

SPACE, MATTER AND THE CONDITIONS OF OBJECTIVE THOUGHT

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Abstract

Space-occupying matter is required to think in terms of objective particulars. This paper critically explores one set of arguments for this claim, first put forward in a ground-breaking paper by Gareth Evans. The need to be clear about what Evans' arguments *are*, exactly, and what they establish is pressing. It is now generally thought that, as Peter Strawson showed, Evans requires too much for objectivity (Rae Langton's *Kantian Humility* provides evidence of this consensus). Evans himself was unable to respond to Strawson. I begin by establishing common conceptual ground with the competing views of Evans, Strawson and Langton (I-II). I then criticise Evans' arguments that a quasi-spatial framework is not sufficient for objective thought (III-IV). I fix the required definitions of certain properties—'intrinsic vs relational'; 'sensory vs non-sensory'; 'dispositional vs non-dispositional' (V). Then I defend and extend Evans' argument for the necessity of space-occupying matter. Its necessity is entailed by the fact that, to be objective particulars, perceptible objects must be constituted of intrinsic, non-sensory, and non-dispositional properties (VI-VIII).

Keywords: Objective thought, Gareth Evans, Matter, Object

Resumen

La materia que ocupa espacio es un requisito para pensar sobre particulares objetivos. Este trabajo explora críticamente un conjunto de argumentos a favor de esta afirmación, inicialmente presentados en un artículo revolucionario de Gareth Evans. Es importante aclarar cuáles son exactamente los argumentos de Evans y qué establecen. Generalmente se piensa que, como mostró Peter Strawson, Evans pone demasiadas condiciones para la objetividad (*Kantian Humility* de Rae Langton proporciona la prueba de este consenso). El propio Evans fue incapaz de responder a Strawson. Comienzo estableciendo una base conceptual común para las concepciones en liza entre Evans, Strawson y Langton (I-II). Paso a criticar

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los argumentos de Evans según los cuales una marco quasi-espacial no es suficiente para el pensamiento objetivo (III-IV). A continuación ofrezco definiciones de algunas propiedades—‘intrínseco vs. relacional’; sensorial vs. no sensorial’; ‘disposicional vs. no disposicional’ (V). Entonces definiendo y extendiendo el argumento de Evans a favor de la necesidad de materia que ocupa espacio. Esta necesidad se sigue del hecho de que, para ser un particular objetivo, los objetos perceptibles deben estar constituidos por propiedades intrínsecas, no sensoriales y no dispocionales (VI-VIII).

Palabras clave: Pensamiento objetivo, Gareth Evans, Materia, Objeto

I. Introduction

The precondition of our thinking about, describing, or explaining things as we do is a background framework made up of sets of concepts and propositions, a conceptual scheme. Certain of these concepts and propositions will be essential or basic to that scheme—in the sense that our conceptual scheme would not exist as such unless it contained them. Let us assume this. Assume also that one essential feature of our conceptual scheme is that it contain those concepts and propositions making it possible for us to think of particular things independent of ourselves and particular episodes or events in which we have no part—i.e., objective particulars.¹

The questions are then, ‘What are those concepts and propositions?’ and ‘How must our world be if they are to be made available to us?’ Or, in reduced form, ‘What is required to think in terms of objective particulars?’

Consider four different answers, in order of increasing demandingness:

- a) A spatial, or quasi-spatial, framework (e.g., Peter Strawson in his 1959).²
- b) Being able to think of things as constituted of sensory, dispositional, relational properties variously disposed in space (e.g., Peter Strawson in his 1980).³
- c) Being able to think of things as constituted of *non*-sensory, dispositional, relational, properties (e.g., Rae Langton in her 1998).⁴
- d) Being able to think of things as constituted of non-sensory, intrinsic, non-dispositional properties—i.e., space-occupying matter (e.g., Gareth Evans in his 1980).⁵

¹ Strawson, 1959, 15.

² 1959, Chapter Two.

³ 1980, 273-82.

⁴ 1998, 182-5.

⁵ 1985, 249-90.

This paper critically explores one set of arguments for (d), first put forward in a ground-breaking paper by Gareth Evans. The need to be clear about what Evans' arguments *are*, exactly, and what they establish is pressing. It is now generally thought that, as Peter Strawson showed, Evans requires too much for objectivity—Rae Langton's *Kantian Humility* provides evidence of this consensus. Evans himself was unable to respond to Strawson.⁶

Some preliminary comments.

(a)-(d) are not meant to be exhaustive; but they are the answers I shall focus on.

To constitute alternatives to (d), of course, (b) and (c) must be read as Strawson and Langton intend: both necessary *and* sufficient.

I have not referred to primary and secondary qualities, as Evans does, precisely because the intension and extension of those terms is part of what is in dispute between positions (a)-(d). I shall deal with this matter in section (V).

As regards (d), Evans and his commentators are not particularly clear or consistent about their use of terms like 'matter' and 'substance'. There are at least three uses for the term 'material substance': to denote material stuff in general; to denote kinds of material stuff (e.g., non-count-noun names like 'water' and 'butter'); and to denote particular concrete articulated individual persisting things (e.g., a horse, a tree). Fortunately, in the present instance, the distinctions here need not detain us overmuch. If objectivity requires any, then it requires (d); for any one entails the existence of space-occupying matter.

Evans' approach to the question 'What is required to think in terms of objective particulars?' is constrained by limitations that Strawson himself imposed. Strawson asked whether it would be possible to think in terms of objective particulars and not in terms of material bodies. Then he constructed a thought experiment to test the hypothesis that one can. Having already argued that a conceptual scheme without material bodies as particulars would have to be non-spatial, he claimed we should "confine ourselves imaginatively to what is non-spatial; and then see what conceptual consequences follow".⁷ What kinds of experience would be allowed the subject—call him *Hero*, as

⁶ So my primary evaluative question in this paper is: 'Why, and with what justification, does Evans require so much for thought about objective particulars?' I have examined other aspects of the questions raised in my (2001a; 2001b; 2002). Evans' paper is replete with arguments and suggestive of very many more. In practice, as we shall see, a critical exploration of Evans' argument for (d) must focus on section III of Evans' paper .

