

Commentary on Cruz Davis

I. Not a Matter of Space

Before I begin with my concerns, I want to say that I found Cruz Davis' paper well-reasoned and thoroughly enjoyable. In preparation for this conference, Davis sent me an additional piece that he has written on the work that non-spatial objects can be put to, and it was quite fascinating. The possibility of non-spatial material objects has consequences across a wide variety of philosophical topics including metaphysics, philosophy of mind, and philosophy of religion. What is even more interesting is that these consequences seem to come about once we accept the possibility of non-spatial material objects (accepting their actuality is not required). With all this in mind, I find this topic extremely exciting as there are many potential consequences at stake.

II. Concerns

Regarding the paper, I have two primary concerns. The first is that while Davis does an excellent job of showing that duplicate and subduplicate objects are material, I worry that he has not necessarily shown that these material objects are non-spatial. I worry that worlds are necessarily spatial, and if this is the case, then all material objects that exist in or at a world are necessarily spatial as a result. If it can be shown that worlds are not necessarily spatial, then Davis succeeds in getting the result that material objects can be non-spatial via recombination. Once that happens, then Davis' arguments against the dualistic substantialist seems pretty straightforward. As a result, I have no concerns with his section on dualistic substantialism. Rather, my second concern deals with his section on the monistic substantialist and whether or not points are necessarily spatial. In what follows I will briefly discuss both of these concerns. I will start with my concern that possible worlds are necessarily material.

II.I – Spatial Worlds

In presenting his paper, Davis does not give an account of possible worlds, so it is difficult to know how exactly he conceives of them. In future versions of the paper, I would recommend including a brief section on the nature of possible worlds as this might help alleviate worries like the one I am about to present. Since there is no account of possible worlds provided, the reader is left considering Davis' arguments against whatever account of possible worlds she chooses. If the reader is a Lewisian, then it seems that she will simply deny Davis' conclusion as Lewisian worlds are necessarily spatial. As such, when positing a material object in or at a possible world, that material object is posited *in* space and time.

As David Lewis says in *On the Plurality of Worlds*,

There are countless other worlds, other very inclusive things. Our world consists of us and all our surroundings, however remote in time and space; just as it is one big thing having lesser things as parts, so likewise do other worlds have lesser otherworldly things as parts (1986, 2).

Just as our world exists in space and time, Lewis argues that the possible worlds do as well. Every world for Lewis exists as a concrete entity located in space and time. Davis' argues that the possibility of non-spatial material objects exists because there are conceivably possible worlds where material objects exist and space does not. If worlds are necessarily spatiotemporal, as David Lewis argues, then Davis' argument doesn't go through because, presumably, the material objects he posits will be located within space since the worlds they're being posited at are necessarily spatial.

Given this worry, there are three types of responses that Davis could give. First, Davis could argue that though all possible worlds themselves are spatial, it is possible that material objects within those worlds are somehow not spatial. This would be something like saying that there are possible worlds with non-spatial objects like ghosts or spirits, but at these worlds the ghosts or spirits are material. Lewis' account of possible worlds does leave room for non-spatial entities, like ghosts or spirits, at spatial worlds. While every world has spatiotemporal relations, according to Lewis, not every

world has those spatiotemporal relations in exactly the same way: “so the interrelation of a world of spirits might be looser than that of a decent world like ours” (1986, 73). If this is the kind of response that Davis wants to give, however, he needs to provide further argument for why it is that we should accept that these material objects are non-spatial entities in these possible worlds. As the standard view claims that no object could remain material and cease to have a spatial location, the fact that the objects in these spatial worlds are material seems reason to believe that they have a spatial location. To argue that they exist in spatial worlds yet do not have a spatial location requires more than Davis has given in this paper.

The second kind of response available to Davis is to deny Lewisian worlds in favor of some other account of possible worlds. This would require that Davis provide an account of the nature of possible worlds. At first glance it might seem that an abstractionist account of possible worlds might get Davis the results he wants, but I worry that it might not. Abstractionism typically claims that possible worlds are states or conditions that a concrete world could be in. In other words, they are ways that a world could be. While abstractionism isn't committed to the concreteness of worlds, it still seems committed to the thought that a concrete world *could* be such and such a way. Concrete worlds, according to Lewis, are necessarily spatial, so if the abstractionist world is a state of conditions about the way a concrete world could be, it seems that those states of conditions would always include a spatiality condition. Thus, Davis might have to posit a non-standard account of possible worlds in order to get the result that non-spatial worlds exist. Once he gets that, however, the rest of his argument runs though and non-spatial material objects are possible. The worry, though, is that any theorist who does not accept Davis' account of possible worlds might not buy the rest of his' argument.

