Do Ordinary Objects Exist? No.*

Trenton Merricks

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I. Three Bad Arguments

Consider a pair of gloves. Name the left glove 'Lefty' and the right glove 'Righty'. Lefty and Righty are ordinary objects; thus we have the ordinary word 'glove', which applies to Lefty and also applies to Righty. Perhaps Lefty and Righty compose an object. That is, perhaps there is an object that has exactly Lefty and Righty (and their parts) as its parts. Name that object 'Pair'. Pair seems to be an ordinary object too; after all, we have the ordinary expression 'pair of gloves', which seems to apply to Pair.

Here is an argument for the existence of Pair.

> ARGUMENT ONE: Yesterday I was out in the cold, and my hands stayed warm. Lefty did not cause that—Lefty kept only my left hand warm. And Righty did not cause that—Righty kept only my right hand warm. But surely something caused my hands—both of them—to stay warm. Pair is the obvious candidate. Nothing can keep both my hands warm unless it exists. So Pair exists.

Argument One is a bad argument. This is because even if Pair does not exist—that is, even if Lefty and Righty compose nothing at all—we can still give a full causal account of both hands being kept warm despite the frosty temperature. Here it is: Lefty kept the left hand warm and Righty kept the right hand warm.

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* Well, except for the ones that do; see Section VIII. Thanks to Elizabeth Barnes, Ross Cameron, Becky Stangl, Adam Tiller, and, especially, Dan Korman.

This account does not say that any one thing kept both hands warm, but rather that two things did: Lefty and Righty, working in concert, kept both hands warm, together causing what neither causes on its own. This is no more mysterious than your and my carrying a couch, a couch that neither you nor I alone could carry. And this no more gives us a good reason to think that Pair exists than does your and my carrying the couch give us a good reason to think that there is a big two-headed object made up partly of me and partly of you.

Note that, for all I have said so far, Pair might have caused both hands to stay warm, as did Lefty and Righty. (And, for all I have said so far, a two-headed object might have carried the couch, as did you and I.) So Pair might exist. So Argument One—like lots of bad arguments—might happen to have a true conclusion. My only point here—at this stage—is that Argument One is a bad argument because your hands' remaining warm while you are out in the cold is itself not a good reason to conclude that Pair exists, not even if there must be a causal explanation of your hands' remaining warm.

Here is a second argument for the existence of Pair.

> ARGUMENT TWO: I put Lefty and Righty on a scale and the scale registered a weight of twelve ounces. But Lefty weighs in at a mere six ounces. The same goes for Righty. So neither Lefty nor Righty caused the scale to register twelve ounces. But surely something caused the scale to register twelve ounces. Pair is the obvious candidate. Only existing things can cause a scale to register a weight. So Pair exists.

Argument Two is a bad argument. This is because even if Pair does not exist, we can still fully causally account for the scale's registering twelve ounces: Lefty and Righty jointly cause the scale to register twelve ounces.

Working in concert, Lefty and Righty did together that which neither could do on its own, cause the scale to register twelve ounces. This is no more mysterious than you

and me, perched together on a scale, causing it to register over three hundred pounds, even if neither of us weighs anything near three hundred pounds. And Lefty and Righty's doing this together no more gives us a reason to believe that Pair exists than does our squeezing onto the scale together give us a reason to believe that there is a big three-hundred-pound-plus object with its four feet planted on the scale.

For all I have said so far, Pair might have caused the scale to register twelve ounces, as did Lefty and Righty. (And a two-headed object composed of you and me might have caused the scale to register over three hundred pounds, as did you and I.) No matter. For now, what does matter is that when it comes to registering a weight on a scale, Pair would cause nothing new, nothing that has not already been caused by Lefty and Righty working in concert. That is why Argument Two is a bad argument.

Let us consider one more argument for the existence of Pair:

> ARGUMENT THREE: I seem to see Pair. So do you—just look! Only existing things can cause visual experiences. So Pair exists.

Working in concert, Lefty and Righty cause a visual experience that neither could cause on its own. This is no more mysterious than is your and my jumping up and down causing a spectator to have a visual experience that neither you nor I alone could cause. And Lefty and Righty's jointly causing a visual experience as of a pair of gloves no more gives us a reason to believe that Pair exists than does our causing a visual experience as of two people leaping about give us a reason to believe that there is a single object, with four hands and two livers, leaping about.

