

from *Selves: An Essay in Revisionary Metaphysics*, pp. 294-304

6.10 *Object*

What are objects—concrete objects? What are the best candidates for being objects, given that we wish to retain the category *object* in our fundamental ontology or metaphysics, and are committed to the view (the Plurality Assumption) that there is more than one object in reality?

I assume, in a conventional materialist way, that every candidate for being a concrete object is either itself a ‘fundamental particle’ or ‘field’ or ‘string’ or ‘brane’ or ‘preon’ or ‘loop’ or ‘field quantum’ or ‘simple’ or, as I will say, ‘ultimate’, or is made up of some number of ultimates in a certain relation, a physical, spacetime relation. In line with 5.10 I take ‘spacetime’ to be a natural-kind term that refers successfully to the actual dimensionality or ‘existence-place’ of reality however wrong we are about its nature; i.e. even if we might naturally express our scientific conclusions by saying that concrete reality isn’t really spatiotemporal at all. I choose ‘ultimate’ as an unencumbered term, and I’ll sometimes also use ‘u-field’ (‘u’ for ‘ultimate’). I agree with van Inwagen (1990: 72) that Leibniz’s term ‘simple’ is preferable to ‘fundamental particle’ as a term for the ultimate constituents of reality, first because ‘fundamental particle’ has potentially misleading descriptive meaning, provoking a picture of tiny grains of solid stuff that has no scientific warrant, and secondly because many of the things currently called ‘fundamental particles’ may not be genuinely fundamental constituents of reality. I prefer ‘ultimate’ and ‘u-field’ to ‘simple’ because ‘simple’, too, carries implications—of radical separateness, non-overlappingness, and indivisibility—that are perhaps best dropped. That said, I’m going to take it for purposes of discussion that it’s legitimate to speak of individual ultimates or u-fields. The phenomena of quantum entanglement may put great pressure on the idea of radical individuality, but I won’t pursue this point

should end in something mental. That was because people thought they knew a lot about physical phenomena, and were sure they differed in quality from mental phenomena. We now realise that we know nothing of the intrinsic quality of physical phenomena except when they happen to be sensations, and that therefore there is no reason to be surprised that some are sensations, or to suppose that the others are totally unlike sensations’ (Russell 1956: 153).

here.⁴⁵ ‘u-field’ is plainly less neutral than ‘ultimate’—it has a descriptive force that ‘ultimate’ lacks—but its ‘unpunctuality’ is potentially helpful.

Sesmetts are either single ultimates, then, or made up of a plurality of ultimates in a certain synergetic relation—if they exist. I assume that there is a plurality of ultimates, putting aside for now the important view that spacetime itself may be best thought of as an object (not a mere dimensionality, as it were), and indeed as the only object there is. If this view is correct, spacetime is an object whose existence comports the existence of everything we think of as matter, and we’re simply wrong to think of matter, as we normally do, as something whose existence involves something over and above the existence of spacetime. According to one version of this view, the fundamental entities currently recognized in the standard model—leptons and quarks—are not strictly speaking fundamental and are to be explained, in Weinberg’s words, as ‘various modes of vibration of tiny one-dimensional rips in spacetime known as strings’ (1997: 20). All the physical objects ordinarily recognized are made of rips in spacetime, the only object there is. (Spinoza and Parmenides are among those who reject the assumption that there is more than one concrete object in reality, as do a number of present-day physicists. Descartes rejects the assumption that there is more than one physical object.)

6.11 Subjectivism, objectivism, universalism

A physical object is either a single ultimate or a plurality of ultimates in a certain relation. Given that all single ultimates are physical objects, the remaining question is which pluralities of ultimates—if any—are physical objects? What should be our criterion?⁴⁶

I take it that a physical object is, at the least, and first and foremost, and essentially, some kind of *physical unity* or *singularity*. So the question is: Which pluralities of ultimates—if any—constitute physical unities of the right kind?

The phrase ‘some kind of physical unity’ is as vague as it is crucial, and some philosophers—the *subjectivists*—think that no judgements about which phenomena count as objects are objectively true or false. When we judge something to be an object, they say, we implicitly or explicitly endorse an ultimately subjective principle of counting or individuation relative to which the phenomenon *counts* as a (single) object. We endorse a subjective *principle of objectual unity*; and there are no others.

