is a cup. Van Inwagen presents an extended argument for the impossibility of analytic existence entailments.

Simon Evnine's 'Mass Production' presents a view of artefacts on which they are, essentially, the impress of human intentions onto matter and claims that, while the original matter out of which something is made is not (*contra* Kripke) essential to it, the act by which it is made is. This raises a very interesting problem for mass production, since in such cases, there is nothing essential to one of the products of a given act of making that distinguishes it from another. He develops a theory of collective essence for such objects.

In her essay 'Pragmatism, Ontology and Ordinary Objects', Lynne Rudder Baker starts by rejecting the idea that we must sharply separate what we need to get along in the world from what we should do in the philosophy room when we do 'serious metaphysics'. On her view, a complete account of what there is should mention the ordinary objects that we interact with every day. Hence, Baker develops a view that allows these ordinary things, as such, a seat at the ontological table. She uses the term 'ontological' to signal that she is talking about reality, genuine reality with metaphysical heft. She is not just talking about concepts or sentences that we accept as true. Baker develops her view (a 'constitution view'), responds to criticisms and suggests that philosophical theories should be evaluated pragmatically.

Neo-pragmatist approaches have been making a comeback lately in various local debates. Expressivist approaches to moral discourse have drawn increasing attention, and allied non-representational views of modal, logical and even epistemic discourse have also been developed. Huw Price has argued for a form of global pragmatism, applied to all areas of discourse. But other defenders of local pragmatisms, such as Simon Blackburn, have denied that pragmatism can be extended globally, as it cannot be extended to everyday talk about ordinary objects. In 'What Can Global Pragmatists Say About Ordinary Objects?', Amie L. Thomasson examines the question of whether a broadly pragmatist approach can be extended to cover talk about ordinary objects and, if so, what the consequences would be for ontology and metaontology.

Which is real? The 'ordinary' table or the one presented by science in terms of elementary particles and fields? Or both? In the closing essay of the volume, 'There Are No Such Things As Ordinary Objects', Steven French argues for a form of eliminativism with regard to

ordinary objects such as tables and the like, drawing on the so-called 'scientific image'. However, French also attempts to mitigate the impact of such an apparently radical line by emphasising that recent forms of eliminativism allow us to continue to take talk about such ordinary objects at face value.

1 *Perception and Ordinary Objects*

ALEX BYRNE

Paradigmatic "ordinary objects" are objects that we can see with the unaided eye, for instance the tomatoes, pigs, and lemon-like bars of soap beloved by philosophers of perception.[*] In the Lockean tradition of "indirect realism", ordinary objects were conceived as speculative causes of perceptual experiences, which themselves involved direct awareness of ideas or sense data. Contemporary philosophy of perception almost invariably repudiates indirect realism, following the lead of, among others, Austin and Dretske. As Dretske puts it, "the tomato *is* the sensory core, the directly given" (1969: 75–6).[1]

The tomato and its ilk are frequently taken to have further significance. On one view, the tomato is a *constituent* of the experience of it:

> Some of the objects of perception – the concrete individuals, their properties, the events these partake in – are constituents of the experience. (Martin 2004: 39)

Another view (which may be held together with the constituency thesis) is that the perceiving subject is *acquainted* with the tomato:

> Perception consists most fundamentally in a relation of acquaintance directly with the constituents of the mind-independent world . . . mind-independent material objects. (Brewer 2017: 216)

Compatibly with both the constituency and the acquaintance theses, the very possibility of thought about mind-independent reality may be placed on the tomato's shoulders:

> Attention to a tomato drops the tomato as an anchor of the objective world. (Hellie 2014: 250)

[*] Thanks to Derek Ball, Javi Cumpa, E. J. Green, Clayton Littlejohn, Carla Merino-Rajme, Adam Pautz, Susanna Schellenberg, Susanna Siegel, Jack Spencer, and an audience at the Pacific APA.

[1] In this essay, objects are *particulars*; accordingly, properties or universals are not objects.

