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ARTICLE

Monism and Monotheism

Aaron Segal

Department of Philosophy, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel
Email: aaron.segal1@mail.huji.ac.il

Abstract
Despite the affinity of monism and monotheism—and despite monism's recent philosophical renaissance—few have defended the conjunction of the two claims, of what we might call 'theistic monism'. I argue, first, that monism and monotheism are consistent, and second, that each one provides good reasons to accept the other one. Monotheists, qua monotheists, have good reason to be monists; and monists, qua monists, have good reason to be monotheists. There should be much greater overlap between the monist camp and the monotheist camp than there is at present.

Keywords: monism; monotheism; cosmic monism; theistic monism; bottom-up monism; null individual

1. Introduction

Monism says that reality, at least at bottom, is one. Monotheism says that reality, at least at its source, is one. There's a natural affinity then between the two views. So it's surprising that despite monism's recent renaissance, there's hardly been any defense of its conjunction with monotheism, of what we might call "Theistic Monism."[1] To be fair to our contemporaries, much the same can be said regarding Monism throughout history. Many of the most prominent philosophical monists—folks like Parmenides, Spinoza, and Bradley, who either identified themselves or were subsequently identified by others as paradigmatic monists—defended versions of monism that were not theistic; indeed, that were incompatible with theism.[2]

Of course, monism and monotheism, even in their barest forms, say still other things besides their shared "core," and those further things might contradict one another. If that were the case, it shouldn't come as a surprise that theistic monism has had few defenders. But it's not the case. Monism, just as such, and monotheism, just as such, are consistent. Indeed, as I shall argue, each one provides reasons to accept the other one. Monotheists, qua monotheists, have good reason to be monists; and monists, qua monists, have good reason to be at least (what I shall call) *minimal* monotheists. There should be much greater overlap between the monist camp and the monotheist camp than there is at present.

[1]For recent defenses of monism, see, *inter alia*, Horgan and Potrč (2000), Rea (2001), Schaffer (2007), (2010a), (2010b), Cameron (2010), Goff (2011), Schaffer (2013), Builes (2021), and Builes and Teitel (2022).

For some exceptions to the recent neglect of theistic monism, see Segal (2014, 2021), Pearce (2017), and Lebens (2019).

[2]Plotinus, like the Neoplatonists who followed him, was a notable exception. See his *Enneads* Book V. And whether or not Spinoza's philosophical worldview could (without too much distortion) be 'purified' so as to be rendered consistent with theism has historically been a matter of great controversy, and indeed was at the heart of the famed *pantheism controversy*. See Mendelssohn et al. (2011).

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Here's a plan for the paper. In Section 2 I will explain what I mean by "monism" and "monotheism" (and "minimal monotheism"). In Section 3 I will argue that the two views are consistent. Then, in Section 4 I will briefly explain why monotheists, qua monotheists, have good reason to be monists. And in Section 5 I will turn to my main point: That monists, qua monists, have good reason to be (at least minimal) monotheists. This is because there's no good argument for monism that's an argument specifically for a sort of monism incompatible with monotheism; while there is a very good argument for monism that specifically supports theistic monism.

2. Getting the Views on the Table

2.1. Minimal monotheism

It's very easy to give a rough-and-ready characterization of monotheism. Roughly, it's the view that there is exactly one god (or deity, or divine being…). As easy as it is to give a rough-and-ready characterization, it's just as hard to give a precise and accurate characterization. The main reason for the difficulty is that the rough-and-ready characterization leaves unanswered what it is to be a god, and that question is itself very knotty.[3] Complicating matters still further, there might *be* no correct, single answer to that question. There are—and historically have been—more and less demanding conceptions of what it is to be a god. Some require personal characteristics, like intellect and will, and some don't; still others demand the *absence* of any personal characteristics; some require perfect or unsurpassable goodness, some don't; and so on. What goes these days by the name "classical theism"—and plays a starring role in contemporary philosophy of religion—is but one specific version of monotheism. It's one that results from specifying a conception of what it is to be a god that is Anselmian, or "tri-omni," or some such thing.

