Undercutting the Idea of Carving Reality


Abstract. Many philosophers suppose that sameness and difference, among the world’s objects, obtain only relative to our conventions for individuation, our conceptual scheme, etc. That two objects are the same in kind, or that one object is the same object as existed earlier, are not fixed mind-independently. The usual premise is that schemes for “carving” objects out of the world quite different from our actual scheme could afford us equal success in practice and theory. This paper examines typical examples of such “strange” objects and argues that the prediction of equal success is not believable.

It is widely supposed that, in Hilary Putnam’s phrase, there are no “ready-made objects” (Putnam 1982; cf. Putnam 1981, Ch. 3). Instead the objects we consider real are partly of our own making: we carve them out of the world (or out of experience). The usual reason for supposing this lies in the claim that there are available to us alternative ways of “dividing reality” into objects (to quote the title of Hirsch 1993), ways which would afford us every bit as much practical and cognitive mastery as we now possess. Hence there is no warrant for supposing that the objects recognized by such alternative schemes are any less real than the objects we actually consider real—unless we are to appeal to a “God’s-eye perspective”, which virtually no one wants to do. The reasonable conclusion, many philosophers suppose, is that any system of objects exists only relative to a particular conceptual scheme or system of predicates. *Our* system of objects is, in this sense, partly of our own making. But this claim should not be heard as a reaffirmation of the idealism of Fichte or Husserl. It is more accurate to take it merely as a claim about sameness and difference among the objects of the world. It is the claim that sameness and difference, whether at the level of kinds or of individual objects, do not obtain mind-independently, but only relative to a conceptual scheme or predicate system (see, e.g., Putnam 1981, pp. 53-54). That is, whether two objects are of the same kind, and whether one and the same individual object now exists at such-and-such
a place as earlier existed at so-and-so place, are matters fixed only relative to a particular scheme for carving the world. I shall call this the Carving Thesis.

The aim of this paper is to show that the Carving Thesis is unsupported. Elsewhere I have argued that it is incoherent (Elder 2004, Chapter 1; 1983, §III). Its proponents have been equally aggressive in their advocacy of it: they have argued that we can, using our actual conceptual resources and predicate systems, carve out objects radically different from those we actually believe in, objects which will serve us just as well as our familiar objects do. Advocates of the Carving Thesis—Carvers, let us call them—might be better advised to offer a scaled-back defense of their Thesis. In any case I shall here, for the most part, scale back my criticisms. I shall argue mainly that the “strange objects” (Hirsch again) which Carvers say we could so readily carve out, using just our actual conceptual resources, fail to live up to the Carvers’ advertisements for them.

This happens, I shall argue, in any of three different ways—through faults I shall call “Verbalizing”, “Shadowing”, and “Unraveling”. First, Carvers sometimes depict speakers whose carving schemes ostensibly posit strange objects, but who use the particular claims they affirm about these strange objects only in inferences that abstract from, or paper over, the strangeness. Their positing of strange objects thus turns out to be a mere verbal illusion, and I call this first failure Verbalizing. Alternatively, Carvers sometimes sketch carving schemes which posit genuinely strange objects at the level of what Sellars (1963) calls “the manifest image”—at the level of familiar medium-sized objects and the properties they present to our unaided senses—but objects whose properties or behavior create static with our actual beliefs about supervenience. In fact we believe that the properties and behavior of medium-sized objects supervene, if only weakly, on what happens at the level of fundamental microparticles in and near the volumes of space occupied by those objects. But the genuinely strange medium-sized objects which Carvers posit, when Carvers are innocent of Verbalizing, are so strange as to require strange microphysical properties in the microparticles found within their borders. How then can Carvers make it plausible that a scheme which posits unfamiliar medium-sized objects will afford as much theoretical and practical mastery as our actual scheme does? They could argue that we could get by
without believing in supervenience at all, but that is implausible. Or they could argue that the natures and properties of their strange objects really do supervene on microphysically strange microparticles.

This is better—but just how widely should they say the strange microphysics hold sway? Carvers might on the one hand say that we could take the strange microphysics to hold only within the borders of the strange medium-sized objects, and could suppose that elsewhere the microphysics familiar to actual science holds true. But it is hard to believe that the shadows cast down onto the level of the microparticles, by medium-sized objects in the manifest image, are that significant at the level of fundamental physical theory. This is ultimately why “causal exclusion” arguments are so worrying. If we suppose that the microparticles of the world do all the real causings in the world, it is hard to be confident that any causal role is left for medium-sized objects—hard to believe that the causally significant groupings of microparticles will exactly reduplicate the outlines of medium-sized objects (Elder 2004, Chapters 3 and 4). So this response by Carvers is implausible, and I call the response “Shadowing”. This is the second way in which objects championed by Carvers may fail to live up to the advertising.

