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# The Place of Subjects in the Metaphysics of Material Objects

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Abstract

An under-explored intermediate position between traditional materialism and traditional idealism is the view that although the spatiotemporal world is purely material, minds nonetheless have a metaphysically special place in it. One way this can be is via a special role that subjects have in the metaphysics of material objects. Some metaphysical aspect of material objects might require the existence of subjects. This would support that minds must exist if material objects exist and thus that a mindless material world is impossible. This view, labeled *the subjectivity thesis* by Anton Friedrich Koch, was defended by him with an intriguing, purely metaphysical argument connected to the individuation of material objects in space and time. The present paper hopes to make progress on assessing the viability of such a position. It starts by critically examining Koch's argument for the subjectivity thesis, as well as similar arguments that give minds a central place in the metaphysics of material objects via considerations about identity and difference. It then compares these ideas to similar ones in the philosophy of time, and concludes with an outlook on whether such a position is viable and what needs to be done to fill the gaps unearthed along the way.

## 1. *Introduction*

Everyone, leaving a few radicals aside, agrees that reality contains material objects as well as minds. What is controversial is what place minds have in a world of material objects. The standard materialist view holds that spatiotemporal reality consists first and foremost of matter, with minds being merely the result of matter combining in a certain complex way. Minds come from combinations of matter, somehow, but that matter ever combined this way is not something that had to happen. That there are minds at all is a fortunate accident, a bonus to reality, but nothing more. This view has three standard alternatives: a theistic one, an idealist one, and a dualist one. The theistic alternative holds that the appearance of minds in the spatiotemporal world was not, in the end, an accident. Instead it was the result of a grand plan by a deity. The traditional idealist alternatives holds that minds don't arise from matter, but the other way round: matter arises, somehow, from minds. The dualist alternative holds that minds do not arise from matter alone, but rather require a further, distinctly mental, ingredient. Thus matter alone isn't enough to give rise to minds. These alternatives are well known and widely studied.

There are, however, further alternatives, which are not widely known, nor widely studied, but which deserve more attention. These alternatives can be seen

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as broadly idealist alternatives, although not in a traditional way. While the traditional idealist takes matter to be, somehow, itself mental or arising from minds, the non-traditional broadly idealist alternatives of interest here hold that although matter itself is not mental, minds nonetheless play a much greater role in the material world than the standard materialist picture accepts. They are not merely accidental results of the combination of matter, but a central part of even a purely material world. And one strong form of such an alternative, broadly idealist, position is the view that minds have to be part of any material world. Minds are no accident, but are required, for metaphysical reasons, to exist in a material world of objects in space and time. Some aspect of the metaphysics of material objects might require minds, or subjects. If so then minds would have a central place in the metaphysics of material objects. But how could that be? As it turns out, there is an intriguing argument for this conclusion.

That thinking subjects necessarily exist in a spatiotemporal world Anton Friedrich Koch has labeled the *subjectivity thesis*, and he has defended it in various places with a clear, original, and purely metaphysical argument. This paper hopes to assess the prospect of giving minds such a central place in the metaphysics of material objects by starting out with a critical examination of Koch's case for the subjectivity thesis and ending up with a look at alternatives and congenial positions. Koch's defense of the subjectivity thesis is of special interest, not just because he presents a purely metaphysical case for it, but also because the argument highlights a novel way in which a broadly idealist position might be true. It would be good to see not only whether Koch's case for the subjectivity thesis is compelling, but also what kind of an overall view one would get if the subjectivity thesis were true. As noted, the view would be broadly idealist in the sense that subjects play a central role in reality. But it might also be compatible with materialism, in the sense that all there is is just matter, and minds arise from matter, somehow, although they do so by necessity. The position would then not be idealist in a more traditional sense where reality itself is mental in some form. It should be well worthwhile to see what such a position might come to and how it might be defended on metaphysical grounds.[1] To do so we will start with a close look at Koch's case for the subjectivity thesis.

## 2. *Koch's argument*

The subjectivity thesis states that

(ST) Subjects exist necessarily in a spatiotemporal world.[2]

[1] I believe, with Koch, that a non-standard form of idealism is correct, although it isn't Koch's. I prefer conceptual idealism instead, as understood and defended in Hofweber (forthcoming a) and chapter 10 of Hofweber (forthcoming b).

[2] That is: a spatiotemporal world without subjects is impossible, not: subjects can only exist in a spatiotemporal world. Koch also holds the latter, and he labeled the slightly stronger view that any subject must be an embodied person *the personality thesis*, which he defended in Koch (2010) and elsewhere. The personality thesis is completely sidelined in the present paper, we will focus exclusively on the subjectivity thesis.

Here a subject is a thinking being which is part of the spatiotemporal world and has thoughts about other things in the world. Human beings are subjects in this sense, but other creatures would do as well. Subjects in the relevant sense have a perspective on the world from within the world, rather than a God's eye view of the world from the outside. The subjectivity thesis entails that a spatiotemporal world that only contains thoughtless matter is impossible, and thus strongly stands in contrast to the standard materialist worldview which takes the arising of thought out of matter to be a fortunate accident, at best a likely accident, but certainly not a necessity.