So, what follows is a somewhat stipulative attempt to more precisely state what I'll call *minimal monotheism*. Minimal monotheism is weak enough so as to be entailed by any standard version of monotheism, and strong enough so as to be inconsistent with any standard version of atheism, polytheism, and pantheism. The attempt is still somewhat stipulative, because the questions of what are "standard" versions of monotheism, atheism, polytheism, and pantheism admit of no answers that aren't at least partly stipulative (and tendentious). Any my characterization will also be somewhat vague and schematic. But it'll serve my purposes well enough. The claim that monotheists have good reason to be monists, and monists have good reason to be (minimal) monotheists, is interesting and important (if true), wherever exactly we reasonably choose to draw the line between monotheism and its neighbors, and even if that line is somewhat fuzzy.

Minimal monotheism must entail that there is a being who is the source, or creator, or explanation, of all *this* (as I gesture left and right and up and down), of all (concrete) things visible and invisible, tangible and intangible, other than itself—of *the universe*, for short.[4] If the universe were a product of two extremely powerful Spirits—each having been responsible for creating one half of the universe—monotheism would be false. Even if one of the two extremely Spirits were responsible for creating *everything but the other Spirit*—the latter of whom simply decided not to create at all—monotheism would be false.

It would be easiest if we could just assume that being such a source of *everything* (other than itself) is *part of what it is to be a god*. But that conceptual assumption leads to the troubling result that in the scenarios we've just considered, there are zero gods. That doesn't seem right. We'd naturally say that in those scenarios there are two gods, not zero—that polytheism is true, not atheism. More simply and problematically still, polytheism would be ruled out as a straightforward

[3]As we'll see shortly, that's not the only reason it's difficult; the other reason is that in order for the view to rule out polytheism, but not to rule out polytheism *by definition*, more conditions will be have to be penciled in by hand.

[4]On whether it must entail that there are no uncreated *abstracta*, see Craig (2015) and van Inwagen (2015). From now on, the 'concrete' qualifier should be understood implicitly.

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conceptual impossibility. Sourcehood, after all, is straightforwardly asymmetric. It *may* turn out that polytheism is impossible. It may even turn out that polytheism is a conceptual impossibility. But it shouldn't be *obviously* conceptually impossible, in a way that would render its myriad adherents throughout history positively *stupid*.

Now, I'd be willing to live with these awkward results. I could always say that there are no doubt less demanding conceptions of divinity—such that in some legitimate sense of "god" the claim that there is more than one god is at least conceptually possible, and would be true in the scenarios I mentioned—but that I'm working with a more demanding conception, and given that more demanding conception, nothing is a god unless it's the source of everything (but itself). Then monotheism could still be put as the claim that there is exactly one god.

But as a matter of fact, we will in any case have to add some additional clauses, to ensure that monotheism is inconsistent with both polytheism and pantheism. We can put the motivation schematically: being a god, is going to be *rather* demanding. It's not like my foot might be god. But given that it's rather demanding, the claim that there is exactly one of *that* kind of thing will be consistent with there being a multitude of very impressive beings—way *too* impressive for the multitude to be consistent with monotheism—that just missed the cut of being a god. Maybe they've got two out of three divine-making features; maybe they've got seven out of seven, but to a slightly lesser degree than is needed to make the cut. A situation in which there are such beings alongside the one being that makes the cut doesn't seem like monotheism enough: it doesn't respect the vast *gap* that there's supposed to be between the one God and everything else. A monotheist is going to want to say *both* that there is a being that has all, or at least a great many, of the divine-making features, and *also* that every other being has none, or at most very few, of these divine-making features. Or, more neutrally, that there's no other being that even comes close to the one God. Let's remedy this defect in the formulation by just adding a conjunct: Monotheism is the view that there is exactly one god and nothing other than the one God even comes close to it. But now once we're adding conjuncts, we might as well be explicit about the sourcehood issue: Monotheism says that there is exactly one god, who is the source of all things other than It, and nothing other than the one God even comes close.

Finally, as opposed to pantheism and panentheism, monotheism in all of its forms says that that being lies *beyond*—in the sense of being neither identical with nor made up of—anything tangible or spatial or material. Indeed, God lies beyond *everything* other than Himself. God is a "*transcendent* being," for short.