The alternative, of course, is for Carvers to say that we could get by just as well by affirming a strange microphysics that applies everywhere, whether within the borders of strange medium-sized objects or without. But now the microphysical strangeness that subvenes the strange medium-sized objects will spread even to the particles that subvene familiar objects, and to fundamental physical processes and physical geometry, and hence to all the phenomena studied by physics. Isolated holes torn in the fabric of the common-sense picture of the world lead to weird predictions everywhere, and engender an “Unraveling” of our actual understanding of the world. Unraveling is the third way in which the Carvers’ objects may fail to live up to their billing.

This however is as far as my main criticisms here will reach. Their message will be that Carvers have failed persuasively to show that, using our actual conceptual and linguistic resources, we could have fared equally well while carving out objects genuinely different from those we actually recognize. It is left open by my main criticisms that Carvers should offer a scaled-back defense of their position. In
particular they might claim that intelligent beings like us could, using concepts and predicates we cannot readily envision in any detail, recognize objects quite “strange” from our vantage point, but fare equally well in practice and in theorizing. This claim is vague enough that I will leave it unchallenged.

I

But it is worth noting briefly, before the main argument begins, that there are reasons for suspecting that the Carving Thesis cannot be defended at all, not even if the defense takes a scaled-back and vague form. That is, there are reasons for suspecting that the Carving Thesis is incoherent. I shall sketch these reasons briefly, in very broad strokes.

The activities of ours captured by the metaphor of “carving” are metaphysically prior, according to the Carving Thesis, to the existence in the world of objects. Exactly which activities are these? Different answers might be offered. Perhaps we carve out objects just by thinking certain thoughts or employing certain concepts. Perhaps we carve by employing in public language the particular sortals that we employ. Or perhaps we carve in virtue of subscribing to certain general conventions for individuation, one convention applying to sortals that designate chemical stuffs, another to sortals designating physical elements, others perhaps for our designators for artifacts or for living creatures (see Sidelle 1988 and, concerning artifacts, Thomasson 2003). In any case the activities of ours in which our “carving” of objects consists seem metaphysically posterior to our existing. We cannot, by our carving, be said to bring about our own existences; only what already exists can carve.

But just what do our existences amount to or involve? For materialists, we ourselves are objects. Even for dualists, we have objects—we have brains or bodies—and our mental activities are causally dependent on the existence of our brains or bodies. But then our existences appear to constitute counterexamples to the Carving Thesis itself—our existences require objects that exist prior to our carving. Yes, there is the delicious metaphor of “pulling oneself up by one’s bootstraps”, and there is the drawing by Escher of a hand drawing the hand by which it is being drawn. But such amusements do little
to dispel the mystery of minds whose activities are metaphysically prior to their existing (see Elder 2004, Ch. 1, or Rea 2002, Ch. 7). Carvers must apparently find a way to make an exception of the objects which we are or have, and the exception must be a principled one—it must not spread to the other objects of which we are supposed to be partly the creators.

The other main worry concerns the stuff or manifold out of which we supposedly carve the world’s objects. Its existence too must evidently be metaphysically prior to the occurrence of our carving. Then does it, independently of and prior to our carving, have a nature of its own? If so, then it is puzzling that this stuff or manifold does not resist some of the carvings we impose upon it. This puzzle becomes sharper when one reflects that if indeed we do carve this stuff into objects and matters and materials, we carve it into diverse objects and matters, ones characterized by differing natures. For independently of and prior to our carving, the stuff or manifold out of which we carve evidently must be, if characterized by a nature of its own at all, characterized by just one nature, the same throughout. How does it happen that this one nature is so indefinitely malleable? An alternative answer, of course, might be that the stuff or manifold out of which we carve the world’s objects is not, independently of our carving, characterized by any nature of its own at all. But then the very metaphor of our carving objects and matters out of it appears to collapse. This carving now appears indiscernible from an unconstrained creation ex nihilo. We are after all returned to the idealism of Fichte or Husserl.

II

The Carvers’ central contention is that sameness and difference among objects in the world—whether at the level of individual objects or at the level of kinds—obtain only relative to a conceptual scheme or a system of predicates, and not mind-independently. The key premise from which they infer this is that speakers who carved out objects quite different from ours could fare every bit as well as we do, both in practice and in theory. Objects different from ours in what ways? Well, in ways that challenge our actual ideas as to what makes for numerical sameness in an individual object or sameness in kind
among two or more objects. Thus Carvers might depict speakers who prosper despite recognizing objects which fail to go on existing—fail to go on being the same individual objects—just on account of undergoing changes that to us seem entirely trivial, and easily survivable. Or they might depict speakers—let us call all such hypothetical speakers Strangers—who prosper despite recognizing objects which continue their individual existences across changes we regard as destructive, or as impossible for any one object to undergo. Or they might depict Strangers who prosper despite treating various objects as belonging to one and the same kind, while those very objects appear to us to belong to quite disparate kinds.