Another indication of the importance of ordinary objects in the philosophy of perception is the amount of space devoted to the problem of hallucination. When one (visually) hallucinates a tomato, one seems to see a tomato but in fact sees nothing.[2] In the Lockean tradition, hallucination is in a sense basic: to see a tomato is to have an experience that is of exactly the same kind as a tomato-hallucination, appropriately caused by the presence of a tomato. The contemporary approach is the reverse: seeing a tomato is the basic notion, and hallucination is conceived of as failed seeing. But exactly how to account for the seeming presence of a tomato when no tomato is present is taken to be an exceedingly difficult issue, with a number of incompatible proposed solutions. The *tomato* is not the problem; rather, the problem is the absence of one.

Ironically, as the philosophy of perception has come to clasp tomatoes and other ordinary objects to its bosom, metaphysics has come to view them with grave suspicion. Some prominent metaphysicians deny that there are any. Thus van Inwagen: "My position vis-à-vis tables and other inanimate objects is that there are none" (1990: 99). (Van Inwagen thinks that there are *animate* objects, but the tomato is not one of those.[3]) Naturally, many prominent metaphysicians disagree, but the issue is often viewed as one that demands an initial position of neutrality, with opinion on either side being earned only by sophisticated argument. As Merricks puts it, the issue "must be decided on philosophical grounds" (2001: 9).

Why the initial neutrality, though? The metaphysicians of course acknowledge that the vulgar – or as we say these days, "folk" – speak of ordinary objects. But here they generally side with Hume against Berkeley, according the vulgar opinion little weight. The metaphysicians have a point: although the vulgar know a lot, the mere fact that they believe something is very weak evidence for it. "Common sense" or "intuitions" sometimes turn out to be nothing more than fashionable prejudices.

But there is more to appeal to than the vulgar. What about the deliverances of perception? For sympathizers with contemporary philosophy of perception, it is natural to take *perceptual evidence* to

[2] Mixed cases, where one both hallucinates and sees, will be ignored, as will perceptual modalities other than vision. These restrictions will not affect the argument.

[3] Thus there are tomato *plants*, according to van Inwagen.

consist in facts about individual ordinary objects – that *this* (the tomato) is red and bulgy, for example. And if so, then perception is decidedly not neutral on the existence of ordinary objects.

Metaphysicians are prone to disagree. I seem to see a tomato. Is there a tomato that I see, or merely a plurality of simples (or *atoms*), "arranged tomatowise"? According to Merricks,

> My visual evidence would be the same whether or not the atoms arranged [tomato]wise composed something. (2001: 9)[4]

Thomasson concurs, writing that the competing ontologies of eliminativists, such as van Inwagen and Merricks, and realists, such as herself, are "empirically equivalent" (Thomasson 2015: 158). Similarly, another realist, Korman, in the course of discussing "debunking" arguments for eliminativism, writes that "the arguments are best understood as targeting only those who believe in ordinary objects *for the usual reasons*, namely, that it seems perceptually as if there are objects of the relevant kinds" (Korman 2014: 4).

The quotation from Korman suggests that he does not take perceptual evidence to consist of facts about the perceiver's environment; rather, perceptual evidence (or the "usual reasons") consists of facts about perceptual *appearances*, or *seemings*. And Merricks and Thomasson likely agree. For example, Merricks claims that in "a world like ours except that, while there are atoms arranged [tomato]wise in that world, there are no [tomatoes]", things "would *seem to us* just like the actual world" (2001: 55). Unless Merricks is equating evidence with seemings, this remark is, in context, of little relevance.

In any case, the effectiveness of this maneuver is quite doubtful, because ordinary objects are hard to expunge from *mere seemings*. Perceptual experience, whether veridical or not, requires the existence of ordinary objects. The next two sections make that case, culminating in an argument for the existence of ordinary objects. The subsequent two sections object to a variety of ways of responding to the argument. The final section sums up.