⁷ 1959, 63.

Evans does—confined in this way? Not visual or tactile experience, for the relevant sensory modalities ‘discover’ spatial characteristics for him. And we should simply ignore whatever experiences are provided by the senses of smell and taste as being both trivial and too complex for the imaginative project to work. We could imagine Hero’s experience of a world being exclusively auditory, however. And since sounds have no intrinsic spatial characteristics, there would be no room in that world for spatial concepts.

The paper that follows is long and involved, so a plan at the start may be found helpful.

I establish common ground with the competing views of Peter Strawson and Rae Langton on the definitions of ‘material body’, ‘objectivity’, ‘space’ and ‘spatial thing’ (II).

I argue that, although Evans is right to think that Strawson fails to show that (a) is even *necessary*, Evans’ own argument is flawed. For he depends on a distinction between a ϕ -ing that continues when one is not experiencing it and a ϕ -ing that does. And this distinction is simply not demanding enough; it is even consistent with phenomenalism (III).

(a) is necessary because space is implicit in the idea of thinking in terms of objective particulars. Such objectivity requires the idea of existence now perceived and now unperceived; and having this idea requires space (IV).

Further discussion requires agreement about the definition of properties, particularly the distinctions intrinsic vs relational, dispositional vs non-dispositional, sensory vs non-sensory (V).

I then explore and defend Evans’ claim that (d) is necessary because objectivity requires perceptible objects to be endowed with sensory properties, which in turn requires that they be constituted of non-sensory, non-dispositional and intrinsic properties—i.e., space-occupying matter. It is often said that Evans argues only for the sufficiency of (d); but there is good reason to suppose that his argument shows (d) to be necessary (VI).

To resist Evans, either we can deny that thinking of dispositionally-endowed objects requires thinking of them as the non-sensory causal ground of those dispositions, or we can deny that thinking of them as the non-sensory causal ground of those dispositions requires thinking of them as space-occupying matter. That is: either (b) or (c). (b) faces a constructive dilemma (VII), and (c) is insufficient: it could not provide for the primitive mechanical theory Evans persuasively makes necessary to objective thought (VIII).

II. Common ground

Having an adequate background for (a)-(d) requires taking stock of what they agree on.

2.1 *Material bodies.* None need deny that material bodies exist, that our own conceptual scheme permits us to think about, describe and explain them, or even that they are essential to our own scheme. (Indeed, Strawson deduces this from the nature of our scheme, providing as it does for a unified spatio-temporal system of one temporal and three spatial dimensions). For the question presently at issue is not ‘what is essential to our conceptual scheme?’, but ‘what is essential to any conceptual scheme that is like ours in this respect: that it enables one to think in terms of objective particulars?’ Once we have appreciated this, (d) will seem quite startling, of course. It claims that what Strawson regards as essential to our *own* conceptual scheme is essential to *any* scheme enabling one to think of objective particulars—material bodies and the ability to conceive of them.

2.2 *Objectivity.* If (a)-(d) are to rival each other as answers, they must at least agree on the question—in particular, on what is meant by ‘objective’. Limiting its application to thought about particulars does not help much—sensory states might be particulars. What all parties to the dispute assume is that no worthwhile conception of thought about objective particulars could be susceptible to a phenomenalist reduction.

According to Strawson and Evans, being able to think in terms of objective particulars requires of Hero:

The ability to think in terms of a particular as:

- i) existing unperceived
- ii) distinct from the experience of it
- iii) capable of existing independently of any experience of it.

A non-solipsistic consciousness.

“A use for the distinction between himself and his states on the one hand, and something not himself, or a state of himself, of which he has experience on the other” (1959, 69)

That the conditional or counterfactual propositions his regular experience allows him to express are not all made true by something of which Hero can be said to have experience.

Phenomenalism regards all propositions conceivable in this world, including observation statements, as reporting either Hero’s experiences or those of others, and either actual experiences or experiences they might have or would have in different circumstances. Thus the Phenomenalist has two

obvious ways to argue that he can make sense of the idea that Hero thinks in terms of objective particulars:

- A) Hero has a use for the distinction between his actual states and his possible states
- B) Hero has a use for the distinction between his actual / possible states and the actual / possible states of others in Hero's world

Thus, suppose Hero reports some observation by the statement 'a is F', where 'a' refers to some particular. It is consistent with the Phenomenalist reduction of this statement for Hero to note either that he *is* perceiving something, i.e., 'a', that he would *not* be perceiving if circumstances were different, or that *he* is perceiving something that *someone else* might be perceiving if circumstances were different. And the Phenomenalist might claim that either would be sufficient for him to make sense of Hero as thinking objectively about 'a'.

Now Strawson and Evans insist that being able to think of a particular as objective requires being able to think of it as 'existing unperceived' (Evans, 251). But, as Evans notes, "Strawson pretends that [Hero] makes no allowance for the existence of other observers" (Evans, 251). Thus (B) is ruled out as false—i.e., not by the meaning of objectivity, but merely by the nature of the thought experiment. Hero has no use for the distinction between his own states and those of others because he does not allow that anyone else has states. Unfortunately, however, the very move that excludes (B) makes (A) a real threat. For, as Evans notes, by making no allowance for other observers, Strawson makes it the case that "existence unperceived' is, effectively, 'existence unperceived by me'" (Evans, 251). And if Hero is thinking of 'a' in either of the ways mentioned—as something he might not be perceiving, or as something someone else might be perceiving—he is undoubtedly able to think of it as 'existing unperceived by me'. So reading 'objective thought about "a"' in terms of being able to think of 'a' as existing unperceived is not sufficient in the present case. Nor is requiring of Hero a non-solipsistic consciousness; for the form of phenomenism under consideration is precisely not solipsistic. This is why Evans insists on a third consideration—Strawson's requirement that Hero have a use for the distinction between himself and his states, and something not himself, or a state of himself, of which he has experience.