Can this be right? Many judgements of objecthood—many principles of objectual unity—are so natural for us that the idea that they are in any sense subjective seems preposterous (nearly all of us think that cups, stones, meerkats, jellyfish, fingers, houses, planets, and molecules are individual objects). The subjectivists, however,

⁴⁵ Post (1963) famously suggested that even if there are ultimate constituents, they may have to be seen as ‘non-individuals’ in some way. See also Lockwood 1989: 253; French 1998; French and Krause 2006; see also Pullman (1998: 351) on the ‘vacuum-matter complementarity’.

⁴⁶ van Inwagen (1990a) calls this the ‘Special Composition’ question.

a ‘sesmet’ / ‘synergy subject’ / is a subject of experience that is correctly judged to be a single thing when considered specifically as a subject of experience that is being considered specifically in its mental being, and so without regard to any non-mental being that it may have

are unimpressed. The fact that some judgements of objecthood are very natural for human beings can hardly entail that those judgements are objectively correct or record metaphysical truths. If we were electron-sized, our natural judgement about a stone might be that it was a mere collection of things, a loose and friable confederacy, and not itself a single object in any interesting sense at all.

It seems uncomfortable at first to think that merely subjective principles of objectual unity underlie our judgements that chairs and stones are objects, but the idea becomes increasingly natural as one moves away from such central cases. Nearly everyone thinks that a chair is a single object, but not everyone does.⁴⁷ Many think cities, newspapers, galaxies, and blenders (assembled from parts) can correctly be said to be single things, but quite a few do not. Some think a body of gas is an object, many do not.

Few think that three spoons, one in Hong Kong, one in Athens, and one in Birmingham, constitute a single thing, and yet some philosophers—the *universalists*—claim that the three spoons have as good a claim to be considered an individual object as anything else. According to universalism, any plurality of ultimates in the universe, however scattered, counts as a single object in every sense in which a table does. A lepton in your amygdala, a quark in my left hand, and the ultimates that make up the rings of Saturn jointly constitute a single object just as surely as your pen or pet duck. No plurality of ultimates has a better claim to be an object than any other.

Whatever you think of universalism (a view favoured by Quine, Goodman, and many others since), it has the merit of being a wholly *objectivist* theory of objects. It endorses a principle of objectual unity that delivers a clear principle of counting. It tells you that if there are n ultimates in the universe, then there are exactly $2^n - 1$ objects in the universe. But it also has a highly subjectivist or ‘post-modern’ aura—it tells you that anything goes and everybody wins, that there is no real issue about whether any particular plurality of ultimates is an object or not—and it’s arguable that genuinely objectivist positions emerge clearly only when more specific and limited principles of objectual unity are endorsed, e.g. by common sense, which rules in favour of tables and chairs and against the three spoons, or by Spinoza, who holds that there is only one thing or substance, the universe (‘God or nature’), or by van Inwagen, who argues forcefully that only individual ultimates and living beings—and not, say, tables and chairs—are physical objects.⁴⁸

This debate has many mansions, and the mansions have many rooms, but there’s no need to enter them now. For present purposes it doesn’t matter which side you favour. If you think there are solid, objective principles of objectual unity, and that there are therefore metaphysical facts about which phenomena are genuine objects and which aren’t, and reject universalism, as I do, then you can take me to be arguing that *sesmets* (and thus perhaps *selves*) are among the genuine objects. If, alternatively, you

⁴⁷ van Inwagen (1990) doesn’t, and his reasons are of considerable interest; the same goes for Nāgārjuna (c.150 CE) and perhaps also Chomsky (2000).

⁴⁸ For van Inwagen, as for Aristotle (see e.g. *Metaphysics*, Z 7.1032^a19, 8.1034^a4), animals are the paradigm substances.