Eli Hirsch depicts Strangers who posit objects of the strangely brittle sort, objects whose individual existences end where we think the objects undergo mere accidental alterations, and I will discuss these Strangers in the present section. (But Hirsch’s own relation to the Carving Thesis is more a matter of flirtation than of matrimony—a point to which I return in §IV.) Davidson’s discussion of “emerires” and “sapphalds” (1970, pp. 92-93), if altered in one respect (more on this later), shows how we can construct a vivid picture of Strangers who recognize objects that are strange, not in being brittle, but in being incredibly durable—objects that endure through changes which we ordinarily suppose no one object could possibly endure. I will discuss these Strangers in the following section. (But I take no position on what Davidson’s actual relation to the Carving Thesis is—some (1977) of his writings seem to me to endorse it, others (1974) to express disdain for it.) Shoemaker’s klables and Hirsch’s cpersons are likewise objects of this amazingly durable sort, and I shall discuss them too in the following section. Finally, there are the Strangers pictured by Hirsch who take apples and oceans to be objects of the very same kind—at least, they apply one and the same sortal to both, namely “apceans”—and these I will discuss in §IV.

The Strangers now up for discussion, then, believe in objects whose existences are incredibly brittle. But before turning to the details of Hirsch’s discussion, let me first say some things about the evidence we typically go by, in judging that the member of kind $K$ now before us is not just a $K$-token but the very $K$-token we earlier encountered, and about the inferences we typically draw from such a
judgement. That is, let me talk about the role in our conceptual economy played by judgements that the same object has persisted from time-and-place A to time-and-place B. The evidence consists in the presence again of certain individuating marks—features which Ks need not have, just on account of being Ks, but which Ks can come to have, and which Ks will have depending on the accidents of their histories. In the easiest cases such individuating marks are marks in the literal sense, features revealed to immediate observation. Thus we might judge that the Plymouth Voyager in the garage this evening is the very Voyager that was here this morning on the strength of noting just the same sort of jagged scar on the right side of the front bumper, together with the same sort of dent over the gas cap. In cases where the judgement of numerical sameness is a bit harder to make, the evidence consists in the presence of the same powers and propensities. Thus I might judge that I am test-driving the same brand new silver Voyager as I test-drove yesterday on the strength of noting that the Voyager of today likewise pulls to the right and that its engine has the same strangely choppy idle. In the cases where numerical sameness is the most difficult to discern, the evidence may be merely that the K now encountered is at a position spatio-temporally continuous with positions that trace back to the position of the K I observed earlier. Thus I may judge that the ball bearing at the far left of bottom tray of a pin-ball machine is the very ball bearing that was released at the center top by noting that only a ball bearing released from there could have landed here.

The tacit premise in most such inferences of numerical sameness is that certain features which Ks by nature can acquire are likely, once acquired, to remain present. That such rough-and-ready conservation principles often are true, or close enough, explains not only how we can find warrant for our judgements of numerical sameness but also why we bother to do so—why such judgements are of use. The conservation principles permit us to infer, from the observation that the K now before us has several of the individuating marks that we noted in some K observed earlier, that the K now before us probably has others of the individuating marks that we noted in the K observed earlier, as well. They permit us to be confident that this present K will in the future have any individuating marks that we have not yet noted, but are just about to note—they entail that it can be of use to examine the present K more closely. They
license retrodictions to the effect that this $K$ earlier had marks which we only now have discovered in it, and hence enable explanation of how this $K$ earlier acted or looked. All such inferences are fallible, precisely because the conservation principles which they enlist are rough-and-ready. But they often succeed, and succeed non-accidentally.

Now for the Strangers whom Hirsch describes (1993, p. 26 ff.). When these Strangers observe a car parked in the garage, they take there to be an object there very much like the car we believe in. But Strangers suppose that when this car is backed out of the garage, it gradually is destroyed, and ceases to exist. Yet no Stranger is alarmed at the destruction of his “incar”. For Strangers suppose that any incar thus destroyed is, as a matter of law, replaced by a qualitatively identical “outcar”. No outcar can ever be driven into a garage, Strangers will say; what we think of as driving a car into the garage amounts to the destruction of an outcar, and its replacement by a qualitatively identical incar. Yet no Stranger seriously wonders, upon seeing his wife back an incar out of the garage in the morning, what sort of incar he will find parked in the garage in the evening. The incar he saw in the morning cannot of course return; it will long since have ceased to exist. But any Stranger will consider himself well warranted in predicting that the incar present in his garage in the evening—provided any incar is present there then—will be qualitatively just like the incar that was destroyed in the morning.