Evans evidently thinks that this excludes the phenomenalist. But that is not obvious. A distinction needs to be made between two claims the phenomenalist might make: that he can make sense of Hero's *actually* thinking about objective particulars, and that he can make sense of Hero's *conceivably* thinking about objective particulars. The first may have been ruled out; but the

second surely remains. For it is not necessary that Hero actually distinguish between his own states and that of other observers to conceive of objective particulars in the phenomenalist way, but only that it be conceivable that he should. In other words, it may be true that Hero himself will understand ‘a is perceived’ as synonymous with ‘I perceive a’. But it is nevertheless conceivable that Hero should think ‘a is perceived, though by someone else, not by me’. And this, allegedly, is all the phenomenalist requires legitimately to regard Hero as thinking objectively about a: it reports the possible experience of another. Thus Hero appears to fulfil all three requirements on objectivity from within a phenomenalist world: he thinks of ‘a’ as existing unperceived, has a non-solipsistic consciousness, and, by fixing his attention on perceptions available to other observers, has a use for the distinction between himself and his own states on one hand, and something not himself or a state of himself of which he has experience on the other.

So Strawson’s objectivity criterion seems susceptible to a phenomenalist reduction. This objection has implications that I shall not pursue here since they would distract us from the central task. But note that it might be used to cast doubt on a thesis often associated with Evans: that we can, and should, elucidate thought without reference to language. For it might be thought that what the objection reveals is that we cannot define objectivity so as to exclude the Phenomenalist without making reference to interpersonal agreement or the possibilities of communication.

2.3 *Space and spatial things.* Evans argues that what Strawson really *means*, though agreeing that it is not quite what he always *says*, is that the kind of space in question is to be conceived of as relative rather than absolute—i.e., ‘a framework’ “constituted by the spatial relations between things” (CP, 254-5). In his “Reply to Evans”, Strawson seems to agree. He describes what follows from conceiving objects as ‘ordered in a spatial or quasi-spatial manner’ as the ability to allow for “the simultaneous existence of any number of distinct, but perhaps qualitatively indistinguishable, objects of the kind in question” (1980, 274). Certain passages of *Individuals* suggest that, like Evans, Strawson regards things as spatial in virtue of the fact that they *occupy* space, where ‘occupation’ is meant to signify the extension of a thing in space—compare Descartes and Locke (e.g., 1959, 78). Langton, on the other hand, defends the Leibnizian conception that things are spatial in virtue of the fact that they *fill* space, where ‘fill’ is meant to signify action, force exerted in varying degrees, the power to engage causally with other things. Evidently, we need to leave room for both views. So we cannot *define*

‘spatial thing’ in a way that excludes either. We should leave it up to the theorist to argue whether what is essential is occupancy and extension or filling and force.

III. ‘(a) is necessary’: Strawson’s arguments

3.1 *Flaws with Strawson’s argument.* Evans shows that Strawson’s argument for (a) fails (CP, 252-61). Strawson had argued that implicit in the concept of objectivity is the idea of persisting and reidentifiable objects. So thinking of particulars objectively requires being able to think of them as persisting and reidentifiable. Now, crucially, one cannot think of a particular at some time t as the very same thing encountered earlier (i.e., $t-1$) unless one thinks of it as at some location $L1$ that is different from the location one is in (i.e., $L2$). And thinking of particulars as located at all requires that there be some spatial or quasi-spatial framework to which they are related.

Strawson’s argument proves too little and too much. It proves too little because a phenomenalist could accept the crucial premise and the conclusion—in Strawson’s auditory world with its master-sound, one could make sense of a particular sound, s , as located at L without having a use for the distinction between states of oneself and states of something not oneself that one is nevertheless experiencing. For one might think of s as located at L in terms of having an auditory experience of type s combined with an auditory experience of pitch level L . This is too little because we have agreed that no worthwhile conception of objective thought could be susceptible to such a phenomenalist reduction.

The argument proves too much, Evans claims, because it claims without good reason that space is implicit in the idea of thinking about objective particulars. This claim is made unwittingly in the crucial premise. For Strawson evidently supposes that thinking of particulars objectively requires being able to distinguish between ϕ -ing stages that are continuous with a given earlier stage and ϕ -ing stages that are not. And this smuggles space into objectivity because it requires too much of the latter. Evans claims that theories of objectivity need not require so much. In this instance, it is sufficient that Hero be able to distinguish between “the case where it is, and the case where it is not uninterruptedly ϕ -ing during a gap in his ϕ -experience”.

3.2 *Flaws with Evans’ criticism.* Strawson’s distinction may be too demanding—resting as it does on the ability to distinguish between numerical and qualitative identity; and between distinct but simultaneous instances of the same universal. But one might wonder whether Evans’ distinction—

between a ϕ -ing that does continue when one is not experiencing it and a ϕ -ing that does not—is demanding enough. After all, a phenomenalist can make sense of it, even when dealing with a one-subject world. The ϕ -ing that continues when Hero is not experiencing it is that which Hero would have experienced in different circumstances. The ϕ -ing that does not continue when Hero is not experiencing it is that which Hero would not have experienced in any circumstances. If Evans' distinction can be given a phenomenalist reduction, it weakens his case against Strawson, of course. But it need not leave in doubt what kind of distinction is sufficient to resist the phenomenalist: we need only appeal to Strawson's criterion noted earlier.