~~think that the subjectivist view is best, and that there are no ultimate metaphysical facts about which phenomena are genuine objects, then you can reinterpret me as trying to convince people who are disposed to think of certain but not all pluralities of ultimates as objects (people, jellyfish, and chairs, but not arbitrarily selected cubic feet of the Pacific Ocean or three newspapers) that it's at least equally reasonable to think of the pluralities of ultimates that I choose to refer to by the expression 'sesmets' (or indeed by the expression 'selves') as objects. Practically speaking, my task is the same either way.⁴⁹~~

6.12 Principles of unity

A concrete object is a certain kind of physical unity or singularity or singleness. It's an individual ultimate or a plurality of ultimates in a certain relation. I reject 'universalism' and take it that there are at the very least various grades and types of physical unity: some candidates for objecthood have, objectively, a better claim than others. A human being has a better claim than your lepton + my quark + the rings of Saturn, or three spoons. I've assumed that the notion of an object has application to reality in fundamental metaphysics, and indeed plural application: that there are real objective unities that are correctly called 'objects'. There are also vast numbers of merely 'conventional' unities or objects (to use Buddhist terminology—one finds the same idea in Descartes and Leibniz, among others) that aren't correctly judged to be objects in fundamental metaphysics and are not of present concern.⁵⁰

With this in place, consider the following suggestion. As one advances in real materialism in the way outlined in 6.9, deepening one's intuitive grasp of the idea that experiential, mental phenomena are physical phenomena in every sense in which non-experiential, non-mental phenomena are, one of the things that becomes apparent is that, when it comes to deciding which phenomena in the universe count as objects and which do not, there are *no* good grounds for thinking that non-experiential, non-mental criteria or principles of unity—of the sort that we use to pick out a dog or a chair—are more valid than mental or experiential criteria or principles of unity.

It's arguable, in fact, that there is no more indisputable unity in nature, and therefore no more indisputable physical unity or singularity, and therefore no better candidate for the title 'physical object', than the mental and in particular experiential unity that we come upon when we consider a synergy subject (273) in the living moment or lived present of experience,⁵¹ experiencing seeing books and chairs and seeing them as such, say, or consciously comprehending the thought that water is wet—an event that necessarily involves the concretely occurring thought-elements WATER and WET forming

⁴⁹ I'm concentrating on human sesmets, which I assume to involve many u-fields, although I'm open to the panpsychist idea that individual u-fields are sesmets.

⁵⁰ For further discussion see e.g. van Inwagen 1990a.

⁵¹ I put the living moment of experience and the lived present of experience together here although they're very different things, as explained in 5.10.

a true unity of some sort, a unity without which the thought *water is wet* can't be said to have occurred at all.⁵² I can think of no better candidates for what I'm going to call 'strong' unity, unity that is not just necessary for genuine, irreducible objecthood (if there is such a thing) but also—I'll propose—sufficient. As far as I can see, the only serious (and mutually excluding) competitors for equal first place are

(a) the universe,

to be identified, perhaps, with spacetime considered as a substance, and, lagging somewhat behind,

(b) individual ultimates

—if indeed there are any. Between these two extremes of size, and given the absolute centrality of unity or singularity considerations when it comes to determining objecthood, it's arguable that subjects of experience as just characterized are the best qualified plurality-of-ultimates-involving candidates there are for the status of physical objects.

Here, then, I make a key assumption or rather ruling: to be an object (if objects exist) is simply to be a 'strong unity', in a sense to be further determined. Note that to claim that there is no better candidate for the title 'physical object' than the unity we come upon when we consider a synergy subject in the living moment of experience is not to claim that when we do this we come upon a living-moment-of-experience-sized entity. If time is dense, then living moments of experience are theoretical abstractions from a continuum, infinite in number, not genuinely physically discrete entities. In this case the qualifying phrase 'considered in the living moment of experience' doesn't chop the synergy subject at the boundaries of the living moment of experience in such a way as to deliver a distinct living-moment-of-experience-sized object, because there are no such things as the boundaries of the living moment of experience.⁵³ It's an empirical question how long synergy subjects last, however they're considered, and if the analytical cut that thought makes in considering the synergy subject in the living moment of experience delivers an infinity of entities, that shows that the cut doesn't correspond to a real division in nature. Questions about the temporal extent of objects—the diachronic identity conditions of objects—are a matter of natural fact, and can't depend on what we can intelligibly isolate as objects of thought (the 'temporal parts' favoured by some metaphysicians are of no ontological interest at all).

