



Meg Wallace on Individuals in Lump Sum Theory: Creepy-Crawly Creatures Across Worlds

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Modality research hones in on the questions and puzzles revolving around the nature of individuals, objects, and their identities (over time, too). Most philosophers who attempt to solve those modal puzzles broadly follow one of two lineages: David Lewis' modal realism, or some version of Ersatzism. This paper explores "Lump Sum" theory, defended by Meg Wallace, and assesses how it stands as a new way (somewhat independent of established Lewisian or Ersatzer traditions) of solving prominent modal puzzles. The first puzzle is of "Lumpl and Goliath", to which Wallace provides a shortcoming of the Lewisian framework. The second puzzle is Kripke's "Humphrey Objection" to the apparent "disconnect" between Lewisian counterparts, to which I argue lump sum theory satisfies Kripke's concern by providing a genuine and interesting connection to other possible people-parts. The last puzzle is on the question of whether an individual like myself could have been an object like an egg. There are different commitments one may invoke in analyzing that modal possibility for an individual, like Haecceitism or a form of essentialism. I argue context and description-dependency are important in answering the question. With that said, I find lump sum theory succeeds in being malleable and neutral as to how we approach the puzzle.

Key words: Lump Sum, Modality, Lumpl and Goliath, Humphrey Objection, Description Dependency

In "The Lump Sum: a Theory of Modal Parts," Meg Wallace defends a theory which may be illustrated as people being mere limbs on a massive trans-world creature.

In this paper, I first briefly outline lump sum theory, second I explore reasons to support the thesis in light of how the theory deals with three puzzling cases, and third I will consider, and then provide a response to, two related objections which press possible issues born out of there being a fact of the matter over what composes the trans-world individual.

A theory of modality, along with its views on what an individual is or could be, must deal with the following kinds of puzzling cases:

- a) When we name a lump of clay as Lumpl, and name a statue as Goliath, given the different modal properties these two things have, do we have 2 things or 1?
- b) When other possible worlds (real or abstract) represent “us,” are those merely counterparts that we may not care about, or in what sense are they “us”?
- c) Could I have been an egg? What about being more egg-like in a possible world?

Lump sum theory provides solutions on these scenarios, many of its competing theories seem to as well. Some of the above questions are both modal and persistence related, but certain persistence questions seem to be inseparably connected with modality¹. Later, I will explain exactly how lump sum theory tackles the three issues. For now, it is simply important we keep in reference the above cases, in order to frame the outline of lump sum theory.

¹ What an individual could be is deeply connected with what an individual persists as. This is why I believe issues of persistence are relevant to issues of modality, and hopefully the connection will be more apparent later in the paper.

Lump sum theory claims that individuals and objects exist over many possible worlds; each possible world featuring you or I is merely representing one part of a trans-world Individual. Wallace says that in the same way we are not wholly located where our hand is, we are not wholly located in only one possible world. In this sense, Individuals are “lump sums of modal parts.”² Another way to describe the view is analogous to the spatio-temporal worm³: except now individuals are trans-world spiders⁴. Where we think of a worm stretching over time in a single world; a spider has each of its legs as one of those worms. When I ask the question of what or who I am, the reality is that I am just one part, just one leg, of the spider.

There may be some limits to the spider analogy however, perhaps we need to refine the theory a little further. For instance, one may wonder whether illustrating the theory as a spider entails that there is some sense of overlap of certain worlds and people-parts at a kind of origin point that branches outwards. While Wallace seems to be okay with some (causally isolated) overlap⁵ of modal parts of Individuals, it's unfortunately unclear whether or not the wormy legs really shoot outwards, like spider legs, in a way that suggests an essential necessary origin point.

Therefore, perhaps the spider conception is useful as just an analogy to get an intuitive elementary understanding of what lump sum theory holds. So the spider analogy may not draw the most accurate illustration, but it draws the most effective

² M. Wallace pg. 1-2

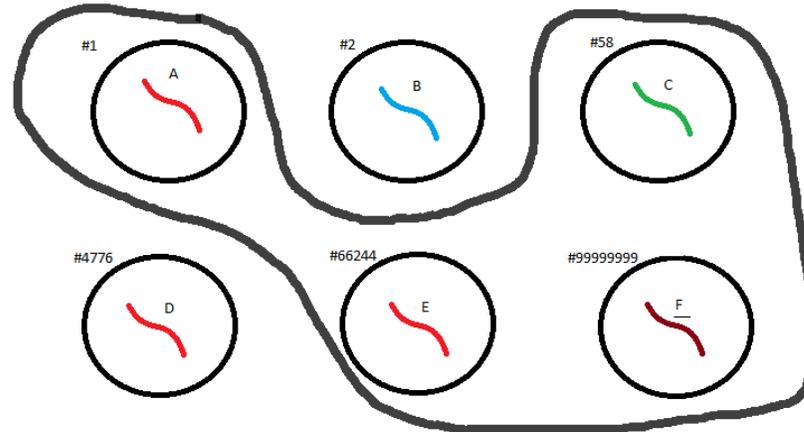
³ The illustrative concept of a spatio-temporal worm is well known in metaphysics discourse. As such, it won't be further elaborated on in this paper.