So runs Hirsch’s story. But we might well marvel at the Strangers’ lack of concern in the face of all this destruction. Does it really make no difference, we might ask the Stranger, that as his incar is backed out it gets destroyed, and gets replaced by an outcar standing in the driveway? But the Stranger will calmly reply that the difference between the incar in the garage and the outcar in the driveway is truly a difference which makes no difference. The outcar can with perfect warrant be counted on to be qualitatively just like the incar. To be sure it is different in one relational respect, different in spatial location. But this just is the difference between the incar and the outcar, not a distinct difference which that difference makes. That difference makes no difference. All the individuating marks which we might note, in examining the incar in the garage, can be counted on to be present again in the outcar in the driveway.
But then Hirsch’s Strangers concede the whole cash value of our judgement that as the car is backed out of the driveway, the very same car continues to exist. For spatial location is not among the features which we suppose to come under the rough-and-ready conservation principles true of cars. This is true in fact of a great many of the conservation principles we believe in: for the most part, we no more expect an individual object to retain its spatial location from encounter to encounter, than we expect it to retain its temporal location from encounter to encounter.

We affirm such judgements as “the car now standing in the driveway is the very car which a moment ago was in the garage”. The Strangers appear to disagree: they say instead “the outcar now standing in the driveway is the very one created when that incar, which a moment ago was in the garage, was destroyed by backing it out of the garage”. But the latter judgement plays exactly the same role, in the Strangers’ conceptual economy, as the former judgement plays in ours. I conclude that it is a mere verbal illusion that Strangers disbelieve in cars which continue their individual existences when backed out of garages. A Carver who employs these Strangers to defend his Thesis is guilty of Verbalizing.

III

Might Strangers fare every bit as well as we do by carving out objects whose courses of existence are strange in just the opposite way to how incars are strange—strange in that those objects continue to exist despite undergoing changes which to us seem destructive, and impossible for any one object to survive? That is the question I will address in the present section. I will focus mainly on Strangers who recognize objects rather like, though different from, the “emerires” and “sapphalds” that Davidson discusses.

Here is why a slight change is needed, for our present purposes, from exactly the emerires and saphalds that Davidson does discuss. At this point we want to look at Strangers who recognize objects that display what Hirsch calls “individuative strangeness” (Hirsch 1988a, p. 4 ff)—in particular, objects that continue their individual existences, go on being the same objects, just where it appears to us that one
object has been destroyed and has been replaced by a distinct object. But Davidson’s actual account of what emerires and sapphalds are is keyed to Goodman’s original account of “grue” and “bleen”, and in consequence his emerires display a different strangeness, what Hirsch calls “classificatory strangeness”. What we need instead are emerires and sapphalds keyed to the account of “grue” and “bleen” offered by Achinstein and Barker (1960), Salmon (1963), and Skyrms (1966). Let me explain.

Goodman’s original account of the predicate “grue” (1955, p. 74) holds that
\[
x \text{ is grue iff } (x \text{ is observed before } T \& x \text{ is green) } \lor \text{ (~ } x \text{ is observed before } T \& x \text{ is blue)}
\]
where \( T \) is some date in the near future—2005, let us now say. (The truth conditions for “...is bleen” simply switch the places of “green” and “blue” in this schema.) But any object can satisfy the truth condition for “grue” without ever changing color from green to blue. All that is needed, in the case where the object is observed before 2005, is that the object be green—green always, if it is to be grue simpliciter, or green at \( t \), if it is to be grue at \( t \). (The “is” in “is observed before \( T \)” is tenseless; in the tensed idiom more congenial to presentists like me, it means “was observed or is being observed or will be observed before \( T \”).) In the complementary case—where the object never is observed, or else is first observed after \( T \)—all that is needed for the object to be grue is that it be blue (or blue at \( t \), for “grue at \( t \)”). So what is strange about “grue” is not that individual instances of the property it appears to pick out look to us like instances of two different properties, one instance succeeding the other. What is strange is that “grue” classes together, as instances of the same property, what look to us like unitary instances of distinct properties. Hence here we have classificatory strangeness, in Hirsch’s terms, rather than individuative strangeness.

Just so, then, for Davidson’s original emerires and sapphalds. For an emerire, on Davidson’s actual account, is something which satisfies this schema:
\[
x \text{ is an emerire iff } (x \text{ is observed before } T \& x \text{ is an emerald}) \lor \text{ (~ } x \text{ is observed before } T \& x \text{ is a sapphire)}
\]
(The schema for “sapphald” simply reverses the positions of “emerald” and “sapphire”.) But no object need switch its affiliation, from one mineralogical kind to another, in order to remain an emerire across $T$. Provided the object was observed before $T$, the object need only go on being an emerald. Provided the object is observed never, or only after $T$, what is required is that it be a sapphire.