Perhaps Pair is yet another cause of the visual experience as of a pair of gloves. (And perhaps a big two-livered object is yet another cause of the visual experience as of you and me jumping up and down.) Even so, I conclude that nothing in the visual

experience of seeming to see Pair gives anyone who believes in Lefty and Righty a good reason to conclude that Pair exists. Argument Three is just as bad as Arguments One and Two.

II. No Good Ordinary Reasons to Believe that Pair Exists

Lefty and Righty, working in concert, cause both of your hands to remain warm. If Pair exists, then—obviously—Pair causes your hands to remain warm in all those situations in which Lefty and Righty cause your hands to remain warm. And—equally obviously—there is no situation in which Pair causes your hands to remain warm, but your hands are not also caused to remain warm by Lefty and Righty, working together. So let us say that, when it comes to keeping hands warm, Pair is at best a *mere causal overdeterminer*. Let us say, in other words, that, when it comes to keeping hands warm, Pair is at best *wholly causally redundant*. And so it goes for any other effect that Pair might cause.

If Pair exists, Pair is a mere causal overdeterminer. Pair's being a mere causal overdeterminer is why Arguments One through Three are bad. For each of those three arguments turns on the idea that a certain effect—hands' remaining warm, the registering of twelve ounces on a scale, a certain visual sensation—should lead us to conclude that Pair causes said effect, and so exists. And each of those arguments is bad because the

relevant effect is fully causally explained even if Pair does not exist. That is, even if Pair does not exist, Lefty and Righty, working in concert, cause the relevant effect.[1]

It is not just Arguments One through Three that are rendered no good by Pair's being wholly causally redundant. I think that any reason for believing that Pair exists that turns on Pair's causal effects will be a bad reason. This includes reasons that turn on Pair's causal effects, but that—unlike Arguments One through Three—are not arguments at all, much less arguments that invoke the relevant effects in their premises.

To see how broadly I am using 'reason'—and to see how a reason can "turn on" causal effects without invoking those effects in the premise of an argument—consider the following: Your experiencing your hands being kept warm directly produces in you the belief that Pair exists. This is not a case of your believing that Pair exists on the basis of an argument for Pair's existence. So it is not a case of your believing that Pair exists on the basis of Argument One. Even so, this reason for believing that Pair exists turns on Pair's causing your hands to remain warm no less than does Argument One.

I think that this reason—this experience that produces your belief in Pair—is a bad reason to believe in Pair, and is bad in much the same way that Argument One is bad. As already noted, Argument One is a bad reason for believing in Pair because even if Pair does not exist, your hands remaining warm is still fully causally explained. Analogously, your experience of your hands remaining warm is a bad reason for believing in Pair because even if Pair does not exist, you still have that experience, and it is still fully causally explained.

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[1] Section I never uses the word 'overdetermine'. And the points made here and below can be made without using that word; for example, replace my claims about what Pair "overdetermines" with claims about Pair's effects being caused by Lefty and Righty, working in concert. So there is no need for us to fight about whether, for example, a whole's causing what its parts cause counts as "real overdetermination."

More generally, and only because Pair is a mere causal overdeterminer, I think that any reason for believing that Pair exists that turns on some causal effect of Pair's is a bad reason. More generally still, I think that any reason for believing that any particular wholly causally redundant physical object exists that turns on some causal effect of that object is a bad reason.

I also think that all the *ordinary* reasons to believe in the existence of any particular physical object, Pair included, turn on the causal effects of that object. To see why, pretend—just for the sake of argument and even though it is presumably impossible—that Pair exists *but has no causal effects whatsoever*. Then Pair would fail to keep any hands warm. And Pair would register no weight on a scale. And Pair would be invisible. And so on. Given what are we pretending only for the sake of argument, I think it is clear that we would have no good ordinary reasons at all for believing that Pair exists. This shows that any ordinary reasons we do have to believe that Pair exists turn on Pair's having this or that causal effect—and so are bad reasons.[2]

III. Pair Does Not Exist

[2] Two points of clarification: First, I have not indulged in skeptical hypotheses to impugn ordinary reasons for believing that Pair exists. For example, I did not trade on a possible world in which an evil demon causes your visual experience as of seeing Pair. Rather, I have impugned those ordinary reasons on the grounds that the relevant effects are actually fully causally explained by Lefty and Righty working in concert, and so fully causally explained even if Pair does not cause them.