⁴ D. Wolfe (2015) - The “Spider” notion belongs to a past professor of mine (he is not a lump sum theorist), who characterized the view in this way. Admittedly, he wasn't aware of an official lump sum theory at the time, he just assumed a view like it had to have existed. So whether his spider analogy maps 1:1 to Wallace's view isn't clear. My understanding is that spiders can still be a compatible illustration of lump sum theory. But to remain neutral, my discussion and illustrations will limit the use of spider imagery.

⁵ M. Wallace pg. 9

message. In truth, lump sum theory may simply be drawn like this for a more accurate picture (figure 1):

In the above figure, we have taken a look at a selection of possible worlds from #1-999999999 (of course, this is no maximum limit), we also have a series of “people”



A-F⁶. And finally, let us call every person-part enclosed by the crudely drawn boundary (A, C, E, F) the Individual that is me, named “Milad”. Lump sum theory could crudely draw this boundary to express who an Individual is. An Individual, the spider being discussed earlier, is just what is in the boundary containing the aggregate of parts (people). Notice that the colors (or, what the person-parts look like) can be different, but they can also be similar. In this case, A, D, and E are all red, yet only A and E are parts of the broader Individual. It’ll be a question of who we are referring to when we mean “Milad” and how we define that larger Individual, whether or not certain parts fall within the boundary. For those devoid of imagination, they can consider lump sum theory in a list or an equation format: Fred = A+C+E+F.

⁶ People in the popular common-sense. Of course, under Lump sum theory one would need to distinguish a person as a part, or a person as in the entire entity (the entire spider) of an individual. I.e. Even the larger individual has “people” as its leg parts in various possible worlds, but the metaphysical person we are concerned with is the sum of these parts.

Thus far I have given a broad overview of what a lump sum theory looks like. Now I will turn to the issue of how it can solve various puzzles and issues outlined earlier. We must begin with the problem ‘a’ (of Lumpl and Goliath). A modal theory, in so far as it pertains to modal facts about individuals and objects, must give an account of whether (and why) we have two objects or one. Of course, Lewis accounts for the puzzle with the spatio-temporal worm: Lumpl starts at the lump of clay and persists onwards, and Goliath starts at the point of being a statue and persists onwards. Therefore, Lewis would hold there are two objects that do look different on a temporal dimension⁷- and for now, notice how that temporal difference represents differing modal features. Lump sum theory, would similarly explain this initial scenario by saying there are two objects that do actually look distinct if we include trans-world dimensions. In other words, we have the spider that is Lumpl, and the spider that is Goliath, and they both appear to have a leg which overlap⁸.

But if Lewis can already solve the problem, why would we be lump theorists? Well, Wallace actually explores a slight modification to the Lumpl and Goliath case in order to show where we may favor the elegance of modal parts. Suppose that the lump and statue (the lump in statue form) poof into existence at the same time, and poof out of existence at the same time. Here Lewis’ worms look identical, there can be no temporal aspect to which they are different, and so he would have to say they are one and the same object. Wallace believes the problem is that, when comparing the original Lumpl and Goliath case with the new temporally identical case, the claim of how many objects there are has changed, but this will have been for reasons other than the actual

⁷ M. Wallace pg. 12

⁸ M. Wallace pg. 13

modal properties of the objects- even though it's really only the modal properties that suggest they are in fact not identical. For instance, we still have the intuition that lumps can be squished, and statues cannot⁹.

If we were to imagine, instead of poofing into existence at the exact same time, the statue "could have came into existence a smidge later,"¹⁰ then suddenly Lewis would have to say it's impossible for the lump and the statue to be the same object. The problem is that he isn't doing this because of any modal reasons. The "smidge later" is supposed to expose and open our eyes to how there must really be two objects there: but it's not because of some temporal difference, instead it's because it makes obvious the fact that the statue has different modal features than the lump.

For the lump sum theorist, modal parts just are modal facts, and so we explain any and all differences in terms of modal features¹¹. Wallace believes the elegance of lump sum theory is that it is always modal facts which yield the distinctions in terms of how many objects there are with lumps and statues. Lewis helps himself to the temporal dimension to solve the basic case of Lump1 and Goliath, but the temporal dimension only helps expose modal differences- and the problem is that modal differences persist even in cases where there are no temporal differences.