IV. '(a) is necessary': Evans' arguments

Evans offers his own arguments in support of (a). He replaces Strawson's bad reason for supposing that space is implicit in the idea of thinking in terms of objective particulars with a good one (CP, 261-8). His argument comes in two parts. First, the idea of thinking in terms of objective particulars is an idea of existence now perceived and now not. Second, having this idea requires space.

4.1 *Evans' argument for the first premise.* Evans needs to show that the idea of thinking in terms of objective particulars is an idea of existence now perceived and now not.

In order for the assertion 'it's ϕ -ing' to be an assertion about an objective particular, it must "loosen its tie with experience, so that it makes sense to suppose that it is true even when no experience occurs".⁸

The tie should not be altogether severed, for what is potentially true in the absence of any experience must be the very same statement as may be affirmed on the basis of experience. Now this non-severance detachment is only possible if that in virtue of which 'it's ϕ -ing' is true is connected with experience by some condition that is sometimes, but not always, satisfied. Suppose that condition is satisfied. Then 'it's ϕ -ing' will be understood to entail that it may be perceived to be true. Thus the idea of thinking in terms of objective particulars is an idea of existence now perceived and now not.

We may suspect that Evans' first premise is flawed: his take on objectivity is not demanding enough. For suppose we accept this first premise: that thinking in terms of existence unperceived is thinking in terms of existence

⁸ 1980, 262.

now perceived and now not. The question is why this should matter to us, who are interested in what it takes to think in terms of objective particulars. For Evans himself has (apparently) already agreed that thinking in terms of existence unperceived is not sufficient for thinking in terms of objective particulars. If it were, the phenomenalist could make sense of thinking in terms of objective particulars even with the metaphysical and epistemological constraints on his enterprise. For the phenomenalist can make sense of existence unperceived—it is that which Hero *would* perceive if things were different, or which *someone else* is perceiving.

4.2 *Evans' argument for the second premise.* Evans needs to show that having an idea of existence now perceived and now not requires space.

Having a use for spatial notions is one way of making sense of existence now perceived and now not—we may appeal to the fact that the observer is in the wrong position to perceive some object continuously, or wrongly oriented, or in some way blocked or occluded. But suppose that it is possible to make sense of existence now perceived and now not without appeal to spatial notions—by appeal instead to the absence of factors in the world that are causally necessary for perception or to deficiencies in the perceiver. Evans claims we cannot appeal to either without appealing to space.

The arguments Evans offers for this claim are not particularly strong. Suppose we accept his claim that a no-space world could only be composed of certain sensory objects. He claims that we cannot make sense of a sensory object 'existing in the absence of conditions causally necessary for its perception' but offers no reason for this except that "a rainbow cannot exist in darkness".⁹ But this point is lost on me; it begs the question against the no-space theorist to suppose that, for a sensory object to exist, it must exist *in* something.

Evans then considers whether perceiver-deficiency might explain why a sensory object both exists and is not perceived. He argues that having a grasp of one's deficiencies in this respect requires that one see the cause of one's experiences as simultaneously determined by the way the world is and by one's changing receptivity to it. This holism is plausible, admirably described, and cunningly defended. But Evans' exertion on this point does not further his overall aim. For he argues not, as we would expect, that a spatial scheme is necessary for such holism, but that it is sufficient. Indeed, at footnote 19, he points out that non-spatial schemes can provide for it. So there is quite a gap in the argument for the claim that the idea of existence now perceived and now not requires space.

⁹ 1980, 263.

4.3 *An alternative argument.* In section III¹⁰ of his paper, Evans offers powerful arguments for a view that entails (a). Before moving on, however, it may be worth pausing briefly to consider one simple way of bolstering his argument in section II.

Evans supposes that, in a no-space world, Hero has only sensory objects to think about—and not other subjects, for example. It follows that, in thinking of any particular, ‘a’, he must be thinking of something whose existence implies actual coexistence with a suitably situated and sensitive being—i.e., a being that can only be himself. Thus, for it to exist at all is for him to perceive it; if he is not perceiving it, it does not exist. This takes care of the objections Evans raises and does not answer. For the only way that Hero could make sense of the idea that deficiencies in himself or the world might prevent him perceiving ‘a’ is that he is able to think that ‘a’ exists though he is not perceiving it. Since he is unable to think this, he cannot make sense of the relevant deficiencies in himself or the world.

Now this conclusion follows from Evans’ claim that, in a no-space world, Hero has only sensory objects to think about. It does not imply that, were Hero to be able to think of other subjects and / or non-sensory objects, he would be unable to think of ‘a’ as existing unperceived in a way that the phenomenalist could endorse. And we may object that, in a no-space world, Hero is nevertheless able to think of other subjects and / or non-sensory particulars.

V. Defining properties

Crucial to Evans’s argument for (d) is the role he finds for various kinds of property. Unfortunately, discussion of his paper is often unnecessarily obstructed by confusion about the use of property-terms. So some attempt at clarification is necessary if we are to grasp what is at issue between Evans and his opponents.

5.1. *Confusions.* Evans himself is not entirely blameless with regard to the confusion.

First, it can appear from the text that he makes the distinction between sensory and non-sensory properties synonymous with the dispositional / non-dispositional distinction. This would render (c) impossible without an argument: i.e., the claim that we might base thought about objective par-

¹⁰ I.e., 1980, 268-81.

ticulars in non-sensory but nevertheless dispositional properties. And closer examination shows that there is nothing in Evans' text to suggest that he ruled out this possibility by definition—he just did not discuss it.

Second, Evans makes his argument depend on historical discussion of which assemblies of properties are primary and which secondary. And there is insufficient agreement about these issues to make a firm basis for argument.