Second, suppose that our having the expression 'pair of gloves', or someone's wanting to receive a pair of gloves for Christmas, amounts to an ordinary reason to believe that Pair exists. I say that if—as pretended above only for the sake of argument—Pair had no causal effects whatsoever (and so was invisible, etc.), then we would all agree that those supposed ordinary reasons would not be any good. I think this shows that those reasons somehow presuppose—and so "turn on"—Pair's having this or that causal effect.

There are no good ordinary reasons for believing that Pair exists. But there might be good *non*-ordinary reasons for believing that Pair exists. I assume that any such non-ordinary reasons will be "philosophical." That is, I assume that any such non-ordinary reasons will turn on the sorts of claims typically made, at least explicitly, only by philosophers.[3] By the same token, there might also be good philosophical reasons for denying that Pair exists. In fact, I myself have a philosophical reason for denying that Pair exists.

My philosophical reason for denying that Pair exists has two stages. The first is an "Ockham's razor" type principle: We should deny the existence of those alleged physical objects that would be, of necessity, wholly causally redundant, especially if we have no good ordinary reasons to believe in such objects. The second is that—as argued above—we have no good ordinary reasons to believe in physical objects that are (of necessity or otherwise) wholly causally redundant.

My philosophical reason applies to Pair only if Pair is, of necessity, wholly causally redundant. And I think it is. After all, I did not have to dream up a special scenario according to which Pair ends up being a mere causal overdeterminer, such as (for example) a scenario in which a superbeing intentionally causes whatever Pair causes. On the contrary, it seems like there is no possible scenario in which Pair is anything but a

[3] I do not deny the possibility of non-philosophical non-ordinary reasons. For example, suppose that you know that God is omniscient, never lies, and has told you that Pair exists. Then you have a reason to believe that Pair exists, a reason that is both non-ordinary and non-philosophical. Moreover, since this reason does not turn on Pair's causal effects, this reason is not touched by my above arguments that undermine ordinary reasons for believing in Pair.

mere causal overdeterminer. Pair is *essentially* a mere causal overdeterminer. That is, Pair is, *of necessity*, wholly causally redundant.[4]

Here is one way to motivate my philosophical reason for denying that Pair exists. Imagine that some claim that a certain object O causes the water in your tea kettle to get hot. They admit that your stove causes this as well. They clarify that O overdetermines the heating of the water, and add that no part of your stove is a part of O and no part of O is a part of your stove. They also claim that O causes the rain to stay outside your house, but admit that O is thereby causally overdetermining the effect of your roof, which itself is not a part of O nor is any part of O a part of it. They add that none of this has anything to do with your stove or your roof in particular. Rather, they further add, this is all because every effect O causes is also (of necessity) caused by other things, and, moreover, none of those things is a part of O and no part of O is a part of any of them. Finally, they add that no one has any good ordinary reasons to believe in O.

First, O would be essentially a mere causal overdeterminer. Second, we have no good ordinary reasons to believe that O exists. I say that these two facts together constitute one good philosophical reason—there are others—to deny that O exists. So I do deny that O exists. And I bet you do too. But if these two facts constitute a good philosophical reason to deny that O exists, then the two parallel facts regarding Pair,

[4] Lefty and Righty, working together, result in Pair being essentially a mere causal overdeterminer. But we should not conclude, in virtue of what Pair allegedly causes, that each of Lefty and Righty is itself essentially a mere overdeterminer, of necessity causing nothing that is not already caused by Pair. For presumably each of Lefty and Righty could exist even if Pair did not. For example, destroying Righty presumably also results in Pair's non-existence, but not in Lefty's; thus it is possible—even if Pair does exist—for Lefty to cause things that Pair does not. On the other hand, I do not suppose that Pair could exist if either Lefty or Righty failed to exist, or—more cautiously—that Pair could exist without being composed of gloves (even if those gloves are not Lefty and Righty in particular) that render Pair wholly causally redundant. (Parallel remarks apply below to, e.g., the discussion of Lefty and S, L, and T.)

defended above, constitute a good philosophical reason to deny that Pair exists. This is why I deny that Pair exists.

My philosophical reason for concluding that O does not exist could be outweighed by philosophical reasons to conclude that O does exist. Likewise, my philosophical reason for concluding that Pair does not exist could be outweighed by philosophical reasons to conclude that Pair exists. And there are some who do defend philosophical reasons for the existence of Pair.