But Achinstein and Barker, Salmon, and Skyrms provide an account of “grue” which points in the direction of individuative strangeness. On their account

$$x \text{ is grue at } t \text{ iff } (t \text{ is before } T \& x \text{ is green}) \lor (t \text{ is after } T \& x \text{ is blue}).$$

It follows that any individual instance of the property (or putative property) picked out by “grue” will, if it exists across $T$, look to us like two different property-instances—one of green and one of blue—the one of which gives place to the other. And an account of what emerires and sapphalds are that is keyed to this account will present us with the individuative strangeness that we need now to consider. Any “emerire” which satisfies this schema:

$$x \text{ is an emerire at } t \text{ iff } (t \text{ is before } T \& x \text{ is an emerald}) \lor (t \text{ is after } T \& x \text{ is a sapphire})$$

will not appear to us to be the same object continuing to exist, when the time $T$ arrives. It will rather appear to us as if some individual emerald has been destroyed, and has given place to some individual sapphire.

Now to our question: might Strangers fare as well as we do, despite recognizing objects which are in this way amazingly durable? Imagine that we are gathered to celebrate the New Year, moments before midnight on 31 December 2004, in the brilliantly lighted display room of our good friend the jeweler. We have gathered here on New Year’s Eve for five years running, and have found every year that the positions in the display cases occupied by our friend’s emeralds just after the stroke of midnight were exactly the positions they occupied before the stroke of midnight, and likewise for our friend’s sapphires. Our carving scheme suggests that the same will be true this year. Our friend’s emeralds will in a few minutes occupy exactly the positions they now occupy, and likewise for his sapphires.
Might Strangers whose carving scheme recognizes emerires and sapphalds be every bit as successful, in their predictions and explanations of what happens in the world, as our carving scheme enables us to be? Suppose, as a first alternative, that our carving scheme yields predictions that work well—just as well as the predictions it has yielded on earlier New Year’s Eves. Suppose the jeweler’s emeralds—as we would put it—stay just where they are, and likewise his sapphires. How well will the Strangers’ carving scheme accommodate the data?

The preliminary question is, simply, how will the Strangers’ carving scheme accommodate the data—what will the Strangers take to have happened? One suggestion is that the Strangers will judge the jeweler’s emerires to have instantly traded places, at the stroke of midnight, with his sapphalds. Did each emerire take its component microparticles with it, then, when it leapt across the jeweler’s display room? Strangers will presumably say Yes, since otherwise they are saddled with the claim that emerires are not essentially composed of microparticles—and that claim would cast grave doubt on the idea that their carving scheme will enable them to deal with the world as well as ours enables us to. Moreover this answer might help the Strangers explain how each emerire managed to get through two glass protective covers without cracking the glass: they could say that the microparticles in each emerire dispersed, passed individually between the silicon dioxide molecules in the glass panels, and coalesced again in a different display case.

Still, this first suggestion is unpromising. Our microphysics suggests that for leptons and bosons to be propelled instantaneously (or close to instantaneously) across such distances, they would have to have been acted on by noteworthy forces. The Strangers would be hard pressed, it seems, to say how such forces could have been generated.

A more promising suggestion is that Strangers should say that at the stroke of midnight, all the emerires (and sapphalds) simply retained their spatial locations—but that the locations in question are “bent” locations. The jeweler’s largest emerire, for example—which we think of as an emerald located 15’ 6” north of the display room’s front door—instead steadily occupied a bent variant of that location, such that
x is BENT(15’ 6” north of the front door) at t iff (t is before 2005 & x is 15’ 6” north of the front door) V (t is after 2005 & x is 21’1” northeast of the front door)

and so on for all the other emerires and all the other sapphalds. But note that there will be no general algorithm for transforming the spatial locations, which we think of the emeralds and sapphires as having steadily occupied, onto bent locations which, on the present suggestion, Strangers will think of the emerires and sapphalds as having just as steadily occupied. The display cases are simply not arranged in a way that would make such an algorithm possible. If the Strangers were to say that the emerires had all moved, changed location—this is the now-discarded first suggestion—they would have to say that one moved two feet to the east, another fifteen feet to the southeast, etc. There is no systematic simple mapping from the spatial locations we believe in onto the bent locations the Strangers now recognize.

How many objects in the world, we might now ask the Strangers, occupy such bent locations? Is space-time as a whole made up of such bent (from our point of view, at least) spatial locations? If Strangers say Yes, they are stuck with predicting what from our point of view are movements, at the stroke of midnight, in all of the world’s objects. Each one of us would have to have moved, and indeed changed position relative to the rest of the group, at midnight. Disturbingly, the front door of the display room would likewise have had (from our point of view) to have moved. This spread of strangeness, from the emerires and sapphalds themselves to many other objects in whose case it yields false predictions, is the failure I call Unraveling.