Finally, the third kind of response available to Davis is to claim that there are things in the world that are very much like worlds but are non-spatial. At this point, however, Davis would not be

able to run the same kinds of arguments that he does in the paper since his arguments rely on recombination and recombination is a tool that is used to help countenance the possible worlds (not the world-like-entities that are not worlds). Recombination is a way of ensuring that there are no gaps in logical space; no vacancies where a world might have been but isn't. I suppose Davis could also claim that there is something very much like recombination that is used to countenance the world like entities. This recombination-like-tool helps ensure that there are no gaps in logical space; no vacancies where a world-like-entity might have been but isn't. Davis would need to motivate why we should care about these world-like-entities, but this seems like an argument that could plausibly be made.

Since Davis' paper argues for the possibility of material objects located at non-spatial worlds, I do not think he would wish to take up the first kind of response. The second and third responses seem more plausible, and I would be interested to hear in the discussion which response he would like to give.

II.II – Material Points

Once it has been established that non-spatial worlds are possible (or that there are non-spatial world-like-entities), Davis' argument seems to work against the dualistic substantialist. It seems that arguing for non-spatial material objects is a more difficult task when dealing with the monist. Davis provides two arguments against the monist in favor of the possibility of non-spatial material objects. He begins by arguing that there are regions of space that are identical with points. These points, Davis argues, are spatial because they stand in spatial relations to other distinct regions of space. Davis argues that by Object Recombination, we can get a world with a duplicate of the point but with nothing else. Since there is nothing else, there is nothing for the point to stand in spatial relation to, and since that is what gives points their spatiality, this duplicate point would be non-spatial.

Since points are regions of space that are spatial due to the spatial relations they stand in there is a worry that these points cease to exist without standing in spatial relations. Without the spatial relations, the point is not spatial, but since points just are regions of space, there is no longer a point there at all. In other words, points are intrinsically spatial, and so this spatiality cannot be taken away from them. Davis acknowledges this argument in the paper and accepts that it might be a good one. With this in mind, he proceeds to give a second argument against the monist in favor of the possibility of non-spatial material objects.

My primary worry here is that this second argument might fall to this same “points are intrinsically spatial” argument. Davis introduces Relation Recombination where for any objects and any external relation, or external family of relations, there is a world with a subduplicate of those objects not standing in that relation or family of relations. Davis imagines the duplicate of Ben Roethlisberger, Duplicateberger.

Duplicateberger is an isolated region that is a duplicate of our Roethlisberger region. Duplicateberger and his parts are all spatially related to one another. By Relation Recombination we get that there is a world where we have a subduplicate of Duplicateberger’s parts and Duplicateberger (call it ‘Subduplicateberger’) that differs only in that this thing and its parts don’t stand in any spatial relations to one another. Subduplicateberger wouldn’t be a region of space, or spatial at all because neither it nor any of its parts would stand in any spatial relations. Nothing in that world would be spatially related, and if nothing is spatially related, then nothing is spatial. So it seems, once again, that we are left with the possibility of a non-spatial, material object. (12-13)

Since Duplicateberger is a material object, it seems that he would be composed of many material point sized parts. Thus, Subduplicateberger and its parts would also be composed of many material point sized parts. While Relation Recombination might allow us to take away the spatial relations between the parts of Subduplicateberger, it cannot allow us to take away the spatiality of the point sized parts as points are intrinsically spatial (as previously discussed). If this is the case, then at the very least, the material point sized parts that compose Subduplicateberger are spatial. Subduplicateberger thus has parts that are spatial (the point sized parts) and thus there are entities at this world that are spatial. If

this is the case, then we cannot make the claim that nothing in this world is spatial, so we might not get the possibility of non-spatial material objects from Subduplicateberger.

III. Concluding Remarks

Overall, I think the paper is extremely promising. I do not take my concerns to be devastating at all. If Davis can respond to the concern that possible worlds might necessarily be spatial, then his argument seems guaranteed to work against the dualistic substantialist. That is already a strong result. The result gets even stronger when you remember that if monistic substantialism is only contingently true (which seems quite plausible) and there is a world where dualistic substantialism is true, then Davis can rerun his argument against the dualist from that world. Given that whatever is possible from one world is possible from any, he once again gets his conclusion that non-material spatial arguments are possible. Thus, my concerns for monistic substantialism only work if monistic substantialism is necessary across all worlds, which seems unlikely. Further, there is likely something to be said in response to the problem of point sized parts. Having said all this, I am very hopeful for the future of Davis' project and am excited to see where it goes from here.

Sources

Lewis, D. 1986. *On The Plurality of Worlds*, Oxford: Blackwell.