For example, some philosophers argue for unrestricted composition, that is, for the conclusion that, for any objects whatsoever, those objects compose something. That conclusion is a philosophical reason to believe that Pair exists, since it is a philosophical reason to believe that Lefty and Righty compose something. Moreover, that philosophical reason is not touched by my above arguments that undermined ordinary reasons for believing in Pair. This is because the arguments for unrestricted composition do not turn on the alleged causal effects of composite objects.

I think that the arguments for unrestricted composition fail (see Merricks, 2005). But you might disagree. Or you might offer other philosophical arguments for the existence of Pair, arguments that do not proceed by way of unrestricted composition. Similarly, my aforementioned philosophical reason to conclude that Pair does not exist could be buttressed by further philosophical reasons for that same conclusion. As we wrangle over which philosophical reasons are ultimately most persuasive, we are doing substantive metaphysics.

I think that the case can be made that the reasons for denying that Pair exists are overall the best (see Merricks, 2001). You might disagree. But even if you do disagree,

you would be confused if you then added that denying that Pair exists is absurd, or added that only those unMoored from common sense would claim that Pair does not exist, or added that assent to the sentence 'Pair does not exist' must be a result of language gone on holiday. On the contrary, to deny that Pair exists is simply to endorse a philosophical conclusion on an issue that all should recognize is genuinely up for grabs. All should agree that this issue of substantive metaphysics must be decided—if it is to be decided at all—by weighing the philosophical reasons that push in one direction against those that push in the other, rather than, say, by what one sees right in front of one's face.

IV. Neither Does Lefty or Righty

We saw some bad arguments for the claim that Pair exists. Here are similar, and similarly bad, arguments for the claim that Lefty exists: Something must cause your left hand to remain warm in frosty weather; so Lefty exists. Something must cause the scale to register six ounces; so Lefty exists. Something must cause your visual experience of seeming to see Lefty; so Lefty exists.

Each of these brief arguments assumes that the occurrence of a certain effect—a hand's remaining warm, the registering of six ounces on a scale, a certain visual experience—gives us a good reason to conclude that Lefty exists to cause said effect. But none of these brief arguments are any better than Arguments One through Three for the existence of Pair. Each of these brief arguments is bad because the relevant effect is fully causally explained even if Lefty does not exist.

To see why I say this, suppose that if Lefty exists, Lefty is composed of a leather shell S, a wool lining L, and some thread T (T connects L to S). Then surely S, L, and T work in concert to cause your left hand to remain warm in all and only those situations in which Lefty (allegedly) also causes your left hand to remain warm. And S, L, and T jointly cause the scale to register six ounces in all and only those situations in which Lefty (allegedly) also causes the scale to register that weight. And S, L, and T jointly cause you to have a visual experience as of a left glove in all and only those situations in which Lefty (allegedly) also causes that experience.

If Lefty exists, Lefty causes a certain effect in all and only those situations in which S, L, and T cause that effect. Lefty—no less than Pair—is essentially a mere causal overdeterminer. Necessarily, Lefty is wholly causally redundant. As we saw above, this undermines certain quick arguments for the existence of Lefty. More importantly, and as we saw in Section II, we have no good ordinary reasons to believe in the existence of a given physical object if that object is a mere causal overdeterminer. So every ordinary reason for believing in Lefty is no good. (For example, we have no good perceptual reasons for believing in Lefty, since such reasons turn on experiences that, even if Lefty does not exist, are fully causally explained by S, L, and T working in concert.)

As noted above (§III), I think that we should deny the existence of those alleged physical objects that would be, of necessity, wholly causally redundant, especially if—as with Lefty—we have no good ordinary reasons to believe in such objects. Thus Lefty's being of necessity wholly causally redundant does not merely undermine all the ordinary reasons to believe in Lefty. It also gives us a philosophical reason to deny that Lefty exists. I conclude that Lefty does not exist. Likewise for Righty.

Even those who have their own non-ordinary and philosophical reasons for believing in Lefty should agree that there is nothing crazy or absurd in denying that Lefty exists. The claim that Lefty does not exist is not the sort of thing one might endorse only "in the ontology room" but be unable to endorse sensibly in the ordinary business of life. Nor is the claim that Lefty does not exist refuted simply by waving S, L, and T—or even Lefty itself—in my face.

