

Study Guide 9

“Change”, *EM*, Chapter 6

Overview

Carter entertains (at least) three different conceptions of substance in chapters 4, 5, and 6:

The first is the view, sometimes attributed to Locke, that substances are bare particulars: entities that are in themselves devoid of qualities, but which support qualities.

The second is the Russellian idea that substances are nothing but bundles of qualities. There are two versions of this conception. On one version, qualities and therefore the substances, are ideas in the mind. On another version, qualities are universals that are multiply located in space and time outside the mind.

The third is the more commonsense view that every material substance is either (i) a simple (non-composite) material object or (ii) a composite entity made up out of the simples, and nothing more.

Carter introduces the first and second of these conceptions – and poses objections to each – in Chapter 4. He introduces the third conception, and raises certain “Aristotelian” objections to it, in Chapter 5¹ (which is not assigned reading). The problem raised by the Aristotelians is that this third conception of substance seems incompatible with what is called *mereological change*: some composite substances continue to exist even when their parts change over time. The tree, for instance, continues to exist as it gains and loses atoms. When there is such mereological change, the composite cannot be identified with the parts that make it up at any particular time. The tree, for instance, cannot be identified with the atoms that constitute it at any particular time. (How can the tree be identical to *this* collection of atoms now, and *that* collection of atoms later on, if the two collections of atoms are not identical to each other?)

Chapter 6 discusses the Aristotelian objection and its implications in more detail. (In the course of this discussion, Carter develops a fourth conception of material substance, as something that “exists independent of minds ..., has a certain location in space and time, ..., and can ... undergo mereological changes.”²)

¹ Specifically, in sections 5.6 and 5.7 of *The Elements of Metaphysics*, pp. 72-75.

² *Ibid*, p. 81.

Key Terms

substantial change
qualitative change
mereological change

Study Questions

1. Aristotelians raise a certain objection to this claim: “*That bug is identical to the atoms that make it up.*” In your opinion, is the objection fatal? Why or why not?
2. According to Carter, how many material things take up (exactly) the spatial region occupied by the bug (right now)? How many of these count as material *substances*, according to Carter? Why?
3. Do you agree with the analysis of substance Carter proposes on page 81? Why or why not? If not, is there a way to repair it?