SOC IT TO ME?
REPLY TO MCDANIEL ON MAXCON SIMPLES

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Abstract: I raised the following question in a recent paper: *What are the necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for an object's being a simple?* And I proposed and defended this answer (which I called "MaxCon"): *Necessarily, x is a simple iff x is a maximally continuous object.* In a more recent paper, Kris McDaniel raises several objections to MaxCon, including, in particular, two objections based on a principle about the supervenience of constitution that he calls "SoC". The purpose of the present paper is to address the main objections raised by McDaniel, and to show that none of them poses a serious threat to MaxCon.

1 Introduction

I raised the following question in a recent paper called "Simples" [Markosian 1998b].

> **The Simple Question:** What are the necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for an object's being a simple?

And I proposed and defended the following answer to the question.

> **The Maximally Continuous View of Simples (MaxCon):** Necessarily, x is a simple iff x is a maximally continuous object.[1]

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[1]   Here is the definition of 'maximally continuous object' from my earlier paper:

> x is a *maximally continuous object* =df x is a spatially continuous object and there is no continuous region of space, R, such that (i) the region occupied by x is a proper subset of R, and (ii) every point in R falls within some object or other.

In a more recent paper [McDaniel 2003], Kris McDaniel raises several objections to MaxCon. The purpose of the present paper is to address the main objections raised by McDaniel.

2 The Irreducibility of Stuff and the Constitution Relation

In "Simples," I considered a number of objections to MaxCon, including several that prompted me to distinguish between talk about <u>things</u> (a.k.a. <u>objects</u>), on the one hand, and talk about <u>stuff</u> (a.k.a. <u>matter</u>), on the other hand. In his paper, after first raising some preliminary objections to MaxCon,[2]

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[2]   Here is a brief summary of the preliminary objections from McDaniel, together with my replies.

<u>Objection</u>: Markosian presupposes the 3D view of persistence, which has certain unpalatable consequences [McDaniel 2003: 266]. <u>Reply</u>: Although I personally endorse the 3D view, MaxCon itself is consistent with both 3D and its rival, the 4D view. Moreover, the 3D view does not have the consequences that McDaniel attributes to it.

<u>Objection</u>: MaxCon is not a proper answer to The Simple Question, since it overlooks various immaterial simples [McDaniel 2003: 266]. <u>Reply</u>: I explicitly stated in "Simples" that I was restricting my attention to physical objects [Markosian 1998b: 214]. Moreover, *contra* McDaniel [McDaniel 2003: footnote 6], this restriction makes a great deal of sense, given that physical and non-physical objects will in general differ so much in their natures that there is no reason to expect the circumstances under which objects from these disparate ontological categories are simples to have much at all in common. In fact, the various putative types of non-physical object that McDaniel himself mentions – God, Cartesian spirits, numbers, and unit sets – are themselves so disparate that we shouldn't even expect the circumstances under which different objects from the category of <u>non-physical object</u> are simples to have anything in common.

<u>Objection</u>: In "Simples" I overlook an important answer to The Simple Question, namely, The Brutal View of Simples, according to which there is no finite and non-trivial set of necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for an object's being a physical simple [McDaniel 2003: 266-67]. <u>Reply</u>: Good point. I shouldn't have overlooked The Brutal View of Simples. For the record, here is what seems to me like a good argument against The Brutal View of Simples. A pointy object would have to be a simple. Moreover, such an object would be a simple in virtue of being pointy. (Either because The Pointy View of Simples – according to which x is a simple iff x is a pointy object – is true, or because MaxCon is true, or because some other "topological"

McDaniel turns to a question about the relation between an object and the matter that constitutes it. The question is: *What exactly is that relation?* And McDaniel suggests that the best answer to this question is that an object is identical to the matter that constitutes it [McDaniel 2003: 270]. But I think there are several good arguments against this proposal.

For one thing, an object will typically have different temporal and modal properties from the matter that constitutes it. For example, the matter that constitutes me right now has existed for much longer than I have. And the matter that constitutes my bicycle right now could survive being melted, but my bicycle could not.