Or should the Strangers hold that the strangeness in space-time, unsuspected by our scheme for carving spatial locations, is localized—confined to just the emerires and sapphalds in the world? In that case the Strangers are claiming that a good theory of the basic physical geometry of the world must quantify over emerires and sapphalds, though not over other familiar medium-sized objects, and must take special heed of where their borders lie. But it is very implausible that so strange a theory of space-time could afford as much mastery of the world as the theory consistent with our carving scheme does. This response too seems a failure, the failure I call Shadowing.
But let us not lose sight of the other alternative—that at the stroke of midnight, our scheme for carving objects turns out not to work very well at all. Suppose that at the stroke of midnight, all the emeralds in our friend’s display cases appear to turn into sapphires, and all the sapphires into emeralds! The Carvers’ main claim is that carving schemes which posit strange objects—in particular, for now, strangely durable objects—would enable Strangers to predict and explain what goes on in the world at least as well as our scheme enables us to. Isn’t it obvious that on this second alternative, the Strangers’ scheme enables them to do these things even better than we can?

But perhaps it is not so obvious. What we would say in such a case is that some as-yet-unknown force or process must have destroyed our friend’s emeralds, and must have caused them to be replaced by sapphires—and likewise, mutatis mutandis, for our friend’s sapphires. Perhaps the force or process actually destroyed or moved the component microparticles in each emerald, and replaced them with other microparticles. Perhaps, more conservatively, it merely rearranged (many of) the component microparticles into different atoms, from which it formed different molecules, which in turn it set in a somewhat different lattice. In any case, the mysterious process we would posit would be localized.

And what would Strangers say about the case in question? The characteristic properties of emeralds and sapphires, according to our best physical theories, are a function of their molecular composition and the way those molecules are arranged. Strangers must make parallel claims about emerires and saphalds, or else they will render it implausible for Carvers to claim that their carving scheme can yield theories that are as successful as our theories are. Supervenience cannot lightly be denied.

So what will Strangers say happens, at the level of microphysics, when the stroke of midnight falls? One answer might be that emerires retain the very molecular structure and arrangement that are characteristic of what we call “emeralds”, but that the laws of nature change—from our point of view, at least—so that that very molecular structure now yields, to the mineralogist’s inspection, the characteristic properties of saphires. Saphals likewise retain the molecular composition we attribute to saphires, and here too the laws of nature change, so that this molecular composition yields the surface properties of
emeralds. But then what other laws of nature will change—at least from our point of view—according to the Strangers? Will gold, though retaining its microstructure, start presenting the surface level appearances now characteristic of, say, iron? Will water remain H\textsubscript{2}O but start behaving the way H\textsubscript{2}SO\textsubscript{4} now behaves? Will our very epidermises present a different appearance? The Strangers, on the present suggestion, seem forced to choose between Unraveling and Shadowing.

Another answer which we might imagine the Strangers giving is that the molecules characteristic of emeralds get replaced or reconfigured in the emerires, at the stroke of midnight, and that what emerges are the molecules (and the molecular arrangement) characteristic of sapphires. The molecules in the sapphalds likewise get replaced or reconfigured, and the product is objects with the molecular composition of emeralds. This is indeed the same account of the case as I have envisioned us endorsing, except that we take the reconfiguration of the molecules to mark destructions (e.g. of emeralds) and replacements (e.g. by sapphires), and Strangers take the reconfigurations to subvene the continued existences of the same medium-sized objects (e.g. emerires). But there is still the question as to which forces or processes cause the reconfiguration, at the molecular level, and it will be just as challenging a question for Strangers as it is for us. Yet until and unless Strangers answer this question, they must find it puzzling and surprising that our friend’s emerires continue to exist across the stroke of midnight—just as puzzling and surprising as we find it that his emeralds are destroyed.

But surely this shows that the answer just considered is not the answer that should really be ascribed to the Strangers. Surely the Strangers are supposed to be unsurprised that, just where there were grue items in the jeweler’s show room before midnight, there continue to be grue items just after midnight. So the answer that really should be ascribed to the Strangers is a subtler one, parallel to the answer positing bent locations. Strangers should answer that everything stays the same with the emerires and sapphalds, at the level of microphysics, as the stroke of midnight falls—but that the sameness is sameness with respect to (what we regard as) bent microphysical predicates. Perhaps the Strangers will say that what it is for the particles we all “muons” to stay the same across the stroke of midnight—to go on being themselves—is for them to appear to us to turn into, say, gluons. Perhaps, more conservatively,
they will say that what it is for the atoms we call “chromium atoms” to go on existing then is for them to alter, from our point of view, into nickel atoms. Perhaps they will say that what it is for the lattice arrangement we discern among the molecules of an emeralds to remain in place is for it to be replaced, from our point of view, with the lattice we discern among the molecules of a sapphire.