Next, there is the puzzle '**b**', of (essentially the "Humphrey Objection") when other possible worlds represent "us," are those merely counterparts that we may not care about, or in what sense are they "us"? Dealing with this problem is what I take to be the most novel advantage lump sum theory possesses.

⁹ M. Wallace pg. 13

¹⁰ M. Wallace pg. 16

¹¹ M. Wallace pg. 18

Let me briefly summarize the issue. In assessing what to make of claims like “Hubert Humphrey could have won the election”, Lewis believes that every individual, like Humphrey, has a counterpart in other possible worlds. Humphrey’s counterparts may have mildly or vastly different properties to the man we know, but they may still represent Humphrey given a particular context to analyze. Kripke argues Lewis’ theory features a counter-intuitive consequence, since counterpart theory does not assess possibilities for Humphrey himself. When we discuss what is possible for Humphrey, we want to discuss this actual Humphrey: but because Lewis’ theory calls for us to identify another counterpart living in another existing possible world, we are no longer talking about Humphrey anymore. That counterpart is a different person, one we are not concerned with. Kripke’s concerned that individuals like Humphrey couldn’t care less about “someone else” achieving things like winning elections.

I believe any account of modality must account for this concern, given that, if Kripke is right, it means that Humphrey’s counterparts *don’t* really represent modal information about Humphrey after all. Lump sum theory is successful here. Given Humphrey in our world is a mere part among the broader individual that is “Humphrey,” this means that the modal information about Humphrey is no longer located in another person altogether. Those things that we called Humphrey’s counterparts are in fact all other parts of “Humphrey”, so we care about them in the same way all of our limbs matter to us: in analogy, Humphrey in our actual world is not special, he is just one leg, and the Humphrey who won the election is another leg. We wanted to know whether or not Humphrey could have been president, and we want some modal information to say something about Humphrey rather than some entirely distinct counterpart that

sufficiently resembles Humphrey. Lump sum theory successfully provides modal information about Humphrey, given his fellow parts, like himself, are what make up “Humphrey” in the first place.

Finally, let me discuss problem ‘C’. Could I have been an egg? Is there a possible world in which I was more egg-like? Some theories answer this question with Haecceitism, or defining some form of essentialism around whether or not I would still be me if I was an egg. Alternatively, Lewis’ theory merely takes this on a contextual case by case basis, in the sense that whether we have a counterpart that is an egg is context-dependent and analyzed through descriptions. I believe lump sum theory is neutrally malleable to both strategies.

For example, if the actual larger trans-world person I am (“Milad”) has certain qualities in which we can round up to say “this is my essence,” then this is compatible with lump sum theory. Imagine if we assessed the figure 1 near the beginning of this paper and saw that in individuals A, C, E, F... n, each of the little worms possessed some common trait like a common origin. If all of the modal parts, the legs, all feature being born to the parents to which I was born to, then lump sum theory is compatible with saying this is my essence.

Alternatively, consider that there may not be a meaningful way we wish to say there is an essence to my being. In this case, in Lewisian style, it may depend on the context whether or not “Milad” has a modal part that is an egg, or egg-like. Whatever the outcome, we have to say there is a fact of the matter as to whether or not “Milad” does have certain “egg-y” modal parts or not. Lump sum theory would commit us to there being a fact of the matter as to whether or not the boundary we drew in figure 1 is

inclusive of an egg person or not. Yet, at the same time, there's a sense in which it is still compatible with non-essentialist description dependent analyses of who I can be in other possible worlds (like Lewis). But perhaps I need to pause, as I anticipate some people will be eager to object to numerous claims I have just made.

There may be two closely related objections, and I will respond to both of them: **(1)** how can you believe both that there is no commitment to essentialism and that there is a fact of the matter over modal parts? **(2)** You say there is a fact of the matter, but how could we even come to know about the facts over which modal parts compose an individual?

For **(1)**, it may seem like a fact of the matter over our modal parts contribute to some kind of essential features, but it's not necessary that these features provide meaningful content of what makes us essentially us. For example, perhaps the fact of the matter is that all the parts composing the individual "Milad" are humans. This is a weak essential feature, in the sense that it cannot really pick person-parts out as belonging to "Milad," because there are billions of other humans that do not compose "Milad." In this sense, we may have some essential features sufficient to draw or modify the boundaries around the possible worlds and there will be a fact of the matter as to whether or not we've included them all or missed some. But at the same time, how us lump sum theorists draw, include, and exclude the set of worlds that compose the larger individual may still depend on how we've fixed what we're talking about when we refer to "Milad". I.e. lump sum theory can acknowledge there being, in fact, a list of essential features that do meaningfully provide an account of an individual's essence: but whether

they make that list may largely depend on other factors (up to us), for example the description of “Milad”.