For another thing, it is possible for an object to be constituted by some matter at one time, and then to be constituted by some different matter at a later time. In fact, this is probably the case with virtually every organic object in the actual world, and many inorganic objects as well.[3]

For a third thing, the matter-thing identity thesis (according to which the relation between an object and the matter that constitutes that object is identity) is inconsistent with the thesis about the irreducibility of stuff to which, as I mentioned above, the MaxConner is committed.

McDaniel offers several arguments for the matter-thing identity thesis. One argument has to do with the similarities between matter and things. McDaniel says,

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theory of simples is true.) But the Brutal View of Simples implies that even if a pointy object were a simple, this would not be the case in virtue of its being pointy; instead, according to The Brutal View of Simples, the fact that some pointy object is a simple would have to be a brute fact about that object. Therefore, The Brutal View of Simples is false.

Objection: MaxCon may be inconsistent with The Special Theory of Relativity [McDaniel 2003: 267-69]. Reply: Although I don't agree with many of McDaniel's remarks on this topic, I do agree with the conclusion to his discussion of the topic, namely, that The Special Theory of Relativity does not present any special worries for MaxCon that are distinct from the worries raised by McDaniel later in his paper.

[3] There may be ways of resisting the arguments of the last two paragraphs that involve appealing to counterpart theory and temporal parts theory. But any such way would involve several controversial commitments, not the least of which would be the commitments to counterpart theory and temporal parts theory.

> Matter as Markosian conceives it seems to be very thing-like; it can fall under different kinds, instantiate properties, change position in space, persist through time, and undergo change; moreover, matter always comes in *thing-like* portions. [McDaniel 2003: 270]

My response is in two parts. First, I would say that matter does <u>not</u> always come in thing-like portions, since many portions of matter are altogether unlike any thing at all. And second, I would say that although matter may be <u>similar</u> to things in certain ways, insofar as matter has properties, etc., nevertheless, that doesn't make it true that each portion of matter is <u>identical</u> to some thing or other.

Another argument McDaniel offers has to do with my commitment to quantifying over portions of matter. McDaniel says,

> In order for talk about matter to do the work that Markosian wants it to do, we need the resources of quantification over portions of matter. Why don't they count as *things*? [McDaniel 2003: 270]

Here my response is to admit that I am committed to there being special quantifiers that range over portions of stuff. (In fact, this commitment is already built into the idea that, at least in some cases, talk about matter or stuff cannot be analyzed in terms of talk about things.) But still, I will insist (as anyone who holds the irreducibility of stuff thesis must) that the relevant stuff quantifiers are not in any way equivalent to or even reducible to thing quantifiers.

McDaniel goes on to say that

> Moreover, denying that a material objects [sic] *just is* the material content of the region of space exactly occupied by the object seems to commit oneself [sic] to an unpalatable and implausible dualism of dubious coherence between things and stuffs. [McDaniel 2003: 270]

My response to this remark is twofold. First, I don't see what is so bad about the kind of thing-stuff dualism McDaniel is talking about in this passage. I find it to be perfectly coherent, and fairly plausible. Second, I think it is just plain false that denying that an object is identical to the matter that constitutes it commits me to a thing-stuff dualism. For although denying the relevant

identity thesis does mean that I cannot be a thing-monist, it remains true that I can be either a thing-stuff dualist or a stuff-monist.

3   The Argument from SoC and DAUPO

The Argument from SoC and DAUPO is one of McDaniel's two main arguments against MaxCon.[4] Both of these arguments have to do with a principle, formulated by McDaniel, about the constitution relation. Here is the principle.[5]

> **The Supervenience of Constitution (SoC):** Necessarily, for any portion of matter that constitutes some object, z, any qualitative duplicate of that portion of matter constitutes a qualitative duplicate of z. [McDaniel 2003: 271]

In addition to SoC, The Argument from SoC and DAUPO also involves the following principle about arbitrary undetached portions.[6]

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[4]   I refer here to what McDaniel takes to be his two main arguments against MaxCon. There is another argument suggested in McDaniel's paper (although briefly, in footnote 15) that I think poses a much more serious threat to MaxCon than either of McDaniel's two main arguments. This other argument involves the possibility of maximally continuous people coming into what we might call "perfect contact" with one another. It is an argument that has also been suggested to me by several other people, but McDaniel's mention of it is the first that I am aware of in print. Although it is an important topic that must be addressed by an advocate of MaxCon, I will have to put off for another occasion a discussion of the argument from the possibility of maximally continuous people coming into perfect contact.

