

Before-Effect Puzzles, Plurals, and Moral Properties

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Abstract

John Hawthorne has proposed a general solution to certain puzzles raised by José A. Benardete's *Infinity: An Essay in Metaphysics*. It follows from Hawthorne's solution that there could be fusions which are composed of infinitely many walls, objects which are composed of infinitely many sounds, and objects which are composed of infinitely many persons. It is also possible that these fusions have infinitely many parts each of which is not causally related to any of the other parts and each of which is spatiotemporally separated from the others. Moreover, these fusions turn out to have surprising causal powers. If Hawthorne is right, then some conservative views of composition turn out to be false. In fact, given Hawthorne's solution, we are permitted to infer that some liberal view of composition is true. In response, I point out that someone who holds a view of composition which is incompatible with Hawthorne's solution has a philosophically respectable response available to the puzzles. The response requires that there are irreducibly plural referring expressions, together with certain properties and causal relations that are exemplified by things plurally (tools which many philosophers with more conservative views of composition already make use of, and for good reason). This sort of solution has been undeservedly neglected by Hawthorne and others. I also argue that some before-effect puzzles are themselves correctly defused by the general solution proposed here but not correctly defused by Hawthorne's solution. Moreover, this is true regardless of whether or not composition is a liberal matter. For this reason, Hawthorne's solution is not fully general.