Bottom line: minimal monotheism says **that there is exactly one god, a transcendent being that is the source of all things other than It, and nothing other than the one god even comes close**. This will do for now.

As I've already indicated, many theists will think minimal monotheism isn't specific enough to capture their view of God. It certainly doesn't capture everything that particular monotheistic religions will say about God's nature. But it's more or less what the whole monotheistic family shares in common—and distinguishes them from atheism, pantheism, panentheism, and polytheism. That's why it's *minimal* monotheism. Despite its vagueness and partly stipulative character, it's serviceable enough.

2.2. Monism

Now for "monism." Monism says that being is one. More perspicuously, that there is just one being. But here we can ask two questions, which give rise to two axes along which version of monism can differ. One question is whether "being" is supposed to be the most general term for anything whatsoever, or if it's supposed to pick out a more restricted category of things. If a more restricted category, then monism-so-understood is consistent with there being *many* things, just so long as only one of them belongs to the restricted category. If a more restricted category, what is the category? A number of proposals have been put forward: the category of *substances* (Spinoza *Ethics*

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Part 1 Proposition 14), or *individual things* (van Inwagen, 2009), or *basic* or *fundamental concrete* things (Schaffer, 2010a, 2010b), or *concrete things that have perfectly natural properties* (Sider, 2007). Schaffer (2010b) calls the unrestricted version, *existence monism*, and his own restricted version, *priority monism*.

It's worth nothing that at least "on paper" Schaffer's is just one possibility among several versions of *restricted monism*. But they're all getting at a distinction between what is metaphysically basic/ground floor, and what is metaphysically derivative/built up, using each one's preferred ideology. These differences might matter in some contexts, but I don't think they'll matter for us here. So I'll just let Schaffer's own *priority monism*—the view **that that there is exactly one basic concrete thing, exactly one concrete thing that isn't grounded in any other concrete thing**—serve as a stand-in for all of them. Indeed, since existence monism (what I've called unrestricted monism) is strictly stronger than priority monism, I'm going to treat bare monism as equivalent to priority monism. Monism says that there's exactly one basic concrete thing—following Plotinus, let's call it "the One." Every other concrete thing, if there be any, will be grounded in some concrete being distinct from it. Assuming metaphysical foundationalism, it will ultimately be grounded in the One.

But this still leaves open a second question, about the *identity* of the One. Is it something we're familiar with? If so, which thing? If not, can we say anything else about it? More generally, we can ask what *kind* of thing it is: is it natural or supernatural? Matter or spirit?

Here, monism as such as silent. As far as monism *says*, it could be my left foot, or Mt. Sinai, or the cosmos, or something else entirely. But nearly all of the extant developments of monism *don't* stay silent, and they speak nearly in unison in declaring that the One is the cosmos—understood as the mereological sum of all the concrete things.[5] Call their view "Cosmic Monism." Cosmic monism is incompatible with monotheism.[6] It's incompatible with monotheism because it implies that everything is either identical with the cosmos, or grounded in the cosmos. But God, according to monotheism, is not identical with the cosmos, for monotheism says that God is neither identical with nor made up of anything tangible or spatial or material.[7] And God's being grounded in the cosmos seems inconsistent with monotheism twice over: first in virtue of God's having to be the source of that in which He is grounded, and second in virtue of the cosmos having to be nothing close to the one God, despite the fact that it grounds everything else! Neither seems possible.

So the now-dominant development of monism—that is cosmic monism—is in fact incompatible with monotheism. (Indeed, given the argument from the previous paragraph, any development of monism that doesn't identify the One with God is incompatible with monotheism. So theistic monism, which is the conjunction of monism and monotheism, is equivalent to the superficially stronger claim that adds to that conjunction the identification of the One with God. Henceforth, I will use "theistic monism" as shorthand for that claim.) But other than a prior commitment to the falsity of monotheism, is there a reason to follow all of these monists in developing monism in a specifically cosmic direction? Is there something about monism just as such that, even if it does not logically imply the falsity of monotheism, puts it at odds or in tension with it? On the surface, perhaps, the answer is yes.