Koch's argument for the subjectivity thesis was first presented, in German, in his Koch (1990) and later elaborated upon in Koch (2006a; 2006b; 2010).[3] I will present Koch's argument in the way that I take to be the strongest form, leaving out some of the subtleties that Koch considers, but that strike me as inessential, and adding in some formulations that he might not accept, but that strike me as making the argument either simpler or more forceful. For Koch's formulation of his argument, see in particular Koch (2010). Koch's argument is a purely metaphysical one that hopes to show that no spatiotemporal objects can exist in a world without thinking subjects, and it goes as follows.

Facts about identity and difference are not brute facts. We can coherently ask, and demand an answer to, the question why two things are different. The answer is in general always the same: one of the things has a property that the other one lacks. Thus I can ask for any *a* and *b*:

(1) Are *a* and *b* different, and if so, what makes them different?

When I ask this then I am asking for the grounds of their difference, that is, what explains their difference and what makes them different. Such an explanation should not be seen as a causal explanation, but as a metaphysical explanation. Since facts about identity and difference are not brute facts, I can always demand an answer to (1), and thus demand grounds for difference. What grounds difference when it obtains are properties, or rather the objects having or lacking them. The difference between *a* and *b* is grounded in *a* being *F* while *b* is not, for some property *F*.

Talk of sameness and difference of *a* and *b* here is talk of numerical sameness and difference, not simply qualitative sameness and difference. The connection between qualitative sameness, that is having the same properties, and numerical

[3] Koch (2010) is a reply to Jay Rosenberg's discussion of Koch's argument in Rosenberg (1996). Rosenberg holds that there is an antinomy in the neighborhood of Koch's argument, and Koch's conclusion is one of four possible ways of trying to resolve the antinomy. Rosenberg did not want to endorse any of the four resolutions. I will follow Koch's presentation instead and present the 'antinomy' in the form of an argument for the subjectivity thesis.

Koch (2006b) is Koch's magnum opus, in which he presents a philosophical system covering truth, freedom, time and other topics. The subjectivity thesis plays a crucial role in it.

sameness, that is being the very same object, is in general captured by two principles: first, the indiscernibility of identicals, i.e., the principle that if *a* and *b* are identical then they have all the same properties, and second, by the identity of indiscernibles, i.e., if *a* and *b* are different then they differ in some property. Although the principle of the indiscernibility of identicals is generally considered a trivial logical truth, the identity of indiscernibles is considered more controversial. But this controversy only arises when we restrict the range of properties to purely general properties or in some other way. If we allow any properties, including the property of being identical to *a*, then it, too, is an uncontroversial and trivial principle. Putting those two together we get what is often called Leibniz's Law[4]:

(LL) $a = b$ if and only if *a* and *b* have the same properties.

(LL) can also be written more explicitly as a statement involving quantification over properties:

(LL*) $a = b \leftrightarrow \forall P(P(a) \leftrightarrow P(b))$

(LL) by itself doesn't address the question of explaining identity or difference. But it opens the door towards such an explanation. It guarantees that whenever *a* and *b* differ then there is a property that one has but the other lacks. And this opens the possibility that having or lacking that property grounds their difference.

But can properties always ground differences? It is possible for two things to share all their general properties, which for now just means all their properties that are neither object-dependent nor 'indexical', two classes of properties that will be discussed shortly. It is possible for the world to be perfectly symmetric, with every object having a twin on the other side of the symmetry. In this case the object and the twin will share their general properties, but nonetheless there are two of them. Since there are two their difference must be grounded, and general properties won't be able to give the grounds, since they are shared in a symmetric situation.[5] Thus other properties must ground this difference. What could they be?

A first attempt at an answer would be object-dependent properties. Those are properties like the property of being taller than Fred, intuitively properties that can only be specified by talking about a particular object, Fred in this case. *a* and *b* can then have their grounds for difference in their different object-dependent properties. To just take the most extreme case, *a* has the property of being *a*, while

[4] Leibniz's Law is sometimes reserved for the indiscernibility of identicals, i.e., the left-to-right direction, sometimes for the identity of indiscernibles, i.e., the right-to-left direction, and sometimes for both, i.e., the full biconditional. We will use it here for the biconditional.

[5] A famous case of such symmetry considerations is Black's world with two spheres in Black (1952). See Adams (1979) for a supportive discussion.

*b* does not. *a*'s having the property of being *a*, and *b*'s lacking it, thus grounds the difference between *a* and *b*.[6] But here is the rub: although object-dependent properties can mark the difference between *a* and *b*, they can't ground that difference. It is true that when *a* and *b* are different then *a* has the property of being *a*, while *b* does not, and *b* has the property of being *b*, while *a* has not. Nonetheless, the difference between *a* and *b* can't be grounded in them having or lacking these properties. *a* has the property of being *a*, but lacks the property of being *b* only if the property of being *a* is different from the property of being *b*. But if the property of being *a* is different from the property of being *b* then there must be grounds for that difference. What grounds the difference between these properties? The intuitively right answer is, of course, that they are different properties because *a* and *b* are different things. The difference of the object-dependent properties is grounded in the difference of the objects on which they depend. But this can't be the answer here, since we want to ground the difference of *a* and *b* in their having different properties, not the difference in the properties of being *a* and being *b* in the difference of *a* and *b*. If the difference of the properties is grounded in the difference of the objects on which they depend then these properties can't ground the difference of the objects.