V. Neither Does S, L, or T

Even if Pair does not exist, we can still causally explain both hands remaining warm, despite the cold. For Lefty keeps the left hand warm and Righty keeps the right hand warm. Or so I said in Sections I and II above. But in the preceding section, Section IV, I argued that neither Lefty nor Righty exists. So I must conclude that neither Lefty nor Righty keeps any hand warm. So I must revise my objection to Argument One. For parallel reasons, I must also revise my objections to Arguments Two and Three, along with my reason for denying that Pair exists, a reason that turned on Pair's being of necessity wholly causally redundant because of what Lefty and Righty jointly cause.

The most obvious revision says that S, L, and T, working in concert, keep the left hand warm; and the shell, lining, and thread that allegedly compose Righty keep the right hand warm. My objections to Arguments One through Three and to the existence of Pair then proceed more or less as above. But of course this most obvious revision cannot be the final story. For S, L, and T (if they exist) are essentially mere overdeterminers in just the same way that Lefty and Righty and Pair (if they exist) are essentially mere

overdeterminers. For S, L, and T each cause an effect only in those circumstances in which their respective parts, working in concert, cause that same effect.

So my argument against Pair turns into an argument against Lefty and against Righty, which in turn turns into an argument against S, L, T, and the lining, shell, and thread that seem to compose Righty. Where does it end? Presumably not with the left half of S, the right half of S, the left half of L, and so on. For if the left half of S exists, it has parts, and those parts, working in concert, cause whatever the left half of S causes, and likewise for the right half of S and the left half of L, and so on.

VI. Two Options

A *simple* has no parts. Suppose that a particular simple has causal effects. It might be possible for that simple to be rendered entirely causally redundant by way of, say, a superbeing who has decided to cause whatever that simple causes throughout the duration of that simple's existence. But none of this would be that simple's fault. Nor would any of this suggest that that simple is, of necessity, wholly causally redundant.

In fact, it is hard to see how a simple could be, of necessity, wholly causally redundant. For a simple has no parts, so it has no parts that, working in concert, cause exactly what it causes. Nor do I think that any simple shares its location, of necessity, with various other simples, all of which cause exactly what it causes. And it is surely false that in every possible situation something or other—such as a bizarre superbeing, or an equally bizarre law of nature—would crop up to render a given simple wholly causally

redundant. So I conclude that if there are simples that have causal effects, those simples are not essentially mere causal overdeterminers.

Suppose that there are simples. And consider those simples that, if Pair exists, compose Pair. Suppose further that those simples, working in concert, cause all that Pair causes, if Pair exists. Given these suppositions—and given that those simples are not themselves of necessity causally redundant—I would follow the reasoning defended in this essay "all the way down" and conclude that there is nothing where we think that there is a pair of gloves besides those simples.

Maybe there are no simples. Or maybe there are simples, but simples do not cause effects, not in the sense of 'cause' in which Pair (if it exists) causes effects. Even so, there might still be some smallest physical objects that cause effects in the way that Pair (if it exists) causes effects. That is, it might be that at a certain point as we descend from Pair to Lefty to T to T's larger parts to the parts of T's larger parts, and so on, we reach a point at which the parts no longer cause effects, not even working in concert, not in the sense of 'cause' in which pairs of gloves or gloves or leather shells or wool linings are alleged to cause effects.[5]

With this in mind, suppose that if Pair exists, it has among its parts some objects $x_1 \ldots x_n$ that cause effects (in the sense of 'cause' in which Pair would cause effects). Add that $x_1 \ldots x_n$ have all and only $y_1 \ldots y_n$ as parts. And add that $y_1 \ldots y_n$ do not cause effects (not in the sense of 'cause' in which Pair would cause effects). Then we can take the above reasoning for the claim that simples would not be essentially mere causal

[5] At least since Russell (1919), some philosophers have argued that the notion of *cause* has no place in physics. Suppose they are right. Suppose further that this implies that we should not credit quarks (etc.) with causing effects. Add that some entities composed of quarks (etc.) do cause effects. Then we get the view just described in the text.

overdeterminers and tweak it to show that $x_1 \ldots x_n$ would not be essentially mere causal overdeterminers. Then, for the sorts of reasons presented in Sections III through V, I would conclude that $x_1 \ldots x_n$ are not only the "smallest causers" but also the biggest objects located in a region that we would ordinarily think contains a pair of gloves.