[5]   It might have made sense to call this principle "The Local Supervenience of Constitution," in order to distinguish it from the weaker, global supervenience claim about constitution mentioned in note 8 below.

[6]   DAUPO is modeled on an analogous principle called "The Doctrine of Arbitrary Undetached Parts" (or "DAUP"), according to which for every material object, M, if R is the region of space occupied by M at time t, and if sub-R is any occupiable sub-region of R whatever, there exists a material object that occupies the region sub-R, and is a part of M, at t. Peter van Inwagen formulates (in a slightly different way) and rejects DAUP in van Inwagen 1981. A related view is "The Doctrine of Arbitrary Undetached Regions" (or "DAUR"), according to which for every region of space, R,

The Doctrine of Arbitrary Undetached Portions (DAUPO): For every material object, M, if R is the region of space occupied by M, and if sub-R is any occupiable sub-region of R whatever, there is a portion of matter that exactly fills the region sub-R. [McDaniel 2003: 272]

The Argument from SoC and DAUPO, then, is quite simple. It goes like this: MaxCon, SoC, and DAUPO form an inconsistent triad. But SoC and DAUPO are both so independently plausible that it would be unreasonable to think that either one of them is false. So MaxCon must be false.

My response is also simple. I agree that MaxCon, SoC, and DAUPO are an inconsistent triad. But that's because MaxCon and SoC are an inconsistent duo. That MaxCon and SoC are an inconsistent duo is easy to see. Here's a little argument.[7]

Consider the statue objection to MaxCon that I discussed in "Simples" (involving a maximally continuous object in the form of a statue shaped like Joe Montana that we would intuitively describe as having a right arm made of one type of matter and a body that is made of a different type of matter), and the reply to it that I was forced to give, involving reference to the arm-shaped sub-region of the region occupied by the statue, and the matter that fills that region [Markosian 1998b: Section 6]. Call that portion of matter The Arm Stuff. Now consider another object: a maximally continuous sculpture in the shape of Joe Montana's right arm, made of the same type of matter as The Arm Stuff. Call the portion of matter that constitutes this right-arm sculpture The Other Arm Stuff, and let The Other Arm Stuff be qualitatively indiscernible from The Arm Stuff. Then, according to MaxCon, The Arm Stuff and The Other Arm Stuff will together be a counterexample to SoC. (Since The Other Arm Stuff constitutes a simple, according to MaxCon, but The Arm Stuff does not constitute any object at all.)

Since MaxCon and SoC are an inconsistent duo, it is clear that the MaxConner must accept the first premise of McDaniel's Argument from SoC

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and for every subset, S, of the set of points whose fusion is R, there is a region of space that is the fusion of the members of S and that is a part of R.

[7]   I think it is also true that SoC is inconsistent with any view that allows the possibility of extended simples. But the argument for that more general claim would be a little bit trickier, so I will stick with the simpler claim here, since it is all that is required to make my point.

and DAUPO (the premise that says that MaxCon, SoC, and DAUPO form an inconsistent triad). But it is equally clear that the MaxConner must reject the second premise of that argument (the one that says that SoC and DAUPO must both be true). For the MaxConner must reject SoC in any case.

What does McDaniel say in support of SoC? He introduces it by saying,

> When does some matter constitute an object? I say that the following condition must be met by a relation in order to deserve the name 'constitution': just as it is the case that necessarily, if some xs compose some y then any qualitative duplicates of the xs compose a qualitative duplicate of y (provided that the same relations obtain between the duplicates of the xs), it is the case that the constitution relation supervenes on the qualitative character of its relata. [McDaniel 2003: Section III]

And in the two paragraphs that immediately follow his formulation of SoC, McDaniel makes similar remarks.