I need to say more about diachronic identity conditions, but the first key move has been made: the claim that synergy subjects are strong or true unities, considered synchronically in the living moment of experience, or in the moment of grasping a thought, and are therefore, and so far, unbeatable candidates for being objects. I'll

⁵² See 2.20 (87–8). There is no implication here that the subject of experience is or must be thought of as an agent that brings about the unity.

⁵³ The objects in question must be theoretical abstractions, for although they're 'countable' in the mathematical sense they're countably infinite, and a concrete infinity of physical objects can't exist in a finite period of time. To think otherwise is like thinking that infinity is or could be finite (this may be difficult to see clearly after exposure to certain sorts of mathematics).

say more about this in Parts 7 and 8. One product of the discussion will be the claim that phenomenological facts about the character of experience feature among the fundamental facts about the nature of the self. This will be the key step towards something promised in 2.10 (52): an attempt to produce valid versions of something like Kant's First and Second Paralogisms.

I'll now begin to take things further by considering three doubts about our ordinary notion of an object. The first concerns the fact that we're in danger of being profoundly—hopelessly—misled in our intuitive thinking by an automatic and unexamined picture of objects as somehow essentially static in nature, rather than dynamic. The second is connected to the first: I think we need to acknowledge the respect in which (the fact that) all objects are processes. The third and most troublesome is this: we need to face the ancient philosophical question of the relation between objects and their properties. My brief discussion of these matters may seem naive to those who specialize in them, but I think it will be enough for my purposes.

6.13 Object, process, property

—I'm prepared to grant, at least for now and for the sake of argument, that there may be a real phenomenon picked out by your use of the (potentially question-begging) count noun 'sesmet'. I'm also prepared to accept for the sake of argument that 'sesmets' may be short-lived, at least in the human case, so that there are many of them in the case of the life of a human being. I'm even prepared to allow that one candidate for the title 'sesmet' is the (indubitably real and wholly physical) phenomenon of the *subject of experience as we find it in the living moment of experience or lived present of experience*. I'm prepared to allow that this is a candidate, even an interesting candidate, for being correctly judged to be (here is your definition of 'sesmet') a single object when considered specifically as a subject of experience that is being considered specifically in its mental being, and so without regard to any non-mental being that it may have. What I'm not prepared to do is to accept that it actually passes all the required tests. In particular, I'm not prepared to accept that the right thing to say about an instance of this indubitably real phenomenon (the subject of experience as we find it in the living moment of experience or lived present of experience) is that it is an *object* of some sort. Let's take a case that seems ideally suited to your view, the case of an isolated one-second-long continuous period of experience *e* occurring in a brain and followed and preceded by periods of complete experiencelessness. Let's stipulate that *e* is *experientially unitary* in whatever strong way you require, that it is an *experientially unitary period of experience*. Plainly the existence of *e* at any moment involves a subject of experience, a live-aware subject-of-experience presence, the currently favoured candidate for the title 'sesmet'. But why should I say that this phenomenon is

(a) an *object*, like a rock or a human being or a mayfly, or indeed a *substance*?

Why isn't the correct thing to say simply that

(b) an enduring object of a familiar sort—viz. Louis, a human being—has a certain *property* at a certain time, or is in a certain *state* at a certain time, in having a certain unified, one-second-long, subject-of-experience-involving episode of experience?

Why, alternatively, can't we say that

(c) the occurrence of an experientially unitary period of experience like *e* is just a matter of a certain *event* or *process* occurring in an object (a human being, say) at a certain time, and does not involve the existence of any further distinct *object*?

The canyons of metaphysics open before us. We face the great object/process/property/state/event conceptual cluster. The distinctions in this cluster seem patently valid. They seem to mark real, irreducible, metaphysically fundamental differences. They're integral to our most basic, discursive, subject–predicate forms of thought, utterly natural, practically indispensable in everyday life (although events and processes may be thought to come down to the same thing, as also states and properties). I think, though, that they're profoundly misleading when taken up in metaphysics as a guide to the fundamental nature of reality, and that it isn't particularly hard to see that this is so, drawing on a mixture of a posteriori and a priori considerations. I think a little thought strips (b) and (c) of any appearance of superiority to (a), whether or not one is a materialist, and I'll now briefly say why, starting with (c).