So I suggest we ignore these names altogether and simply define more precisely the particular kinds of property and their assemblies that we shall need to refer to. This may be done primarily by intension and in a way, I hope, that all parties to the dispute can agree to.

A caveat: I call on the notion of the existential dependency of x upon y throughout, something which I take to amount to the strict implication of y 's existence by x 's existence. Perhaps this is too strong. What I am really concerned with, however, is existential dependency. And, so far as I am aware, a weaker interpretation of what that amounts to will still suffice to capture what is at issue between Evans and his opponents.

5.2 *Definitions.* 'Intrinsic' properties contrast with 'relational' properties: the former do not imply actual coexistence with any other thing; the latter do.

'Dispositional' properties differ from their non-dispositional counterparts in their conditional aspect: they imply what relations would exist if something else were to exist. (Thus dispositional properties need not be relational: they do not imply the actual existence of any other thing).

'Sensory' properties are those that imply both actual coexistence with certain sensitive beings, and the existence of a certain relation with those beings on the condition that they are suitably situated—namely, that they would cause a particular kind of sensory state in those beings if they were so situated. Thus sensory properties are both relational and dispositional. Non-sensory properties may be defined by contrast as all those that are not sensory—i.e., all properties that are either non-relational or non-dispositional, and all properties that are relational and dispositional but either do not imply actual coexistence with certain sensitive beings, or do not imply that a particular kind of sensory state would be caused in those beings if suitably situated. We should not confuse the sensory / non-sensory distinction with a distinction between sensible or observable properties and those that are not sensible or observable (*CP*, 270). A sensitive being may be sensible of, or observe, a property even though the existence of that property implies the existence of neither that being nor that state.

5.3 *Assemblies of properties.* Given these intensions, many coarse or fine ways of assembling properties are made available. There are three assemblies crucial to what follows (they do not exhaust those available, of course):

First: properties that are non-sensory, intrinsic, and non-dispositional.

Second: properties that are sensory, relational, and dispositional.

Third: properties that are non-sensory, relational and dispositional.

It is more than a happy coincidence and less than a relevant concern that these three assemblies map onto one way of conceiving the primary, secondary, tertiary quality distinction. Both Evans and Strawson appear happy to discuss the requirements on thought about objective particulars by drawing on the first two assemblies of properties alone. It is Langton who argues for the relevance of the third possible assembly.

I have introduced this terminology not to elucidate Evans' use of terms but to provide a proper basis for judging the claims he makes. So there will be some (hopefully minor if not obvious) differences between my terms and Evans'—particularly the term 'sensory'. One needs to be cautious about their translation.

VI. '(d) is necessary': Evans' argument

6.1 *Interpreting Evans.* One way to think of Evans' arguments in sections III and IV is negative—i.e., as showing that Hero is unable to think in terms of objective particulars even if (a) held; i.e., if he had the use of some travel-based quasi-spatial framework. This is the way Strawson regards them, as is evident from his "Reply to Evans".¹¹ But this view cannot be quite right; Evans says a great deal more than would be necessary to show that (a) is not sufficient. The alternative is to think of Evans as advancing the claim that (d) is necessary. Again, this cannot be quite right; Evans continually reminds us that he is not developing his points and defending them sufficiently to substantiate (d). Nevertheless, I assume it is his attempts to do so that should really interest us. So it is in that way that I shall consider his arguments—not so as to attack him for falling short of (d), but so as to appraise his suggestions as to how we might arrive at (d).

Evans can be read as offering a single two-part argument for (d).¹²

¹¹ 1980, 274.

¹² 1980, 268-81.

6.2 *Argument for (d): First Part.* In the first part, Evans argues that being able to think in terms of objective particulars requires thinking of the perceptible objects of one's world as endowed with sensory properties.

To say that an object is 'endowed with' properties, at least as I use the phrase, is certainly not to imply that it would make sense to ask 'what is an object over and above its properties?' For it is consistent with regarding them as belonging to different ontological categories, so that the question is a category-howler (like 'what is Oxford University over and above its colleges, buildings, senior and junior members, etc.?'). We might, for example, regard an object's properties as modifications of the object, ways in which it is or would be in certain circumstances.

Evans does not lavish attention on the first part of his argument, and it is obvious why not. He has already argued that the exclusively auditory world Hero inhabits could contain only sensory properties. So, if Hero is to be able to think of the things he perceives *at all*, he must think of them as endowed with sensory properties. But the same claim may be quite as obvious, at any rate to a Strawsonian about perception, when applied generally. Suppose we accept that thinking of objective particulars requires being able to perceive them; and suppose we accept that perceiving an object is to be a suitably sensitive and situated being in some particular state caused by that object. Since this is just what it is for that object to be endowed with sensory properties, the first part goes through.

6.3 *Argument for (d): Second Part.* In the second part of the argument, Evans argues that being able to think of perceptible objects as endowed with sensory properties requires thinking of them as constituted of non-sensory (intrinsic, non-dispositional?) properties—i.e., space-occupying matter.

The point rests on what it is to be able to perceive, and more generally to think of, sensory properties. By definition, of course, they are relational and dispositional. To be able to think of those items endowed with such dispositions (e.g., objects or places) as objective particulars requires thinking of them as the abiding categorical basis or causal ground of those dispositions. Being able to think in terms of the ground of a disposition requires thinking in terms of something that is neither sensory nor dispositional. Now Hero has only sensory (i.e., dispositional) properties to think about. So Hero cannot think in terms of objective particulars.

'Causal ground' is never fully explained in the text. It might be taken to mean some underlying ingredient that somehow provides unity, cohesion, integrity and / or wholeness to a set of properties—i.e., something like Aristotle's 'prime matter' or Locke's bare substrate. This would raise familiar problems. Suppose we ask whether we need something to unite this

bare particular with those properties it unites. If the answer is ‘yes’, then we are launched on an unbenign regress. If the answer is ‘no’, then we have rejected our very reason for claiming that the substrate was needed to unite those properties in the first place.