Even though it is intuitively the right answer that the difference between the properties of being *a* and being *b* is grounded in the difference between *a* and *b*, there are also other possibilities, but they, too, won't help us here. Maybe the differences between *a* and *b* as well as the difference between the properties of being *a* and being *b* have a common third ground *G*, with neither one of the earlier two grounding the other. But then, in particular, *G* grounds the difference between *a* and *b*, and it is thus exactly what we are looking for. Since we take grounds for differences of objects to be the having of properties, *G* can't be the fact that being *a* and being *b* are different, since *G* grounds the difference of those properties as well. The question simply remains what *G* could be.

Maybe then there are other grounds for the difference between the properties of being *a* and being *b* besides the difference between *a* and *b*? And, of course, there could be. The former property has the property of being the property of being *a*, while the latter property lacks that property. It instead has the property of being the property of being *b*. But this now leads to a regress. Those properties of

[6] Such properties are often call the *haecceitas* of an object, and it is often taken to be a bit of a derogatory word. We can take these properties to be simple cases of object-dependent properties, the property of being identical to a particular object *a*. Other object-dependent properties would do as well. For example, being more than 1 meter from *b* would be a property that *a* likely has, but *b* lacks, assuming the symmetric world is reasonably far spread out, with *a* and *b* more than a meter apart. Haecceitistic properties are not the crucial point here, but object-dependent properties are. See Hofweber (2005) for more, and an argument why purely general properties do not determine object-dependent properties even if complete symmetry is disallowed.

properties must be different, but what grounds their difference? Further properties of an even higher order? That just pushes the regress back. But an infinite descending chain of deferring grounds is no better than no ground at all, and thus it can't be what grounds the difference between *a* and *b*. Object-dependent properties thus don't help when it comes to finding the ground for the difference between *a* and *b*.

A parallel argument shows that what grounds the difference between the objects can't simply be their location. Although the objects are in different locations, simply pointing to their different properties of being in location $L_1$ and being in location $L_2$ isn't enough to ground their differences. These properties are just like object dependent properties, except they don't depend on regular objects like *a*, but on regions of space-time, the regions occupied by the respective objects. But then these properties are only different if the regions on which they depend are different, and thus the issue gets pushed back to what grounds the difference of those regions. Proposing that the grounds for the difference between *a* and *b* are their different locations is in essence no different than proposing that it is their different parents. The issue then simply gets pushed to the locations, or the parents. No progress will have been made, unless we had reason to think the issue is easier in case of parents,or locations. But we have seen no such reasons so far.

But some properties must ground the difference between *a* and *b* even in a symmetric universe where general properties can't do this, and these properties must not themselves be such that their difference is grounded in a way that leads to a circle or a regress. It was our starting point that sameness and difference are not primitive facts, but they have an explanation or ground, and the ground for sameness and difference is to be found in the properties of the objects. But what properties could do this job? The answer suggests itself when we think about the world not from a God's eye point of view, but from our own point of view. The cup right here has the property of being here. And even if the world is symmetric and there is another cup on the other side of the symmetry, it doesn't have the property of being here, it has the property of being there, so to speak. The cups might share all their general properties, but they still differ in their properties: one has the property of being here, while the other has the property of being there. But how should we think of these properties? They can't just be regular object-dependent properties that depend on a location, a region of space-time, like the property of being located at region R. That property, as we saw above, can't be what grounds the difference between the cup and its twin. These properties must be a different kind of property, properties somehow associated with a particular point of view from within the world. We must depart from some orthodoxy and must accept a further class of properties besides object-dependent ones and purely general ones. We must say that the cup has an *indexical property*, like the property of being here, attributed from a point of view from within the world. That property is neither an object-dependent property nor a purely general property, but belongs to a new, *sui generis* class of properties. Being here is just one example

of such a property, being there is another, happening now is one, being me and being you are others, and so on.[7]

These properties, finally, can be the grounds of sameness and difference even when general properties are not enough and taking recourse to object-dependent properties to ground the difference is either question begging or leads to a regress. Thus indexical properties are required to ground the difference of different objects. These properties are, by metaphysical necessity, tied to subjects that have at least the ability to attribute them and that have a perspective on the world from within. Indexical properties are tied to a subject's perspective on the world from within. Without a subject there is no object with an indexical property. An indexical property is tied, by its nature so to speak, to a perspective on the world, which is again tied to a subject having that perspective on the world.[8] Since

[7] The term 'indexical property' for this class of properties comes from Koch, see for example Koch (2010). It is possibly misleading terminology, since on a natural understanding of indexicality, it belongs at the level of a representation of things or properties, not the properties themselves. Thus, for example, 'here' is generally taken to be an indexical expression that represents a location in a particular way, with some disagreement of what is being represented more precisely and how this works. The location so represented is not an indexical location, only the word used in representing it is an indexical. One might think, similarly, that the property of being here is not an indexical property, it is simply the property of being at a certain location, although we just represented it in an indexical way. Thus only the way in which this property is represented is properly to be called 'indexical'. But this is not how indexical properties are to be understoodhere. The 'indexical' aspect is taken to be part of the property itself, not merely the representation of it. This is analogous to the understanding of properties like the property of happening now on an A-theory of time. This analogy between the A-theory of time and indexical properties in general will be discussed in more detail below. For a survey of indexicality in the level of representation, see Braun (2015). Despite this possible source of confusion, I will stick with Koch's terminology.