The subject of experience currently under consideration, the (human) neural-synergy subject as we find it in the living moment or lived present of experience, is a wholly physical, plurality-of-ultimates-constituted entity. It's only one candidate among others for being a *sesmet* (an immaterial soul is another), and its claim to be a genuine object, and so a genuine *sesmet*, is now in question. In order to keep its probationary or candidate status clear, I will in the next two sections call it a 'sysele', short for: **synergy** subject of **e**xperience considered as it is in the living/lived process of **e**xperience (it falls under a new name—'thin subject'—in 7.1). The question, then, is whether *syseles* qualify as *sesmets*, given that they have to qualify as objects in order to qualify as *sesmets*.

6.14 Object and process

Any claim to the effect that a *sysele* is best thought of as a process rather than an object (as in (c)) can be sufficiently countered by saying that there is, in the light of physics, no good sense in which a (short-lived) *sysele* is a process in which a rock or a crow is not also and equally a process. It follows that if a rock or a crow is a paradigm case of an object in spite of being a process, then we have, so far, no good reason not to hold that a *sysele* is an object even if we're inclined to think of it as a process. To say this is not to say that everything that's naturally thought of as a process—such as the yellowing of a leaf—is helpfully or legitimately thought of as an object. The claim is just that everything that's naturally thought of as an object is legitimately thought of as a process, and that there are things that some may want to think of as processes that are no less properly thought of as objects.

In making this claim I don't mean to show any partiality to the 'four-dimensionalist' ('4D') conception of objects, as opposed to the 'three-dimensionalist' ('3D') conception.

I think I can overfly this debate, observing in passing that there are contexts in which the 4D conception of objects is more appropriate than the 3D conception and contexts in which the 3D conception of objects is more appropriate than the 4D conception. The 3D/4D debate has its own internal dynamic, and creates contexts in which its disagreements have importance, but it doesn't really matter to the present question about the existence of selves.⁵⁴

—But if there's a process, there must be something—an object or substance—in which it goes on. If something happens, there must be something to which it happens, something which is not just the happening itself. So it can't be true that everything is a matter of process.

This expresses our pre-theoretical conception of things, but things are unimaginably strange relative to our ordinary understanding of them. The general lesson of physics (not to mention a priori reflection) is that our pre-theoretical conceptions of space, time, and matter are in many respects hugely and demonstrably wrong; so we already have one general reason to be cautious about the claim—which is, after all, a very general (universal) claim about the essential nature of *matter-in-spacetime*—that it is a hard metaphysical fact that the existence of a process entails the existence of an object or substance that is in some way ontically distinct from it. Physicists are increasingly content with the view that physical reality is itself a kind of pure process. The view that there is some ultimate stuff to which things happen has increasingly ceded ground to the idea that the existence of anything worthy of the name 'ultimate stuff' consists simply in the existence of fields of energy—consists, one might well say, in the existence of a kind of pure process which is not in any way usefully (or even coherently) thought of as something which is happening to a thing distinct from it.

Physics aside, the object/process distinction lives covertly off a natural, unexamined, massively influential and irredeemably confused picture of objects and matter that presents them statically rather than dynamically, as things whose essential nature at any given time can be fully given in the consideration of them as they are at a fixed instant. This *staticist* picture has deep roots in conventional empiricism, and vice versa, and the entanglement of staticism and empiricism may help to explain one of the larger philosophical mysteries (comedies) of the twentieth century: the spectacle of philosophers endorsing outright realism about physical objects while continuing to adhere to a regularity theory of causation.⁵⁵

Whether or not this explanation is correct, a deep and unremarked staticism constitutes one of the main confusions in what Russell called our 'imaginative picture of matter'. For matter is essentially *dynamic*, essentially in time, and essentially changeful in time.⁵⁶ All reality is process, as Whitehead was moved to observe by his study of

⁵⁴ For an outstanding piece of arbitration see Jackson 1994: 96–103.

⁵⁵ There's nothing odd about adopting a regularity theory of causation in the physical world if one is also a phenomenalist about physical objects, as so many were in the early part of the twentieth century; it is, in fact, the right thing to do. See e.g. G. Strawson 1987.