But it would be a mistake to interpret Evans in this way. For, in speaking of a causal ground, he need not claim that sensory properties depend for their existence on material substance in an *ontological* sense, but only in a merely *causal* sense. Moreover, even if Evans were to put the stronger ontological claim forward, what causes all the trouble is a *further* question that he is certainly not concerned with—namely, ‘in virtue of what does this (ontological) dependency exist?’

It might be thought that this second part of Evans’ argument is not consistent with a remark he makes early on in section III,¹³ namely, that sensory properties “may, in [their] turn, be identified with what we should normally regard as the ground of the disposition.¹⁴”

I assume that what Evans is exploiting here is the gap between ‘identified with’ and ‘identical to’. Otherwise, he is denying what I take to be a crucial aspect of the second part of his argument: that being able to think in terms of the ground of a disposition requires thinking in terms of something that is not a disposition. Moreover, if some identity claim *were* being made, it is entirely unclear to me why Evans should go on to say that “*in the first instance*, a sensory property is a dispositional property”¹⁵ and that, for the case of colour, “All it can amount to for something to be red is that it be such that, if looked at in the normal conditions, it will appear red.¹⁶” That is: this property is sensory, relational and dispositional.

6.4 Interpreting Evans. At this point, having shown that Hero cannot think in terms of objective particulars, and apparently only halfway through the second part of his paper, it has seemed to his commentators that Evans gives up and turns to arguing that (d) would be sufficient rather than necessary—Strawson, for example, has Evans turn immediately from the causal ground requirement to the observation that ‘we human beings’ satisfy it with our concept of “space-occupying material”.¹⁷

Now this is not exactly false, but it is deeply misleading. It is not exactly false because Evans does indeed claim that being able to think in terms of

¹³ A remark that recalls subsequent discussion of colours; see John Campbell (1993).

¹⁴ 1980, 269.

¹⁵ 1980, 269; my emphasis.

¹⁶ 1980, 272.

¹⁷ 1980, 275; see also Langton, 1998, 182-4.

non-sensory properties and the space-occupying matter with which such thought is interdependent *does* enable one to think of the grounds of sensory properties (and, hence, of objective particulars). And he spends a great deal of time discussing how this works and what its implications are. But it is misleading because, for anyone with an eye on the argument in play, if Evans is simply making a sufficiency claim, the following question will arise.

Suppose we accept that Hero cannot think in terms of objective particulars; and suppose we accept that, if he were able to think in terms of space-occupying material substance, this would be sufficient for him to do so. Nevertheless, might not something *less* than material substance suffice for thought about objective particulars? In particular, would not either (b) or (c) suffice—i.e., precisely as Strawson and Langton would wish to suggest?

I think it would be quite wrong to suppose that Evans' argument leaves a gap of this kind—however understandable as it may be, given the complexity of Evans' text at this point and its proliferation of different aims. I noted that Evans' take on the original question ('what is required to think in terms of objective particulars?') is constrained by the limitation that Strawson himself imposed: namely, that we should ask instead 'would it be possible to think in terms of objective particulars and not in terms of material bodies?' That, after all, is the purpose of Hero—to test the hypothesis that one can. If one cannot think in terms of material bodies, then one is reduced to a world without spatial concepts and only sensory properties as thinkables. It has now turned out that, in such a world, one cannot think in terms of objective particulars. So, if the Strawsonian way of testing the hypothesis is sound, there is no gap in Evans' argument. Having shown that Hero cannot think in terms of objective particulars, he has shown generally that it is not possible to think in terms of objective particulars and not in terms of material bodies. Hence, if the rest of the argument is successful, we may conclude without further ado that (d) is necessary and not merely sufficient.

VII. '(d) is unnecessary': (b) is sufficient

If those who advocate (b) or (c) accept the first part of Evans' argument and agree that, if his second part were true, then (d) would indeed be necessary, they must try to show that the second part is false. It might seem that there is little for them to disagree with. They have accepted that being able to think in terms of objective particulars requires thinking of the perceptible objects of one's world as endowed with sensory properties. And they have accepted Strawson's objectivity constraint, which implies in this

case, as Strawson himself puts it, that such thought would not be objective unless the subject were able to think of those properties “as properties of genuinely independent objects [requiring] an abiding causal ground distinct from themselves” (1980, 275). So there are only two obvious places to halt the progress of Evans’ argument.

Either we can deny that thinking of dispositionally-endowed objects requires thinking of them as the non-sensory causal ground of those dispositions. Or we can deny that thinking of them as the non-sensory causal ground of those dispositions requires thinking of them as space-occupying matter. This, I take it, is precisely how the advocates of (b) and (c) divide up. (b) denies that objectivity requires a non-sensory causal ground, while (c) denies that objectivity requires a substantial (i.e., non-sensory, non-dispositional) causal ground. Consider (b) first.

7.1 *Sensory properties are sufficient.* (b) must deny that objectivity requires a non-sensory causal ground because it claims that being able to think in terms of sensory properties is sufficient for objective thought. This is precisely what Strawson attempts to do in his “Reply to Evans”. He asks us to consider ‘Seer’ rather than Hero—i.e., the subject of a purely visual experience—and to imagine that Seer “conceive[s] of an objective world of things constituted of colour variously disposed in space... The things so constituted would be thought of as simply causing, in a suitably positioned subject, the experience of seeing them” (1980, 278). Seer is better equipped than Hero, even though neither are able to think in terms of anything more than sensory properties. For Seer can make sense of spatial concepts, both serial and simultaneous, where Hero cannot. Thus Strawson is apparently quite free to accept Evans’ whole argument in the last part of his paper—that if space is to provide a system of relations constitutive of an objective world, one must be capable of thinking of it as constituted by simultaneous, as well as serial, relations.¹⁸ It follows that, if Evans has an argument against (b), it must be located in section III.¹⁹ So I shall continue concentrating on that section.