[8] I will sideline two issues here, that is, I will grant them to Koch's argument, but they certainly deserve further discussion. They won't be the issues I will be focusing on in my criticism of the argument in the following. The first is whether it is conceivable that objects have indexical properties even though there are no subjects. One might hold that subjects are clearly required for the attribution of indexical properties, but not for the instantiation of indexical properties. But the connection of an indexical property to a perspective on the world from within can make it seem problematic how such indexical properties are supposed to be understood without subjects that occupy the perspectives. In my presentation of Koch's argument I granted that if there are indexical properties then there are subjects that have a perspective on the world from within. This deserves further discussion, but I won't engage in it here. Second, there is a worry, or objection, that subjects and indexical properties are only required in symmetric worlds, but not in general. In a non-symmetric world the purely general properties might be able to ground the differences between any two objects. Koch considers this objection in Koch (2010, 241f). The idea of his reply is to argue that if a world without subjects would be possible at all then we can argue that such a world could be changed slightly in repeated steps to turn it into a symmetric world, analogously how Robert Adams (1979), for example, argued for the coherence of symmetric worlds in the first place. If non-symmetric worlds without subjects are possible at all then such worlds could be turned into symmetric ones without subjects, but the latter, by the argument given, are impossible. Of course, this argument can be turned around, and one could argue that we can slightly change a material world with subjects in it to one where all of them never came to be. And thus if a material world with subjects is possible then one without them should be possible as well. But since my main objections to Koch's argument don't rely on these considerations I am sidelining them here as well.

spatiotemporal worlds are worlds where symmetry can arise, and thus where there is the danger of ungrounded differences, such worlds must contain subjects that are connected to the proper grounds of difference: indexical properties. Thus any spatiotemporal world needs to contain subjects that have a perspective on the world from within, and with it assure that individuals have indexical properties. Thus subjects are required in a spatiotemporal world and so the subjectivity thesis holds. This concludes Koch's argument, as presented to the best of my abilities.

The subjectivity thesis so defended has immediate corollaries that would be of great significance if true. If objects have indexical properties then any complete description of the world must include an ascription of the indexical properties. But indexical properties can only be ascribed from a perspective within the world, not from a position outside of the world. Thus any complete description of the world must be perspectival, if there is such a description at all. To put it differently: any non-perspectival description of the world must be incomplete. *Perspectivalism* is the thesis that any non-perspectival description of the world is incomplete.[9] Koch's defense of the subjectivity thesis via an acceptance of indexical properties implies perspectivalism so understood. And it implies that there is no complete description of reality from the point of view from nowhere. Koch endorses this consequence in Koch (2010, 245f). Whether or not perspectivalism so understood is coherent and how best to spell it out will be discussed further below, independently of whether Koch's argument establishes it.

These all would be significant conclusions by any standard. Minds would have a metaphysically special role in reality, not because of consciousness or similarity to a deity or divine plan, but because they are required for the properties that ground the differences among objects. And it would imply that no 'purely objective' description of reality is possible, understood as a complete description that can be made from a God's eye point of view, from nowhere. I hope to show in the following, however, that Koch's argument is mistaken. I will first briefly discuss the starting point of the argument, but then mostly focus on the argument itself and where it goes wrong, granting its starting point, and finally consider the perspectivalist position it would establish.

## 3. *Grounds for identity and difference*

Koch's argument essentially is one about grounds for difference and identity and it starts a requirement for such grounds. It hopes to show that what has to provide such grounds are indexical properties and via them subjects. Grounds here are tied to metaphysical priority, what is metaphysically more basic than what, and to metaphysical explanation.[10] However, there are some reasons to think that

[9] Koch calls a slightly more loaded thesis *the perspective thesis* in Koch (2010, 245).

[10] The classic discussion of ground and its connection to metaphysical explanation is Fine (2001).

demanding a metaphysical explanation for identity and difference is based on a mistake. In this section we will briefly look some of these worries. I would like to highlight these concerns here to bring out that Koch's argument is tied to a project in metaphysics that is at present widely discussed and naturally is controversial. Although my criticism of Koch's argument in the remainder of this paper is not tied to worries about grounding in general and demanding grounds for difference in particular, it should nonetheless be worthwhile to briefly make this starting point of the argument explicit and why it can be seen as quite problematic.

When we ask why *a* and *b* are different then an answer 'because *a* is *F* while *b* is not' is a perfectly good answer. The question remains, though, whether we give metaphysical grounds for their difference in such an answer, or do something else. One thing we definitely and uncontroversially do is to point to what we take to be sufficient evidence for their difference. If *a* has a property that *b* lacks then this is sufficient to conclude that *a* and *b* are different. Nothing else is needed. To ask for metaphysical grounds for difference goes beyond that. Here it is natural to think that a certain fact, the fact that $a \neq b$ or the fact that $a = b$, needs to be grounded in other facts. It might seem dubious to demand such grounds. Why can't such facts not be seen as basic? They can be basic, in the order of grounding, but nonetheless the question 'why are the objects different?' can be a perfectly good question that asks for evidence of difference, but not a metaphysical explanation of their difference.