⁵⁶ If 'dynamic' is taken to mean nothing more than 'in time', this is true even on the 'block-universe' view, which doesn't of course deny the reality of time. (I'm respectfully putting aside theories that deny the existence of time.)

twentieth-century physics, and as Heraclitus remarked long ago. Matter is best thought of as ‘process-stuff’. Perhaps we should always call matter ‘time-matter’, or at least ‘matter-in-time’, in contexts like the present one, so that we never for a moment forget its essential temporality and essential changefulness. When we think of matter as essentially extended, we tend to think only of extension in space—something that can, we intuitively feel, be experientially given to us all at once at a single time (hence the pact with old empiricism).⁵⁷ But space and time are ontically interdependent, mere aspects of spacetime, and all extension is necessarily extension in spacetime.

There’s no need to invoke relativity theory, though, for even if relativity theory is false in its account of the essential non-separateness of space and time, there’s no metaphysically defensible conception of a physical object—a ‘spatiotemporal continuant’, as philosophers say—that allows one to distinguish validly between objects and processes by saying that one is an essentially dynamic or changeful phenomenon in some way in which the other is not. There’s nothing in the 3D conception or the 4D conception of objects that supports such a view.⁵⁸ The source of the idea that there might be some metaphysically deep distinction between objects and processes which gives the lie to the claim that all objects are processes lies in useful and ordinarily harmless habits of thought that are extraordinarily misleading in certain theoretical contexts.⁵⁹

It seems to me that we continue to be severely hampered by this, even when we have, in the frame of theoretical discussion, fully agreed and, as we think, deeply appreciated, that objects—substances—are entirely creatures of time, process entities, wholly and essentially and constitutively dynamic in nature, essentially active in the basic sense of the word, which doesn’t of course imply any sort of capacity for intentional agency, acting for reasons. One illustration of our staticism is that we have no difficulty with the idea of dynamism when we think of electrons, quarks, vibrational ‘strings’, and so on, but still tend to think of a filing cabinet, say, as a paradigmatically inert thing. In fact, of course, a filing cabinet is wholly made of leptons and quarks, or vibrating strings, or It is an inherently dynamic thing whose existence is a matter of furious and unceasing activity.

Leibniz coined the word ‘dynamic’, and he was surely right in his view that the most important definition of an object or substance is that it is *that which acts*. ‘Activity’, or *dynamism*, in my non-scientific and possibly un-Leibnizian use of the term, ‘is of the essence of substance’ (1704: 65). Nothing wholly inert can be a concrete substance, a genuine concrete object. Even if we concede the logical possibility of inert concrete objects, we can still insist that no *physical* object can be inert. A physical object, after all,

⁵⁷ What is matter, on this view? A dust-covered china doll in a frozen pirouette on a chimney piece, a stone, a boot, something just there, supremely motionless before our eyes, something that proposes itself as—in some fundamental sense—comprehensively given to us in this confrontation alone, wholly given to us in its basic essential quality as matter, whatever the micro details of its composition. And all this is wholly wrong.

⁵⁸ Nor is there anything in the 4D view that challenges it, for the fourth dimension is, precisely, that of time—however time is characterized.

⁵⁹ P. F. Strawson’s remark that ‘the category of “process-things” is one that we neither have nor need’ (1959: 57) concerns our ordinary everyday conceptual scheme.

is a strong physical unity. It is therefore a strong *spacetime* unity, and the temporal-unity aspect of its spacetime unity is, I propose, essentially a matter of dynamic unity, activity-unity. (If one wants an analogy for the quality—as it were—of the unitariness of the temporal-unity aspect of an object’s unity, one may take the spatial unity of an object like a human being as grasped by us at a single time.) It probably doesn’t need to be said, but I’m assuming that diachronic strong unity, and hence the temporal persistence of an object, entails temporal continuity. At the same time, I’m not excluding the possibility, considered in 5.10, that what we think of as temporal continuity may turn out to be a matter of discrete chronons (between which there are of course no temporal gaps) rather than something dense.