7.2 *The theory requirement.* Strawson goes on to consider one objection that Evans might make: that concepts of the genuinely objective must possess a ‘theoretical character’ here absent.

Strawson himself interprets this to mean that they are “not woven out of sense-experiences alone”.²⁰ Strawson’s own reply to the objection he puts

¹⁸ 1980, 281-90.

¹⁹ 1980, 268-81.

²⁰ 1980, 279.

in Evans' mouth is simply to deny that Seer's concepts *are* 'woven out of sense-experiences alone'.

But this is not enough to counter Evans' point; indeed, it does not appear to register it. For Evans does not need to argue that there is a theory-requirement on the objective to deny the implausible view that concepts are woven out of sense-experiences alone—particularly if 'woven out of' is meant to imply 'constituted by'. So, if we are to reply on Strawson's behalf to Evans' possible objection, we must at least ask what the theory-requirement really comes to and give it full value.

Evans introduces the theory-requirement in the following way. Having claimed that we cannot think in terms of material substance as space-occupying stuff without having a grasp of non-sensory properties, he then argues for the converse. Having a grasp of such properties depends on mastering the set of interconnected principles which make up what he calls an elementary theory of primitive mechanics—i.e., the principles governing the location, movement, conservation, identity, persistence, and interaction of bodies in a unitary spatial framework. And mastery of this set of principles depends on one's being able to think in terms of material substance as space-occupying stuff.

Now the Strawsonesque advocate of (b) simply need not be impressed by these thoughts. He may accept that thinking in terms of non-sensory, non-dispositional properties requires thinking in terms of space-occupying matter. For he is free to deny that, in thinking about objective particulars, one need think in terms of non-sensory non-dispositional properties at all. Thus an answer is available to Strawson in reply to the objection he thought Evans might have made to (b).

Given the ease with which we can dissolve the objection put into Evans' mouth by Strawson, we might wonder whether it would indeed have issued from it.

7.3 *The seer case.* We might start by applying pressure to Strawson's Seer case; what does it really amount to, and does it in fact support (b)?²¹

We are to suppose that Seer thinks in terms of objective particulars; that he thinks of them as 'constituted of colour variously disposed in space';

²¹ What follows are thoughts stimulated by a footnote (25) in John McDowell's (1985). The footnote itself is suggestive and worth elaborating, but it is neither lengthy nor detailed enough for me to feel confident that what follows is indeed an elaboration and not my own invention. The crucial sentence is this: "Shapes as seen are *shapes*—that is, non-sensory properties; it is one thing to deny, as Evans does, that experience can furnish us with the concepts of such properties, but quite another to deny that experience can disclose instantiations of them to us".

and that he thinks of his experiences, when correctly positioned, as ‘simply’ caused by them. Now we might wonder precisely what content is to be given to the notions of sensory properties as being disposed in space, or as being constituted, or as causes at all, except by reference to the items which ‘have’ those properties—i.e., either that the subject must be in touch with objects endowed with non-sensory properties ‘out there’, or he must himself be an object so endowed. (I shall return to the latter possibility later on.)

Tentatively, the whole might be phrased in the way of a constructive dilemma. Either Seer is genuinely able to think of what he sees as objective particulars, but that is because what he sees are not merely sensory properties. Or Seer is indeed confronted by merely sensory properties, but he is unable to think of them as objective particulars. Either way, of course, (b) is false.

7.4 *First Lemma.* The thought behind the first lemma is that, as Evans himself makes clear, non-sensory properties may nevertheless be sensible or observable—visible, in Seer’s case. Thus we can avail ourselves of Strawson’s talk of things being variously disposed in space and constituted in such a way that they cause experiences in subjects. But, on the one hand, we can insist that such talk does not properly apply to merely sensory properties. And, on the other hand, we can insist that such talk makes perfect sense when applied to non-sensory properties.

The point can be made with Strawson’s own examples of what is available to Seer: “visually defined shapes” and colours.²² If Seer is indeed able to see visually defined shapes and think about them, then of course we may accept that he can think in terms of objective particulars. But this is no argument in favour of (b). For some object to have a visually defined shape is precisely for it to have a property that does not imply actual coexistence with sensitive beings—i.e., a non-sensory property.²³

7.5 *Second lemma.* The thought behind the second lemma is merely an application of Strawson’s own objectivity constraint. If Seer has only sensory properties to think about—i.e., without the non-sensory causal grounds that enable us to think of them objectively—we have no reason to suppose that he has the use of a distinction between his own states and states of something not himself of which he has experience. For there appears to be

²² 1980, 278.

²³ Strawson’s example of colour is not well chosen since it is not at all obvious (*pace* Evans (1980) and McDowell (1985)) that colour is a dispositional property—rather than, for example, the ground of a disposition (see Campbell 1993). And if it is not dispositional, then, by definition, it cannot be a sensory property.

only one state he would have a use for; that particular sensory state aroused by his relationship to the property. And without the use of such a distinction, whatever Seer is able to think of, it is not objective particulars.

This is one way of putting Evans' own thought that, trying to introduce objective thought into a purely sensory world is like (precisely because it would require) trying to conceive of a sensory state (like a pain) which *no one* feels on the model of a sensory state (a pain) which one *does* feel.