These remarks suggest an argument by analogy from a principle about composition – according to which if some xs compose some y then any qualitative duplicates of the xs compose a qualitative duplicate of y (provided that the same relations obtain between the duplicates of the xs) – that McDaniel apparently endorses.

But this argument fails, for two reasons. First, the relevant principle about composition is highly controversial. As a defender of Brutal Composition [Markosian 1998a], for example, I would reject it.[8] So would some philosophers who endorse van Inwagen's proposed answer to The Special Composition Question.[9] And similarly with various other possible answers to SCQ.

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[8]   But note that I do accept a different, global supervenience claim about composition, according to which it is not possible for two worlds to differ with respect to composition without also differing with respect to non-mereological facts [Markosian 1998a: Section 3]. Similarly, I accept the corresponding global supervenience claim about constitution.

[9]   Interestingly, van Inwagen himself accepts the relevant local supervenience claim, despite the fact that his answer to The Special Composition Question might be seen by some as providing a reason for rejecting that claim. For van Inwagen's proposed

Second, the claim that constitution must be analogous to composition is also controversial. In particular, in view of the fact that constitution is a stuff-thing relation while composition is a many-one relation between things, it is quite reasonable to believe that the two are disanalogous in other ways.

The reader may wonder at this point what the MaxConner should say about DAUPO, the other principle involved in The Argument from SoC and DAUPO. Since the MaxConner must reject SoC in any case, he need not also reject DAUPO in order to escape The Argument from SoC and DAUPO. My own view is that DAUPO is true. In fact, I would accept a much stronger version of DAUPO than the one formulated by McDaniel. For I would accept the following.

> **The Doctrine of Wholly Arbitrary Portions (DWAP):** For every region of space, R, such that every point in R is filled with matter, there is a portion of matter that exactly fills R.

DWAP is a consequence of the conjunction of DAUPO with the Principle of Universal Fusions as applied to portions of matter. (This principle, which I am happy to accept, says that any two portions of matter have a fusion.) And DWAP entails the existence of far more portions of matter than does DAUPO, since, in effect, DWAP (unlike DAUPO) entails the existence of fusions of matter from different (and spatially separated) objects.

In any case, whether or not my fellow MaxConners accept this more radical thesis (DWAP) I would strongly recommend to them that they endorse DAUPO, since they need the resources of the relevant portions of matter in order to handle objections like the statue objection to MaxCon.

4   The Argument from Spatial Intrinsics

The second of McDaniel's two main arguments against MaxCon is The Argument from Spatial Intrinsics. This argument is meant to be based on a problem that is analogous to an alleged problem – "the problem of temporary

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answer, see van Inwagen 1990: Section 9. For evidence that van Inwagen accepts the relevant local supervenience claim, see van Inwagen 1990: 12.

intrinsics" – for the 3D view that has been discussed in the literature [Lewis 1986: 203-04; Hinchliff 1996].[10]

McDaniel considers a maximally continuous object – "Multi" – that we would intuitively describe as having a blue part (in region R1) and a gold-colored part (in region R2). And McDaniel says,

> Multi is blue at region R1 and gold at region R2. But since there is no such thing as a color-relation between a thing and a place, 'Multi is blue at region R1' must be analyzable as 'Multi has a part that is located at R1, and that part is blue.' But if MaxCon is correct, then Multi has no parts. Hence, MaxCon is incorrect. [McDaniel 2003: 274]

There is a possible MaxCon reply to this argument that is considered by McDaniel, who says,

> The MaxConist might resist the above argument as follows. Although 'Multi is blue at Region R1' must be analyzable into a statement in which the spatial index 'at region R' does not appear, it is not analyzable in terms of parts of Multi, for there aren't any. Instead, it is to be analyzed in terms of the portions of the matter that constitute Multi. The proposed analysis would then be, 'Some of the matter that constitutes Multi is located at R1 and is blue.' [McDaniel 2003: 274][11]

According to this line, there is indeed a genuine instance of <u>being blue</u> in the case of Multi, and not merely a case of the relation <u>blue at</u>. But, on this view, it is a portion of matter, rather than an object, that exemplifies blueness in the example. Thus we have accounted for the relevant case of a spatial intrinsic without positing any part of Multi that possesses that property (and without any objectionable appeal to a strange color-relation between an object and a region).