Could something be (a) a strong physical unity, and (b) essentially dynamic, and yet not be (c) a dynamic unity—a unity specifically in respect of activity? I doubt it, but I won’t argue the point here. I think it’s sufficiently underwritten by two claims argued for in the next section: that an object is identical with its propertiedness, and that a thing’s categorical propertiedness is identical with its dispositional or power propertiedness. With that promissory note let me expressly endorse the view that strong physical unity, strong spacetime unity, essentially involves (c) dynamic unity. It essentially involves being an agentive unity, where ‘agentive’ carries no trace of any implication of intentional agency. It essentially involves being a locus-of-activity unity, a unity specifically as a locus of activity in spacetime. This, I propose, is the fundamental definition of what a physical object or substance is. If we’re going to talk of objects at all, in fundamental metaphysics, then an object is a strong spacetime unity, a strong activity-unity.⁶⁰ I’m going to work with this definition without defending it further.

It remains as doubtful as ever that such concrete unities exist in such a way as to fulfil another traditional requirement on substancehood—that they be capable of existing independently of all other things.⁶¹ Individual ultimates ought to be prime candidates for being radically ontically distinct substances in this sense, but it’s far from clear that they can really be what they are without other things existing, given the nature of spacetime and the quantum vacuum and quantum entanglement.⁶² It may be, as remarked, that spacetime itself or the universe (Spinoza’s ‘God or nature’) is the only thing capable of existing independently of all other things, and that all other candidates for being things are just properties or modifications or local aspects of spacetime; my sense is that physics and cosmology tend this way. But I’ll continue to assume that there are a great many distinct and coexistent ultimates, and that they can at least for purposes of argument be treated as ontically distinct substances capable of existing independently of all other things. I’ll also continue to assume that plurality-of-ultimates-constituted objects

⁶⁰ One way to put things is to say that all *genuine* physical unities are *ipso facto strong* unities, and therefore objects, and that there aren’t really any non-strong genuine physical unities, only ‘conventional’ unities, non-objective unities fabricated by discursive thought and language. This makes the word ‘strong’ redundant, but I’ll retain it none the less. For some striking scepticism about objects, see Ladyman *et al.* 2007.

⁶¹ Descartes 1644: 1.210. Descartes qualifies this by saying that they must be capable of existing independently of all other things except God, and one might replace God by spacetime or the universe.

⁶² Nāgārjuna, Spinoza, and others seem to be right on this point, independently of current physics.

or substances exist. My prime candidates for being plurality-of-ultimates-constituted objects are as before syseles, neural-synergy subjects, candidate sesmets. I hope the word 'synergy' can do some work against the staticist tendencies of our ordinary conception of objects.

When anti-staticist considerations are applied to the case at hand, the case of syseles, the conclusion, I take it, is that there's no sense in which it's correct to call a sysele a process in which it's not equally correct to call it an object. All objects are legitimately thought of as processes, contrary to (c), even if it's not true that all processes are legitimately or helpfully thought of as objects. (We can treat 'the extinction of the apatosaurus' as the name of a single process while agreeing that it fails to have the right sort of unity to be a good candidate for the title 'object'.) The phenomenon of the existence of a sysele, by contrast, the phenomenon of the existence of a subject of experience as we find it in the living moment of experience—during the thinking of the thought that there is a world shortage of fresh water, say—has a very high degree of unity, on the present terms (in 8.5 I propose, with James and Descartes, that the unity is absolute, absolutely indecomposable or indivisible). So if it's figured as a process, then it's as good a candidate as there can be for being a process that's an object, and in saying that it's well thought of as an object, we're not of course saying that it's not well thought of as a process. There are areas of metaphysics in which it is, I think, crucial to cultivate the intuition of process in thinking about concrete reality.

—So why bother with the solid staticist word 'object'? Why not fall back into a world—or vocabulary—of Russellian 'events' or Whiteheadian 'occasions'?

Good question, but there's no reason why one shouldn't take the word 'object' with one into the processual outlook, realigning it to mean more clearly on its face what it really meant (referentially speaking) all along. I think there are also positive reasons for taking 'object' with one, rather than leaving it behind as a specious rallying point for bad intuitions.

It seems to me that these partly a posteriori, partly a priori points about the superficiality of the object/process distinction find a different, irresistible, and wholly a priori expression when we consider the object/property distinction.

§6.15 in separate document