VIII. '(d) is unnecessary': (c) is sufficient

8.1 *Langton*. Advocates of (c) can escape these problems, of course, for they are free to accept that non-sensory properties are necessary for objective thought and may thus be the causal ground of sensory properties. What (c) must deny is that objectivity requires a non-sensory, non-dispositional causal ground. For it claims that being able to think in terms of non-sensory dispositional properties is sufficient for objective thought. The idea here is related to Strawson's point in his "Reply to Evans"—that the theoretical properties Evans needs to appeal to in his primitive mechanics are 'thoroughly dispositional in character'—i.e., 'force, mass, impenetrability, electric charge'.

It is Rae Langton who forces us to distinguish clearly between this thought and the defence of (b) that is Strawson's primary concern in his "Reply".²⁴ Her argument is essentially this: we need Evans' primitive mechanical theory in order to think objectively; but this theory is interdependent with our being able to think of dispositional properties, not the intrinsic non-dispositional properties Evans claims are required.

8.2 *Evans interpretation*. It may be worth entering an expositional caveat about whether Evans does indeed claim that intrinsic non-dispositional properties are required. For he only explicitly claims that the properties constitutive of the idea of material substance as space-occupying stuff are non-sensory, not that they are also intrinsic and non-dispositional.²⁵ Of course, he appears to run the non-sensory and the non-dispositional together. So perhaps his commentators are correct to assume that he thought the properties constitutive of material substance are not merely non-sensory but intrinsic and non-dispositional as well (e.g., Langton, 1998, 182-3).

²⁴ 1998, 182-5.

²⁵ 1980, 269.

In fact, I am sure this *must* be Evans' position. For he claims that his primitive mechanics is interdependent with thought concerning space-occupying material substance. And the extension of those non-sensory properties required for primitive mechanics undoubtedly includes intrinsic, non-dispositional properties. So this would constitute an answer to Langton.

Evans divides such properties into three classes:

First Class: those properties immediately consequential on the idea of space-occupation (position, size, shape, motion).

Second Class: those properties applicable to a body in virtue of the non-sensory properties of its spatial parts.

Third Class: those properties definable when combined with the idea of force (mass, weight, hardness).

There are two obvious responses available to Langton here.

8.3 *First response.* Langton can point out that, of the properties Evans claims are constitutive of material substance as space-occupying stuff, some are relational and dispositional—the second and third classes. Precisely by describing properties as either consequential on space-occupation or definable when combined with the idea of force, Evans implies that they are relational and / or dispositional.

Of course, Evans would be free to accept this and argue nevertheless for (d) on the grounds that the properties falling under the first class are undoubtedly intrinsic and non-dispositional. So the advocate of (c) must go deeper.

8.4 *Second response.* Langton might accept both that the first class denotes non-dispositional properties, and that that class is partly constitutive of material substance as space-occupying stuff. For what she is free to deny is that primitive mechanics, on which objective thought about particulars depends, requires space-occupying stuff. If it does not, so the response would go, objectivity does not require first class properties at all, but only those non-sensory dispositional properties that fall under the second and third classes—i.e., (c) is sufficient and (d) unnecessary.

In fact, of course, the advocate of (c) need not agree that the extension of Evans' third class must map onto the extension of that class of non-sensory dispositional properties she is prepared to accept as necessary for primitive mechanics. Indeed, she might deny that 'hardness' is a non-sensory property (as Langton does).

But a paradigmatic property for Langton's response must be impenetrability. The idea would be this: if an object is impenetrable, that implies its coexistence with other objects and with forces, and it implies that it would have certain effects on other objects or forces in certain situations (i.e., in the right circumstances, it would deform some objects and resist some

forces). Thus impenetrability is a relational and dispositional property. But it is, nevertheless, not a sensory property. For it does not imply coexistence (actual or possible) with sensitive beings, nor that it would cause particular kinds of sensory state in such beings if suitably situated. Hardness, on the other hand, does seem to imply coexistence (actual or possible) with sensitive beings.

It might be thought, as Langton herself implies, that what her response resurrects is that huge debate about how we are to conceive of matter as a space-filler which particularly enthralled the early moderns—as that which is essentially extended, something that occupies space, or as that which is essentially a set of powers, something that engages causally with other things in space. This would make a simple reply on Evans' behalf impossible.

Fortunately, I think we can regard Langton's concern here as an unnecessary detour. For what is at issue is not the rarified question of how we are to conceive matter as a space-filler, but the more straightforward question of how we are to conceive of matter if we are to have a grasp of primitive mechanics. And if that grasp depends on learning of how bodies compete for occupancy of positions in space, as Evans claims and Langton does not deny, then it is dependent on thinking of matter *both* as a space-occupier, i.e., extended, *and* as something engaging in causal interaction, i.e., empowered. Thus we need to think of it in terms of all three classes—i.e., non-sensory properties that are non-dispositional as well as dispositional properties; and thus the argument for (d) goes through.

8.5 *Third Response.* The advocate of (c) might offer a third response by mounting an argument against the claim that having a grasp of primitive mechanics requires learning how bodies compete for occupancy of positions in space.

The advocate of (d), however, has two possible replies.

First, he could argue that primitive mechanics would not then be worthy of the name. For the principles that make it up are interconnected, and if one is unable to grasp competition for spatial-occupancy, one will be unable to learn of other principles—such as the conservation of matter in different shapes.

Second, he could argue that primitive mechanics would not then be interdependent with thought about objective particulars. For a principle of primitive mechanics that is crucial to objectivity may be regarded as dependent on the possibility of its application to spatial occupants—namely, the identity of matter perceived from different points of view and through different modalities.

8.6 *Conclusion*. So there is good reason to conclude, with Evans, that being able to think in terms of objective particulars requires being able to think of things as constituted of non-sensory, intrinsic, non-dispositional properties—i.e., space-occupying matter.²⁶

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²⁶ I am most grateful to audiences at Pittsburgh, Oxford, London (KCL) and Auckland for discussion of arguments contained here.