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[10] For the record, I think that the best 3D solution to the "problem" of temporary intrinsics is simply to "take tense seriously," rather than, as McDaniel suggests, to insist that what appear to be properties of things (like being bent) are really disguised relations between things and times (like bent-at).

[11] McDaniel correctly notes that I say some things in "Simples" suggesting that I would make this reply to The Argument from Spatial Intrinsics.

But McDaniel argues against this reply to the argument. He says,

> However, a consistent policy of following this procedure would commit the MaxConist to DAUPO, which is, as we have seen, inconsistent with MaxCon and SoC. Consequently, this way of avoiding the argument from Spatial Intrinsics is unavailable to the MaxConist. [McDaniel 2003: 274]

I think it is a mistake to say that this way of avoiding The Argument from Spatial Intrinsics is unavailable to the MaxConner. I think that, on the contrary, this way of avoiding the argument is eminently available to the MaxConner. For as we have seen above, although MaxCon, SoC and DAUPO form an inconsistent triad, this is because MaxCon and SoC form an inconsistent duo in any case. Moreover, as we have also seen above, the MaxConner has independent reasons to endorse DAUPO, which makes the response to The Argument from Spatial Intrinsics currently under consideration particularly suitable to the MaxConner.

In addition to his mistaken belief that it is not open to the MaxConner to respond to The Argument from Spatial Intrinsics by endorsing DAUPO and rejecting SoC, McDaniel also offers the following remarks against this response to the argument.

> At this point, the MaxConist may wish to reject SoC, which would allow the MaxConist to endorse DAUPO. Taking this route would allow the MaxConist an analysis of [x is F at region R] in cases where F denotes an intrinsic property; it should be noted, however, that the analysis will attribute intrinsic properties to *stuff*, not things. In a very strict sense, there will be no *things* that are the basic bearers of intrinsic properties. Accordingly, it seems that these properties are free-floating entities. They are neither had by the simple nor by parts of the simple; moreover, they are not *parts* of the simple. This is extremely odd. [McDaniel 2003: 274]

I think that McDaniel is mistaken here as well, in two ways. First, it is not true that the MaxConner who opts for this approach must say that there are no things that are the basic bearers of intrinsic properties. For it is perfectly open to the MaxConner to adopt a mixed ontology of things and stuff (as opposed to a pure stuff ontology), and to say that in the case of Multi, what exemplifies blueness is not a thing but some stuff, while in other cases it is a

thing that exemplifies blueness. I.e., it is perfectly consistent with the approach in question that there are many things that are among the basic bearers of intrinsic properties.

And second, I think that McDaniel greatly exaggerates the oddness of the idea that, at least in some cases, an intrinsic property is instantiated without being instantiated by any <u>thing</u>. After all, it is not true that the relevant properties will be "free-floating entities." For each one will be firmly anchored to the stuff that instantiates it. Moreover, it is perfectly natural to speak of a property's being exemplified by some stuff (even if it is not at the same time exemplified by any thing). Some tapioca pudding, for example, can be both yummy and gooey, even though no individual molecule of the pudding is either yummy or gooey. Similar remarks will apply to many other standard cases of some stuff and its properties.

The upshot is that the MaxConner has a simple, straightforward, and natural response to The Argument from Spatial Intrinsics, and that this reply involves endorsing DAUPO, rejecting SoC, and maintaining that although Multi is neither blue nor partly blue, it is nevertheless true that some of the stuff that constitutes Multi is both blue and located at region R1.[12]

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