

Mind 105 (1996): 694-696.

Object and Property, by Arda Denkel. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Pp. xii + 262. £35.00.

This is an ambitious book. It offers an account of the nature of physical objects, an understanding of individual essences, a novel account of causation, and much more. The central claims of the book invoke “compresences of properties”, and it is on these that I will focus.

Denkel denies the existence of universals. He holds, instead, that there are particular property instances (more or less like tropes). And he insists that individual property instances must exist in compresences which are themselves physical objects. Property instances cannot be “free-floating”. This allows him to follow Aristotle in insisting that any property must inhere in an object, without committing him to any sort of suspect substratum in which properties inhere (pp. 35-36).

Because there are no property instances which do not inhere in some object, Denkel says that the smallest building blocks out of which objects are composed—the ultimate units of physical reality—are themselves objects, not properties. Yet those smallest units can be analyzed in terms of properties. They are nothing more than compresences of properties. Standard trope theory, Denkel says, errs by treating properties—that in terms of which objects are ultimately analyzed—as also being the ultimate units of physical reality (p. 32).

Objects are compresences of properties. But there are other kinds of compresences as well. Consider *essences*. According to Denkel, when an object’s identity is preserved through a process of intrinsic change, it is because a compresence of the object’s essential properties, its essence, remains itself intrinsically unchanged throughout this process (pp. 101-109). Essences account for identity over time, but not

for “individuation” or “identity at a time”. That, Denkel maintains, is secured only by the complete compresence of all the object’s qualities at that time (p. 68).

Another way in which Denkel makes use of compresences of properties is in explaining causation. Just as a compresence of properties can be spread out in space to form an object, so it can be spread out in time to form a series of events. Physical necessity brings it about that there are multiple *spatially* extended compresences which resemble each other—thus we get members of the same natural kind. Physical necessity also brings about multiple *temporally* extended compresences which resemble each other—thus we get instances of the same type of causal relation (pp. 229-233).

Denkel holds that there are objective resemblances among particular properties and particular compresences. But members of the same natural kind (or instances of the same type of causal relation) do not share a universal. Natural kinds, types of causal relations, and any other seeming universals “are creations of the mind that result from summarizing and grouping objective resemblances” (p. 155).

The unifying theme of Denkel’s book can be summarized with his claim that:

..all three categories of object, essence, and causal relation are different manifestations of basically the same fundamental feature of existence, which by physical necessity ensures that properties exist in bundles continuously, and sometimes also form patterns that extend spatially or temporally, but never in isolation. (pp. 246-247)

Denkel’s ontology is very interesting. But his arguments for that ontology, and the style in which he presents those arguments, sometimes leave much to be desired. As an illustration of this point, consider Denkel’s argument against a rival view of what guarantees “individuation”:

Let us take, now, any Aristotelian principle of individuation such as matter, substratum, or position, and designate it as an object’s ‘individuator’. Accordingly, anything that has this individuator will be identical with the object and anything which lacks it will be distinct from it. Being an exclusive principle, the possession of the individuator is both sufficient and necessary for identity. Clearly, though, there is nothing in it that logically requires or guarantees qualitative sameness of any two

things it identifies. Sharing their properties becomes altogether unnecessary for such things. (pp. 59-60)

(Note Denkel's objectionable talk of "two things" that are identified.) Since sharing "their" properties becomes altogether unnecessary for such "things", Denkel argues that this admits the possibility of an object not having all the same properties as an object with which it shares an "individuator". So Denkel concludes that the claim that the individuator makes for identity implies a possible violation of the indiscernibility of identicals. So that claim must be rejected.

But, obviously, if an object x is identical with an object y if and only if x has the same individuator as y *and* x has the same individuator as y, then x has all and only the properties y has. To deny that x must have all the same properties as y when x has the same individuator as y is just to beg the question against the sufficiency of the individuator for identity.

The whole book should not be judged by the passage quoted above. The ontology Denkel defends is quite interesting. It is especially interesting to see how he addresses many apparently disparate issues all in terms of a single philosophical notion, a compresence of properties. But it is fair to say that the arguments Denkel provides are sometimes disappointing and his exposition sometimes infelicitous.

*Department of Philosophy
Virginia Commonwealth University
915 West Franklin Street
Richmond, Virginia, 23284-2025
USA*

TRENTON MERRICKS