But will they say that muons everywhere transform, from our point of view, into gluons? Do all chromium atoms change, on our carving scheme, into nickel atoms—do all atoms in the elements we call “metals” undergo (what are for us) parallel transformations? The Strangers face truly massive Unraveling. They can evade it only by deeply arbitrary Shadowing.

I conclude that it is simply not plausible that Strangers whose carving scheme posits emerires and sapphalds would fare just as well, in their practice and their theory, as we do. But these Strangers are by no means the only speakers depicted in the recent literature as recognizing objects which individually continue to exist, to be themselves, despite undergoing “alterations” which we would regard as destructive or impossible. Speakers who wield Shoemaker’s sortal “klable”, or Hirsch’s sortal “cperson”, all recognize objects which undergo sudden spatial jumps which we would think it impossible for any one object to undergo. A klable (Shoemaker 1979) is found in all and only those houses which contain exactly one living room table (as we would put it) and exactly one kitchen table. In the afternoon and evening, one klable is located just where we think the living room table is. At the stroke of midnight, it instantly shifts its location, and is found just where we think the kitchen table is, being replaced in the living room by the klable that had been in the kitchen (cf. Hirsch 1988a, n. 1). At noon the next day, these movements are reversed. Cpersons are far more deeply affected by contact with another cperson than persons are (Hirsch 1998, p. 4). So long as person A is in contact with no one else, there is a cperson located exactly where A is; but the moment A comes in contact with one other person B (and with no one else), that very cperson comes to be located exactly where we say B is located, and the cperson formerly collocated with B comes to be located just where we say A is. Once contact is broken, the cperson temporarily coincident with B returns to A’s location, and vice versa.
These are different examples of strangely durable objects, but the same sorts of objections raised already in this section apply equally to them. Either klables and cpersons take their component microparticles (or many of them, at least) with them during their spatial leaps, or they do not. If they do not, they are not material objects, and the carving schemes that recognize them hold out little promise of empirical success. If they do, Strangers who use these carving schemes must identify unsuspected forces, or posit bent locations.

IV

Let us turn now to objects which are strange (or would, if real, be strange) not in respect of how trivial the changes are that end their individual existences, nor in respect of how drastic the changes are through which their individual existences continue, but in respect of how disparate the properties are which, as members of a common kind, they present. Predicate schemes that treat such disparate objects as belonging to a common kind will display what Hirsch calls “classificatory strangeness”. They will appear to us to lump different kinds together, and their sortals will appear to us to be more perspicuously expressed as disjunctions. We have already passed by one such sortal: “emerires”, on Davidson’s own formulation, are either emeralds that are (or were or will be) observed before $T$, or sapphires observed only after that date, or never. But to introduce not only difference in kind but also difference in date, between the two classes lumped together in the Strangers’ strange kinds, may seem to disadvantage the Strangers unfairly. So here I will follow Hirsch in considering strange kinds that appear to us merely to lump together different kinds irrespective of date—objects, in other words, which are strange in that they are all of the same kind, despite seeming so different from one an other. I will focus on sortals “carple” and “apcean” that appear in one of Hirsch’s strange languages (1993, p. 24 ff; in 1998b, p. 713, carples appear as “capples”). According to our scheme for carving reality, carples are either cars or apples, and apceans are either apples or oceans. Our question: could Strangers who carve reality so that all carples
belong to a single kind—and likewise all apceans—make their way through the world just as well as we do?

At first blush, of course, the answer seems to be No. Far too little is true of carples in general that is usefully specific. Carples are not, as a class, characterized by any particular size or mass or chemical composition or historical origin. Carples are all composed of matter—but that after all is true of everything, according to many philosophers.

Yet if Strangers were to avail themselves of disjunctive predicates—predicates that to us, at least, seem disjunctive—they could after all make fairly specific claims that are true of many carples. Consider the predicate “fourcylortart” (modeled after the predicate “gricular” in another of Hirsch’s strange languages—Hirsch 1988a, p. 15, or 1993, Ch. 1). “Fourcylortart” is satisfied by all and only those things which either have four cylinders or are tart. A great many carples are fourcylortart—this is something about carples which Strangers could surely learn.

But what would it avail them to learn this—what could Strangers infer from the information that these or those carples are fourcylortart? Are there further features which Strangers could discover to attach to the carples which are fourcylortart, and not to carples which are otherwise characterized? To make such discoveries, Strangers would have to have some way of representing to themselves the other ways carples can be characterized. As ways that contrast with what it is for carples to be fourcylortart, these other characters would have likewise to be fairly specific—and hence would have to be, from our point of view, characters picked out by other disjunctive predicates. (More on this below.)

Might one such contrasting way for carples to be the character picked out by “eightcylortart”—a predicate which for us translates as “has eight cylinders or is tart”? But being eightcylortart is not clearly a distinct way for carples to be, from their being fourcylortart. Being eightcylortart excludes being fourcylortart with respect to the carples which are cars—so we would put it—but not with respect to the carples which are apples.