But there is something even more problematic in asking for metaphysical explanations of identity or difference. Facts about objects being the same or different involve the objects themselves, not representations of these objects with names like '*a*' or '*b*'. But when the objects themselves are parts of, or involved in, these facts then it is hard to see how there could be a need for grounds for such facts. After all, the fact that $a = b$ involves just one object and in this regard is not different from the fact that $a = a$. That there is only one object involved in this fact would itself be internal to the fact, and thus it is hard to see how one could demand that there be some other fact, something external to the original one, that grounds its obtaining. Similarly for grounds of difference: the fact that $a \neq b$ involves two objects, and these two objects are constituents of the facts or in some other way internal to it. But then, how can we demand that there be something else, a further fact, which grounds their difference and thus the obtaining of the first fact?[11]

Demanding grounds for facts of identity or difference is problematic, as is metaphysical explanation and grounding itself.[12] This is a topic presently widely

[11] For a discussion about grounding facts of identity and difference in objects, see also Mantegani (2014, 192ff).

[12] My own view on this topic is that grounding does not have an important place in metaphysics, for reasons outlined in Hofweber (2009) and spelled out in detail in chapter 13 of Hofweber (forthcoming b). But all this is completely sidelined in the present paper.

debated, and reasonable people can disagree on it. I thus won't criticize Koch's argument along those lines. In fact, Koch himself does not explicitly tie the presentation of his argument to grounding or metaphysical explanation as it is employed in contemporary metaphysics. His argument predates much of this discussion, but I think it is natural to present it in these terms and something along these lines seems to me to be required for the argument on any reasonable way of thinking about it. We should thus flag these concerns about grounding in general and grounding of identity and difference in particular, but grant for present purposes that such demands for grounds can be made. The question remains whether Koch's argument shows that this demand can be met the way he proposes and whether the subjectivity thesis is the result of meeting it.

### *4. Object-dependent properties, nominalism, and Leibniz*

One way to try to resist Koch's argument is to reject that the demand for grounding differences applies equally to properties as it applies to objects. And one way to do that is to adopt a form of nominalism about properties. Maybe properties are not things in a broad sense after all, and thus questions of grounding identity and difference do not arise for them. Then, maybe, it would be fine to say that the ground for $a$ not being identical to $b$ is indeed $a$'s having the property of being $a$, while $b$ does not. Object-dependent properties can ground identity and difference, without giving rise to the further question what grounds their identity and difference.

But this is a red herring for our overall discussion. Even if we are nominalists we need to make sense of talk about properties, including quantification over properties and claims about properties being the same or different. Anyone who accepts Leibniz'sLaw (LL), for example, must do so, and it was one of the starting points in our discussion. Once we go this far and accept the challenge that we need to provide grounds for sameness and difference it will be no further help to reject questions of grounding the sameness and difference of object-dependent properties. That the property of being $a$ is the same or different as the property of being $b$ is a fact whether or not properties are entities or some form of nominalism is true. It will be a different fact depending which one it is, but that doesn't take away from the demand for grounds for it, if those demands are legitimate in the first place. Nominalism thus doesn't make a difference for us here, unless it is so radical as to reject talk of properties in the first place. But that is too radical to give much consideration here.

What we should do then instead is this. Everyone should accept Leibniz's Law and talk about properties. Those who do not believe in grounding of identity and difference should nonetheless accept (LL) as a truth, but simply as a true biconditional, where no side of it has any metaphysical priority over the other. $a = b$ just in

case they have the same properties, since one of those properties is the object-dependent property of being *a*. Object-dependent properties are unproblematic simply as properties, and thus can figure in Leibniz's Law. But those who believe in grounding of identity and difference will look at Leibniz's Law differently. They will hold that it is a true biconditional with one side being metaphysically special in relation to the other. The properties talked about on the right hand side of the biconditional are the grounds we need, but reliance on object-dependent properties as grounds is not acceptable, since it leads to a regress. Taking (LL) to be asymmetrical this way rules out object-dependent properties as the grounds and thus requires other properties. This is the setup we will accept now to investigate whether indexical properties can be such grounds.

## 5. *Indexical properties, solipsism, and McTaggart*

What are indexical properties? As noted above, they cannot be identical to any regular object-dependent properties, like one that depends on a region of space-time, and the ascription of indexical properties thus is not to be understood merely as the ascription of an object-dependent property via the employment of an indexical concept or expression. Indexical properties are sui generis and additional properties over and above general properties and object-dependent properties. In particular, indexical properties are a different kind of properties, not merely a special way to represent a property. We can take paradigmatic cases of indexical properties to be the property of being here and the property of being there (over there, away from here). Lets call these examples of indexical properties *hereness* and *thereness*. These properties are not identical to non-indexical object-dependent properties like the property of being in location $L_1$ or in location $L_2$. In particular, 'here' and 'there' in such ascriptions of properties should not be understood as demonstratives that pick out some location. That would render them object-dependent properties, where the objects are whatever location the speaker succeeded in picking out. Rather these properties should be understood as primitive further properties, in addition to general and object-dependent properties. The proper analogy here is with the A-theory of time, where properties like being past are not to be understood as object-dependent properties that depend on particular events or times, like the property of being earlier than this very utterance of this sentence. Instead they, too, are supposed to be primitive further properties, not merely special representations of object-dependent properties. We are thus assuming that there are such properties as hereness and thereness, analogous with being past and being present according to an A-theory of time.[13] Furthermore, and once