But in what sense could our analyses of the individual be context-sensitive or description dependent? Well, we need to figure out the meta rules of this metaphysics game: who is “Milad” anyways? I think if “Milad” was used to refer to a pet lizard, well, the transworld individual would look entirely different. Some people wish to give an account which states that naming things is like a baptism which fixes their referent. Some people, presumably, may not believe in naming baptisms. In any case, we must agree to the rules of the game before we start asking questions of if “Milad” could have been an egg. Otherwise the debate will consist of people talking past one another, talking about two entirely different things. For example, if we are discussing any questions regarding the properties of water, we must first agree whether we define water in the structural sense (H₂O), or the functional sense (clear liquid life ingredient).

To further clarify, is it a contradiction to say there is a fact of the matter, but that we also set the rules of the game? In some sense, no. We may set better or worse definitions, but for every definition there is a fact of the matter over which things to enclose in the boundary that is the individual. For instance, consider figure 1, if we were working with a different framework of “Milad” then we may wish to modify the crudely-drawn boundary to exclude person F in world #9999999, and to include the person D in world #4776.

Before moving away to address the second objection, my responses to the first objection offered the clarifications which allow me to offer some kind of stance to finish discussing the initial egg-puzzle. Under lump sum theory, it may seem un-intuitive and

downright nutty that “Milad” is actually a transworld ‘spidery’ Individual, but, what I take to be unacceptably bizarre is to think that an egg could be anything close to what we mean when we refer to “Milad”. To explain that bizarreness, we may just be sympathetic to some form of naming-baptisms. For example, if “Milad” was the kind of individual that had a modal part that was an egg, then it would be an incredibly obvious indication that “Milad” refers to a kind of thing that isn’t even human (an indication there has been some kind of misunderstanding in what we meant to refer to). To compare, Lewis offers there is an egg-like individual bearing the counterpart relation to me; but as with the “Humphrey objection”, there is something hollow or uninteresting with this modal claim. Comparing Lewisian counterparts, with their disconnects, can sometimes be muddy: there’s a fear that the degrees of similarity, like a spectrum from one gradient leading to another, reach too far such that I would indeed eventually have a counterpart that was an egg. Therefore I suppose the benefit of lump sum theory would be that, by most accounts of our reference, “Milad” can’t be an egg; but the Individual I am can at least have an extremely egg-like part that is still meaningfully connected with me in this actual world. The point to emphasize here is that the spidery creature that is “Milad” is a useful and novel thing to turn to in trying to process questions of whether I could have been an egg because rather than compare two counterparts in a (potentially endless) sequential order, we are comparing parts bearing relations to the larger Individual.

The second objection **(2)** regards an epistemic concern that there is no way to access or confirm the fact of the matter over whether a modal part is a member of an Individual. There are two versions of this objection. The first version of **(2)** is the concern over the criteria. Given this epistemic gap, we may have trouble accepting some kind of

fact of the matter over what Individuals consist of. But for lump sum theory, all the little “leg people,” or modal parts, merely represent a possible world for the larger Individual. Our epistemic access is no different to asking any modal question with any other theory: it is possible for Humphrey to have been president, either because (Lewis) there is a possible world containing the Humphrey president counterpart, or perhaps because you are some version of an Ersatzer and believe there are no logical issues found within the set of propositions we can write out or represent for Humphrey having been president. No matter the flavor, lump sum theory is neutral to either Lewis or the Ersatzer, in merely adding that on-top of their analyses, the possibilities (worlds or otherwise) represent modal parts. In other words, I don’t believe there is an epistemic concern, given the theory is neutral as to how we yield modal facts.

The second version of **(2)** is the epistemic concern in regards to being skeptical about the entire project: given we can’t know that there is even any transworld individual (in the first place) for a fact of the matter to apply to, we cannot believe in lump sum theory. I.e. if there exists a fact of the matter over whether or not a part belongs to an Individual, then the lump sum theorist must be able to point to these spider Individuals in the first place. Well, like Lewis’ Modal Realism, it just doesn’t make sense to give a kind of empirical account for the existence of these broader Individuals. The metaphysical reality, however, is one which can be pointed to in terms of its theoretical merits. Frankly, I agree with Wallace: there must be more literature to flesh out all the theoretical reasons in favor of lump sum theory¹².

¹² M. Wallace footnote 1 and 2

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