To make useful inferences from the information that these or those carples are fourcylortart, then, Strangers would have to represent to themselves ways for carples to be that are genuinely contraries of
their being fourcylortart. These would have to be other ways of being such that a carple which is not fourcylotart must have some one of them, but cannot have any two. Can we imagine Strangers wielding predicates for such contrary characters? Perhaps so: perhaps we should list all the characters which, for cars, are the contraries to having four cylinders, and all the characters which for apples are the contraries to being tart, and should envision disjunctive predicates which link each character in the first list to some one character in the second list.

But the suggestion is not promising since there is no a priori reason to expect there to be just as many contraries to tartness, for apples, as there are to having four cylinders, for cars. Rather we should expect the finished list of disjunctive properties to display what are from our point of view repeating elements—for example, to include both “sixcylorsweet” and “eightcylorsweet”. Again we would have failed to represent a range of characters which are contraries for carples in general. And if we cannot represent such a contrary range, we can have no confidence that Strangers could represent such a range either. And in that case we could have no confidence that Strangers could gain usefully specific knowledge about the different kinds and forms of carples.

This problem does not, I hasten to note, afflict the Strangers whom Hirsch depicts using the sortals “carples” and “apceans”. For Hirsch is content to let his Strangers gather information not about carples in general, but about items falling into more specific classes. Hirsch’s Strangers gather information about “carples which are apceans”—these are apples—and likewise about “carples which are not apceans” (= cars) and “apceans which are not carples” (= oceans) (1993 p. 24, 1988b p. 713). Hirsch’s Strangers thus discern the same kinds in the world as we do, and merely use strangely complex expressions to label those kinds. So as a defense of the Carving Thesis, the story of Hirsch’s Strangers would plainly be a case of Verbalizing. But this is no demerit for Hirsch himself since Hirsch, despite the title of his 1993 book, is not a full-fledged exponent of the Carving Thesis. Hirsch’s work for the most part leaves open the possibility that the world is populated by ready-made objects, assorted by nature (not by us) into kinds (1988b, pp. 699-700; 1993, pp. 52-53ff.). His main question concerns language instead: why, if at all, is it better to have a language which uses simple or uncompound terms to label nature’s
kinds, rather than one which uses expressions such as “carples which are not apceans” (cf. 1988b, p. 704)?

But our concern is with the Carving Thesis—with whether Strangers who truly consider all carples to belong to a single kind can make their way through the world as well as we do. So we must take seriously the question whether Strangers could represent ways for carples to be that are truly contrary to their being *fourcylortart*. I have argued that they could not, and the digression about Hirsch now permits me to frame that argument in broader terms. In order for Strangers to learn usefully specific things about carples *which are apples*, they must represent alternative ways of being from which such carples will select one—tart versus medium versus sweet, or MacIntosh versus Gala versus Fuji versus Cortland, etc.—ways of being for which the carples which are cars are not even eligible. To learn usefully specific things about the carples *which are cars*, they must similarly represent distinct ways of being for those carples—four-cylinder versus six-cylinder versus eight-cylinder—for which the carples which are apples are not even eligible. Just now I have represented several such ranges of ways for carples to be using simple, *non*-disjunctive predicates. If Strangers too use non-disjunctive predicates, they must devise a label by which to separate off the carples that are apples from those that are cars. But then they carve out *our* kinds after all, and a Carver who enlists such Strangers in defense of his Thesis is guilty of Verbalizing, every bit as much as he would be if he enlisted *Hirsch’s* Strangers. My argument therefore assumes that Carvers *would* use *disjunctive* predicates (from our viewpoint, anyway) to represent, at a stroke, both ranges of alternative ways for carples to be—for car-carples *and* for apple-carples. But the predicates can do what is needed only if there turns out to be a one-one correspondence between the contraries available to car-carples and the contraries available to apple-carples. Yet the expectation of such a correspondence fights against the very recipe by which the kind “carples” was assembled. It fights against the idea that that kind joins together what from our point of view are radically disparate, disconnected kinds.
I expect that some readers will consider the project of this paper to be misguided. “It is hardly surprising,” such readers will think to themselves, “that none of the schemes for carving out strange objects, considered in this paper, is truly worked out. Each of them is meant only to be suggestive. But suggestive they are. If you think clearly about the way Strangers employing these schemes sometimes fare just as well as we do, even if only in isolated contexts or in talk about isolated regions of the world, you will see that extensions of these carving schemes could provide Strangers, globally and enduringly, with just as much empirical success as we enjoy.”

But this conclusion is what I do not see. I believe that no one else sees it either, though some philosophers have the sensation of seeing it. They experience a cognitive hallucination, I believe. The aim of this paper is to dispel that hallucination.
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