[13] For a discussion of the A-theory of time, see the classic Prior (1967) or the more recent Zimmerman (2005). Arthur Prior also frequently discussed the analogy of the A-theory of time to something like perspectivalism and centering evaluations of propositions on subjects. See, for example, Prior (2003).

more analogously to the A-theory of time, the properties of hereness and thereness exclude each other, just as the properties of being past, being present, and being future exclude each other. Nothing can have both hereness and thereness (at the same time), similarly, nothing can be both past and future (at the same time).[14]

Suppose now that we have a symmetric world with two subjects on different sides of the symmetry which are qualitatively identical, i.e., have the same general properties, lets call them *a* and *b*. We can imagine they look at each other. *a* will say that they are right here, while *b* is over there. Thus *a* correctly attributes to themselves the property of hereness, while they attribute to *b* the property of thereness. And *b* does it correspondingly. *b* says that they are right here, while *a* is over there. Thus *b* correctly attributes to *a* the property of thereness and to *b* the property of hereness. But thinking of this in terms of hereness and thereness threatens for it to become incoherent. Hereness and thereness, as properties, are incompatible properties, in the sense that nothing can have both at the same time. Nothing can have hereness and thereness at the same time just as nothing can be both (all) here as well as (all) there.[15] We need to hear more about why this is not an incoherent situation.

There are a number of options for how such an incoherence could be avoided. First and foremost one could hold that the properties of hereness and thereness that *a* and *b* respectively ascribe are different properties. *a* ascribes $\text{hereness}_a$ and $\text{thereness}_a$, while *b* ascribes $\text{hereness}_b$ and $\text{thereness}_b$. When they both are correct in their ascriptions it only follows that *a* has $\text{hereness}_a$ and $\text{thereness}_b$, which are not incompatible properties. Only $\text{hereness}_a$ and $\text{thereness}_a$ are incompatible, but $\text{hereness}_a$ and $\text{hereness}_b$ are different properties. This would make explicit how nothing can have hereness and thereness not just at the same time, but also from the same perspective. Even though they are real properties of objects, they are different since they are tied to different perspectives. But how are these properties different more precisely?

[14] This, again, contrasts primitive hereness and thereness with the object-dependent properties of being here and being there (where the speaker demonstrates a region and attributes a properties that depends on that region, whichever was demonstrated). In cases of mirrors, special geometries, or what have you it might well be that the speaker picks out the same region, unbeknownst to them, with both demonstrations, and thus being here and being there can be the same property on that occasion. For primitive hereness and thereness this is ruled out by the natures of these properties. Or to make a further analogy: being me and being you can be the same property when someone attributes the latter to their mirror image, mistakenly thinking they are talking to a different person. The indexical properties are better understood with the analogy of being me and being "the other", where these are primitive properties that exclude each other.

[15] I take the properties of hereness and thereness as intended to apply to things as a whole, not just to their parts. Of course an object can be extended in it being partly here and partly there. The intended example of indexical properties is one where the object is all here, and nowhere else, or all there, and nowhere else.

We can distinguish two main ways this could be. First they could be implicitly relational properties, relating some object to the subject that attributes them, or a perspective associated with the subject, or something similar. Second, they could be non-relational or absolute properties, not bringing in the subject and its attribution or the perspective. On the first option, the property of hereness$_a$ could be the property of being where subject *a* is, whereas the property of hereness$_b$ would be the property of being where subject *b* is. Thereness would correspondingly be the property of being at a certain distance away from the relevant subject. In this case there is no conflict with one and the same object having hereness$_a$ and also thereness$_b$, since there is no problem with being where subject *a* is while being a distance away from subject *b*. Having indexical properties as relational properties avoids inconsistency, but it robs them of their ability to ground differences. The problem now is quite analogous to the problem we had with object-dependent properties. What grounds the difference between hereness$_a$ and hereness$_b$? Since these are relational properties, as we are for the moment still assuming, they are relations to different things, *a* and *b* respectively. So their difference is naturally seen as being grounded in the difference between *a* and *b*. But it was supposed to go the other way round. The objects having indexical properties was supposed to ground the difference of the objects. It was supposed to be that the difference between *a* and *b* was grounded in *a* having hereness while *b* has thereness. If these indexical properties are object-dependent properties, and relate to subjects, then their difference can't ground the difference between the subjects.

Suppose then instead, secondly, that indexical properties are not relational, but absolute properties. What about the properties of hereness and thereness that *a* and *b* attribute, do they attribute the same property of hereness, or is it a different one for each of them? If it is the same then inconsistency follows: the very same objects have both hereness and thereness. This is problematic in two ways. First, these properties are incompatible properties, in the sense that nothing can have both of themat the same time. Second, the having of indexical properties is supposed to ground sameness and difference, but in our symmetric worlds the objects on different sides of the symmetry have not only the same general properties, but also the same indexical properties. The latter thus can't ground the difference of the objects.