VII. An Objection

There might be simples that cause effects in the way that gloves cause effects. Or there might be non-simple "smallest causers." Those are two options. And I think that there are further options that would fit with the line of argument I have been defending against the existence of Lefty and Righty and Pair (see Merricks, 2001, 115). But there is one alleged possibility that might seem to threaten the line of argument I have been defending. Here it is: First, every physical object has parts that are physical objects (so there are no physical simples). Second, for every physical object, the parts of that object, working in concert, cause exactly the same effects (in the sense of 'cause' in which gloves are alleged to cause effects) as that object itself causes.

I do not know whether this alleged possibility really is possible, and I doubt that anyone else knows either. But let us assume that this alleged possibility really is possible. And let us also assume that this possibility implies that it is possible that there are some physical objects that are essentially mere causal overdeterminers. These assumptions might seem to threaten my overall argument for the conclusion that Lefty and Righty and Pair do not exist.

But I do not think the threat is very serious. To begin to see why, recall this example from above: Imagine that some claim that there exists a certain object O that causes the water in your kettle to get hot. They admit that your stove causes this as well. They clarify that O overdetermines the heating of that water. They also claim that O causes your rugs to remain dry during a rainstorm, admitting that O is merely causally overdetermining an effect caused by your roof. They then add that, necessarily, every effect caused by O is also caused by other things, none of which is a part of O and no part of O is a part of any of those other things. They then concede that there are no good ordinary reasons to believe in O.

As noted above, I would conclude that O does not exist. For, as noted above, I think the fact that O would be essentially a mere causal overdeterminer is a good philosophical reason to deny that it exists, especially since there is no good ordinary reason to believe in O.

But now consider this alleged possibility: There is an object that is exactly like O, as just described. I do not know whether this alleged possibility really is possible, but assume that it is. Even assuming this, I still conclude that O does not actually exist. And I still say that the following principle gives us a good reason to conclude that O does not exist: We should deny the existence of those alleged physical objects that would be, of necessity, wholly causally redundant, especially if we have no good ordinary reasons to believe in such objects.

If it is possible for an object like O to exist, then this principle would lead us astray in some "possible worlds." So too would a principle like "we should deny that there are any physical objects that are, as a matter of staggering coincidence, mere

overdeterminers, all of whose effects are caused by entities that are not their parts and of which they are not themselves parts." I suppose that there are also "possible worlds" in which a principle like "everything else being equal, adopt the simpler and more elegant theory" would lead us astray. And the same goes for a principle like "trust inductions made with regard to natural properties, but not with regard to gerrymandered properties." So what? A principle that guides theory choice can be the right principle to follow even if it would lead us astray in some "possible worlds."

So I deny that the mere possibility of an object like O automatically undermines every philosophical reason to deny that O exists. In particular, I deny that that mere possibility undermines my own reason for denying that O exists. (That mere possibility does undermine those reasons that—unlike my own—rely on the claim that an object like O is impossible.) For perfectly analogous reasons, I do not think that the reason defended in this essay for denying the existence of Pair and Lefty and Righty is undermined simply by the mere possibility of there being physical objects that are, of necessity, wholly causally redundant.

Set aside mere possibility. Suppose—for the sake of argument—that the following is in fact how things really are: First, every physical object has parts. And, second, for every physical object, the parts of that object, working in concert, cause exactly the same effects (in the sense of 'cause' in which gloves are alleged to cause effects) as that object itself causes. Suppose that we even know that this is how things actually are.

I concede that, given these suppositions, we cannot say that there are absolutely no physical objects that are, of necessity, wholly causally redundant. But these

suppositions do not imply that Pair or Lefty or Righty exists. In fact, even if I endorsed these suppositions, I would still deny the existence of Pair and Lefty and Righty. I would even do so for an Ockham's-razor type reason. That reason claims that we should deny *to the extent that we can* the existence of those alleged physical objects that would be, of necessity, wholly causally redundant, especially if we have no good ordinary reasons to believe in those objects. We can say that Pair and Lefty and Righty do not exist. And this is what I would say.

Defenders of Lefty and Righty and Pair might object that there is something arbitrary about wielding Ockham's razor once it is qualified with *to the extent that we can*. That is, they might object that it is arbitrary to use the razor to rule out familiar macroscopic objects while also conceding that at some point there will be smaller objects that are, of necessity, wholly causally redundant.

Their sort of reasoning aims to purchase a decrease in apparent arbitrariness with an increase in objects that are, of necessity, wholly causally redundant. I myself find it more plausible to get rid of as many such objects as we can. And this seems like the right move to me even if its cost is conceding both that we do not know how "far down" to "draw the line" and start admitting such objects, and also that if we did know where that line was to be drawn, it might seem arbitrary to us.