[4] See also Merricks 2016. Merricks's explanation of the crucial locution 'arranged tomatowise' (4) assumes (as he notes) that counterfactuals with impossible antecedents are not vacuously true, a controversial position (see n. 21). For the sake of the argument, 'tomatowise' and the like will be taken for granted here.

1 Scene and Object

This section argues for the two main premises in the argument for ordinary objects. Simply to avoid distracting qualifications, the informal exposition will take the vulgar point of view and assume the existence of ordinary objects.

1.1 The Successful Case

Consider an everyday example of successful – hence veridical[5] – perceptual experience: you have keen vision and in excellent lighting conditions see a red tomato and a green lime on a white kitchen counter. You see these things as they are: the tomato looks red and is red, the lime looks dimpled and is dimpled, and so on. To repeat a question from P. F. Strawson, "How is it with you, visually, at the moment?" (Strawson 1979: 93). As Strawson says, a natural response is simply to specify what you see in more detail: "I see a red bulgy smooth tomato next to a green oval dimpled lime, against a white background."

Of course this specification is drastically incomplete. Attributes like glossiness and shading have been left out, as well as the spatial relations between the items in the scene and between those items and your position. Even the attributes themselves cannot be captured by ordinary adjectives like 'red', since the color of the tomato will be variously saturated, bright, and of a more determinate hue.

Once these additional parameters are included, one might expect that this would render the verb 'see' redundant. Color is detectable only by vision, but that is just one example: glossiness, (visual) texture, shading, and illumination are also proprietary visual attributes. Even Aristotelian "common sensibles" such as shape seem less common on closer examination: when one runs one's fingers over a black triangle on an otherwise white sheet of paper, is one's tactile experience of boundarylessness illusory? There is, after all, a triangular boundary that one can detect by sight. It is more attractive to say that the kinds of boundaries (and so shapes) detected by vision and tactile perception are different: visual boundaries concern how surfaces interact with light; tactile boundaries concern how they deform under pressure. Visual and

[5] Veridicality is necessary but not sufficient for success: see Johnston 2006: 271–4.

tactile shapes are of a common genus but are distinct species. This is supported by the physiological characteristics of our senses: the front ends of our visual and auditory systems, for example, are devoted to the recovery of different sorts of information about our environment.

Granted that 'see' is in principle dispensable, does a suitably detailed specification of the scene before your eyes provide a complete answer to Strawson's question? Those who think that experience has "sensational properties" (Peacocke 1983), or believers in "mental paint" (Block 2003) will answer no. The issue is controversial, but there is at least a presumption in favor of the opposite answer. The point of perception is to inform the animal about its environment; information about sensational properties or mental paint is ecologically useless. When asked Strawson's question, one would expect the environment to be the only place to look.

In any event, the argument of this essay would (probably) not be much affected even if sensational properties or mental paint were admitted, but the cost in additional complexity would be excessive. We will therefore leave sensational properties and mental paint on the shelf and work with a popular view we can call *presentationalism*, expressed in the following quotations:

> To know what one's experience is like is to know what properties, aspects or features are presented to one in having the experience. There seems to be no way to pick out the what it is like properties of the experiences without also picking out corresponding properties which objects may appear to have. (Martin 1998: 174)

> The phenomenal character of your experience, as you look around the room, is constituted by the actual layout of the room itself: which particular objects are there, their intrinsic properties, such as color and shape, and how they are arranged in relation to one another and to you. (Campbell 2002: 116)[6]

> [T]here are no images (two dimensional arrays) in the phenomenology of vision: it is the relevant tract of the environment that is present to consciousness, not an image of it. (McDowell 1994: 342)[7]

[6] See also Campbell in Campbell and Cassam 2014: 18: "The qualitative character of perceptual experience has nothing particularly to do with perception or experience; it is simply the qualitative character of the world observed."

[7] The subsequent sentence implies that the quotation describes "what visual consciousness is like".