Thus these properties of hereness and thereness must be different when *a* and *b* respectively attribute them. But they are absolute properties, so their difference is not to be understood in terms of relating to different objects. They are absolute, but different, properties. But then, what grounds their difference? Not *a* or *b*, since the properties are not relations to them, and since these properties are instead supposed to ground the difference between *a* and *b*. Thus they must just be different as absolute properties. But still, what grounds their difference? Not who attributed them. Not the objects that they were attributed to. These properties are supposed

to ground their differences instead. Maybe some of their properties, like the property of having been attributed by *a*? This will lead just to the same regress as the one we saw with object-dependent properties. The property of having been attributed by *a* and the property of having been attributed by *b* will have their differences grounded in *a* or *b*, or in further, higher order properties. It can't be the former, for circularity, or the latter, for regress.[16]

We can thus conclude that indexical properties can't play the role that Koch hopes to give them. Even if we accept indexical properties as a further kind of property, they cannot play the role that some properties need to play if we demand grounds for difference in terms of properties. Koch's argument that objects in space and time must have indexical properties, since they are required to ground sameness and difference, fails: these properties, even if objects had them, can't ground sameness and difference. A world with indexical properties and subjectivity in it is no better off here than one without them.

Koch aimed to conclude from the subjectivity thesis that no complete description of the world is possible from the view from nowhere. I have rejected his argument for the subjectivity thesis, but, to be fair, I have made no better proposal how to ground identity and difference, granting still that such grounds can be demanded. Maybe we should thus combine the position that the world is a world from a perspective, which we called perspectivalism above, with a proposal about what such grounds could be. If the world has a perspective built in, say the world is my world from my perspective, then indexical properties might well be enough to ground differences. But this would have to mean that I am special in the world. If the world as a whole has a single perspective built in, my perspective, then my perspective is the one that correlates with the objects having the respective indexical properties, and that would mean that I am metaphysically special in the world. The perspective of the world is my perspective. This is naturally taken to mean that I am the only subject in the world. And this would mean solipsism. Solipsism might well guarantee that there can be grounds for identity and difference.[17] Solipsism might solve the problem, but it would give the game away. First, it is not clear how solipsism is compatible with materialism. Koch's argument, as I presented it, was an argument that would establish a moderate form of idealism which would be compatible with a purely materialist ontology. That was partly what made the position so intriguing. But in a purely symmetric

[16] The considerations in this section are in a sense very similar than those of McTaggart's in his argument against the reality of time. See McTaggart (1921).

[17] Strictly speaking, a perspective alone would not be enough to do this, understood just as a directed viewpoint into the world from within. What is required also is that this viewpoint comes with an orientation, in essence a distinction between left and right. Otherwise, imagine a 'flat' world symmetric around a central point, and a perspective perpendicular to the plane that is the world.

and purely material world it can't be that one being is a subject and has a point of view, while the symmetric duplicate is not. Second, solipsism is in a sense just a brute force way to rule out symmetries. If there can only be one subject then symmetries are ruled out, since they, in general, would require at least two subjects. Solipsism is a way to insist that not all aspects of reality can be mirrored, and it is for that reason that solipsism would give rise to candidates for grounding identity and difference. That the grounding properties are indexical ones is irrelevant, all that is required is that those properties are not mirrored across the symmetry. Any other brute force way to avoid symmetries would do as well. If there can be only one apple, say, then apple-related properties like being 10 yards from an apple would be enough to ground identity and difference, since they would guarantee that different objects differ in them.[18] Third, and finally, solipsism is false, or so most would insist. The question remains if there is a position in the neighborhood that does not have these problems, and that accepts the spirit of perspectivalism while avoiding solipsism. Whatever is good about perspectivalism should be good in a world where there are many subjects of metaphysically equal standing, but this threatens to lead to incoherence. In a final section we should consider whether there might be a view that does this after all.

## 6. *Perspectivalism as fragmentalism?*

Could it be that perspectivalism is true, while solipsism is false, all subjects are metaphysically equal, and at the same time subjects via the indexical properties tied to their perspectives ground identity and difference? If solipsism is false then there is more than one subject, each of which would have a perspective on the world that has metaphysically equal standing with the other perspectives. It is not that one is the true perspective and others are merely something secondary, that would just be a version of solipsism, maybe solipsism light, but still to be rejected. Every perspective has to be just one among many equals. But then, what happens in our symmetric world with two subjects *a* and *b*? If the indexical properties associated with each perspective are relative to *a* and *b* then this won't help with grounding differences, since it, in essence, reduces to the case of relational object-dependent properties. If they are the same properties then reality is incoherent, since one and the same thing has incompatible properties: hereness as well as thereness. If they are primitively different properties then this difference will have no proper grounds. There seems to be no way out. But there might be one option: there might be a perspective associated with *a* and a different one associated with *b*, each with indexical properties that ground differences

[18] Again: there being one strictly speaking is not enough to rule out symmetries, since it could be at the center of the symmetry. But it having other symmetry breaking-features (an orientation, no internal symmetry) would be enough to rule that out.