Besides, once we have a descending series of essentially wholly causally redundant objects that goes "all the way down," I suspect that the only view that really does purchase a decrease in apparent arbitrariness says that the hierarchy of such entities goes "all the way up" as well. This view delivers not just the existence of Lefty and

Righty and Pair, but also unrestricted composition. And I say that—whatever we say about Lefty and Righty and Pair—we should reject unrestricted composition.

I say this because unrestricted composition brings serious problems in its wake, problems best avoided by rejecting unrestricted composition.[6] So I think that—given that we should reject unrestricted composition—endorsing the existence of Lefty, Righty, and Pair does not free us from the sort of arbitrariness that those who object to my "qualified Ockham's razor" want to avoid. And as long as we have the apparent arbitrariness anyway, we might as well—at no additional cost—get rid of the essentially merely overdetermining Lefty and Righty and Pair.

Not everyone will agree. For example, some will insist that we should rid ourselves of all apparent arbitrariness here, even if that means endorsing unrestricted composition. So they will conclude that Lefty and Righty and Pair exist. Obviously enough, they have reached that conclusion not for ordinary reasons, but for philosophical ones. Again, they have reached that conclusion not because, for example, they can see Lefty and Righty and Pair, but rather because of their conviction that avoiding a certain kind of arbitrariness is a benefit that outweighs the costs of unrestricted composition. Fair enough. But, as already noted, I do not share their conviction. And, more importantly, I think that the overall philosophical reasons to deny the existence of Lefty and Righty and

[6] Here is just one: If composition is unrestricted, then there is an object composed of all and only the atoms that compose you save a single atom in your left thumb. (That object is not identical with you; you have a part, the aforementioned atom, that it lacks.) Is that object a conscious person? If it is, we have two persons in your chair: you and that object. If it is not, whether something is a conscious person can turn on whether it has an extra atom in its thumb. Either result is bad. So I deny that all and only your atoms, minus one in your left thumb, compose something. So it is false that composition is unrestricted.

Pair are more compelling than the overall philosophical reasons to believe that such objects exist (see Merricks, 2001).

Besides, the philosophical defense of Lefty and Righty and Pair that we have just considered rests on the following claim: It actually is the case that every physical object has parts and, for every physical object, the parts of that object, working in concert, cause exactly the same effects—in exactly the same sense of 'cause'—as that object itself causes. I granted this claim for the sake of argument, and then explained how, given this claim, I would reply to that defense of Lefty and Righty and Pair. But of course no one really knows whether this claim is true. So no one should endorse the philosophical defense of the existence of Lefty and Righty and Pair that we have just considered.

VIII. Conclusion

I have argued that we should deny that Lefty and Righty and Pair exist. Those arguments can be adapted to support denying the existence of a wide variety of ordinary objects, objects that—if they do exist—are essentially mere causal overdeterminers. Thus I deny the existence of not just gloves, but also scarves (and winter accessories more generally), tables, chairs, mountains, boulders, trees, and most other ordinary objects.

Sometimes the claim that most ordinary objects do not exist is met with incredulity. But such incredulity is confused. This is because all our ordinary reasons for thinking that here is one wholly causally redundant ordinary object and here is another are no good. It turns out that what one should conclude about the existence of such objects turns on philosophical reasons, some of which push in one direction, some in the

other. In this way, one's view on the existence of gloves and tables and chairs is akin to one's view on the existence of abstract objects. I think that those who deny that there are abstract objects are making a mistake. I do not, however, meet their denial with incredulity, but instead with argument (Merricks, 2015).

Again, I deny the existence of most ordinary objects. But not all. For you yourself are an ordinary object. (No offense.) And so am I. And I do believe that we human beings exist. This is partly because I think that each of us has good ordinary reasons to believe in his or her own existence, reasons that would not be undermined even if we did turn out to be essentially mere causal overdeterminers. And it is partly because I deny that each of us is essentially a mere causal overdeterminer. But all that is another topic.[7]

REFERENCES

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[7] I defend these claims about human beings in *Objects and Persons*. That book also presents the sort of arguments that are presented in this essay, but both in more detail and also in a way that engages with the relevant literature. And that book contains further philosophical arguments against objects like Pair and Lefty and Righty.