in these perspectives, while at the same time there is no coherent description of reality that incorporates both perspectives. Reality might be fragmented into several perspectives, each of which are of equal standing, without there being a coherent whole of reality that incorporates all of them. The position that reality is fragmented in such a way was labeled *fragmentalism* by Kit Fine, and discussed by him in particular with regards to the A-theory of time, but also the self, special relativity, and a few other topics, in Fine (2005).[19] Fragmentalism crucially denies that there is one coherent whole of reality, there are only coherent fragments. In our case this would mean that reality is fragmented into many different perspectival fragments, all of equal standing, with no coherent unified reality that incorporates all of these fragments into one whole. And for each of these fragments grounding of identity and difference could work just as in the solipsistic case. The fragment has a distinguished perspective, but reality overall does not. This view might well be a congenial reading of Koch's position, and it would overcome the problems of the solipsistic position as follows. First, it is compatible with materialism, since in a purely material world each subject has equal standing, each having their own perspective. Second, it doesn't rule out symmetries globally, that is for all of reality, but it fragments reality into perspectives within each symmetry is ruled out. Third, extreme as it might seem, it might well be true for all we know, that is to say, it seems to be coherent, on the face of it, and its not clear what fact we know to be true would speak against it. To be sure, fragmentalism is a more radical way of thinking about reality than simply perspectivalism. Not only is there no God's eye point of view on all of reality, there is no coherent whole of reality. Fragmentalism goes beyond perspectivalism in that it rejects the God's eye point of view not simply because any description of reality from the outside must be incomplete, but because any description of all reality must be incoherent and contradictory. Fragmentalism maintains that there is no coherent whole of reality that could be described from any point of view.

Fragmentalism seems to be the natural companion to a non-solipsistic perspectivalism. But there are at least two problems with relying on fragmentalism in a defense of the subjectivity thesis: first, it is not clear whether fragmentalism is coherent and, second, it is not clear why subjects should do the fragmenting. Let's briefly look at them in turn. The first worry is, in a nutshell, that there is a tension in the characterization of fragmentalism. Fragmentalism is supposed to be non-solipsistic, allowing for the recognition of oneself as one among many metaphysically equal subjects. At the same time, no two perspectives can be combined into a larger reality without leading to incoherence. But then, how are all subjects equal? From what stance can I evaluate them as equal?

[19] Fine's fragmentalist interpretation of special relativity is critically discussed in Hofweber and Lange (Hofweber and Lange, submitted).

From my perspective I am special. I am the focus of the only indexical properties that are instantiated, in the fragment that is my perspective. Others are second to me, and their point of view is secondary, in the fragment that is tied to my perspective. And, of course, everyone else can say the same thing about themselves. But from no perspective is it true that all perspectives are equal. Each one has one that is special: itself. If reality is fragmented into perspectives and there is no coherent 'all of reality', nor even a coherent part that contains more than one perspective, then how can we claim they are equal when in each coherent fragment this is false?

The second, and for us maybe more important, worry is this: if reality is fragmented into perspectives then in each perspective we will have brute-force symmetry breaking analogous to the solipsistic case. Thus within each perspective we can find grounds for identity and difference. But the question is why the brute-force symmetry breaking has to be done by subjects? Why does it have to be that reality fragments into the perspectives of subjects with its brute-force symmetry breaking rather than into other ways that break the symmetries? To take an extreme case: couldn't reality break into fragments centered around apples that have a primitive direction and orientation? In each such fragment we could find grounds for identity and difference, analogous to the indexical properties tied to subjects, except these properties are tied to apples. Of course, this is quite absurd, and it is much more plausible that reality fragments into perspectives then into apple-centered fragments. But the question remains why reality must fragment into perspectives tied to subjects, if it could fragment in other ways just as well to break symmetries?

A new defense of the subjectivity thesis along the lines of Koch's argument could thus be attempted as follows: there must be grounds for identity and difference and these grounds must be the having of properties. Because of this compete symmetries must be ruled out, and thus reality must fragment into perspectives tied to subjects, and thus subjects must exist in a material world. But the worry then is why it must fragment in a way tied to subjects, rather than some other way that would brute force break the symmetry as well. Even if we accept fragmentalism in general and take it to be coherent, this remains a big gap in the argument. To fill it, one would need to show why the symmetry breaking, assuming it must happen, is tied to subjects and thus why reality fragments around subjects, with each fragment incorporating a unique perspective on the world. I don't see how this gap could be filled in a compelling way, and thus I don't see much hope for a defense of the subjectivity thesis along those lines. Others might do better, but to my mind the gap is too big.

## *7. Conclusion*

If the subjectivity thesis were true then it would lead to a non-standard alternative to materialism. Minds would play a central role in reality, as envisioned by idealists, but in a surprisingly different way, compatible with a purely materialist ontology.

On the defense of the subjectivity thesis discussed here, subjects would have a central place in the metaphysics of material objects by grounding facts about identity and difference of material objects. Koch's argument would have established the subjectivity thesis and the central place of subjects in the metaphysics of material objects in just this way, on purely metaphysical grounds. I have tried to show that Koch's argument does not succeed in doing this: indexical properties by themselves do not help in providing these grounds. This left open whether there is a coherent fragmentalist perspectivalism that can provide such grounds, and whether there is a good argument that the fragmentation of reality must be tied to subjects. I have my doubts that this will work, but however this issue turns out, I consider it is highly worthwhile to think about alternatives to the standard materialist picture and its standard alternatives. Koch's argument would have established one such alternative, but even if it fails, thinking about one way this could be might lead to others that succeed.*

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