[5]At least one view says that the One is *also* my left foot, and Mt. Sinai, and so on, because all of these things are identical. (This is standardly presented as the Hindu philosophy of Vedanta. See Watts (1966) and van Inwagen (2009, 37).) And another view says not that it is the cosmos as a whole but the sum of (a concretely construed) configuration space and the world-particle (see Albert (1996) and (Sider, 2008, nt. 12)). The latter is still naturalistic, of course.

[6]It's worth pointing out that this is so even if the cosmos is itself conscious, as one finds in the "cosmopsychism" of Goff (2017) and the "cosmic idealism" of Kastrup (2018) and Chalmer (2019). The reason cosmic monism and monotheism cannot be reconciled is not that the cosmos is not impressive enough, it's that God would wouldn't be transcendent enough. Thanks to an anonymous referee here.

[7]At least assuming that there *is* a world of tangible, spatial, or material objects. One can achieve consistency between monotheism and the standard developments of monism, but only by paying the acosmic price of thinking all that stuff an illusion.

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3. Are They Consistent?

God, according to monotheism lies *beyond* all that is tangible and spatial and material. This makes trouble for the idea that God is the *ground* of everything else, per theistic monism. Put somewhat weakly, the trouble is *dialectical.* It seems that given God's transcendence, it's going to be *hard* to tell a detailed theistic grounding story—a story that fills in the specifics of everything's being grounded in God. It's going to have to be chalked up to *magic.* But that puts a theistic monist at a dialectical disadvantage, at least if she's out to convince those on the fence about monism/pluralism or naturalistic/theistic monism.[8] It's hard to convince a neutral party with such a sketchy story.

Put more strongly, the trouble it causes is *metaphysical.* It's not just that a theistic monist is left speechless, but that a plausible constraint on fundamentality *rules out* a case in which the one and only basic thing transcends (at least some) non-basic things. Schaffer calls the relevant constraint *Covering*, and it is the claim that the basic thing(s) together make up, or mereologically sum to, the whole cosmos Schaffer, 2010b. His argument for *Covering* is straightforward: first, the basic things need to serve as a complete blueprint for reality, so that if you duplicate the basic things, you duplicate reality, and second, that if the fusion of the basic things isn't the cosmos, then those basic things couldn't serve as a blueprint for reality. They'd be leaving some portion of the cosmos uncovered, and so they wouldn't serve as a blueprint for that portion. Schaffer then goes on to argue that *Covering* leaves only one viable monistic option. The only concrete thing that all by itself makes up or composes the cosmos *is the cosmos itself.* The implications for theistic monism are clear. The latter is not a viable way to develop monism, because it involves a violation of the constraint that the basic thing(s) cover the cosmos.[9]

But Schaffer's argument that the only viable form of monism is cosmic monism makes two assumptions, neither of which is obvious, and both of which can be contested by a theistic monist.[10]

First, the argument *for Covering* implicitly assumes that the only kind of relation between the Cosmos and the basic things that would allow the latter to serve as a blueprint for the former is *mereological*; it assumes that the basic things have to collectively *compose* the whole of concrete Reality in order to cover them. But, for obvious reasons, that's not an assumption that's very friendly to a theistic monist. And it's far from obvious, since it neglects a number of other candidates for the

[8]Compare Sider (2008).

[9]A slightly different source of trouble comes from a plausible constraint on grounding itself. The constraint is just that in any instance of grounding there has to be some more *specific* building relation that obtains between a grounded thing and the thing that grounds it, some relation like parthood, or constitution, or being a determinate, or being a modification of, or whatnot. It can't just be generically grounded, and that's all there is to it. (This is certainly true if one thinks, with Wilson (2014), that there *isn't* any candidate for what the grounding relation could *be* aside from an unnatural disjunction of some such list of specific relations. But even if that's not so–even if grounding is *more* natural or fundamental than any of the specific relations–it still seems plausible that it'll be logically equivalent to some disjunction of specific relations.) And each of the specific relations we know of is such that it requires some sort of overlap, broadly construed, between the relata. But then if God transcends everything else, it's not clear how He could ground anything else.

The replies I offer in the text solve this problem as well, if they solve the problem that arises from the constraint on fundamentality.

[10]To be fair, Schaffer (2010b, p. 33) parenthetically restricts his attention to material things: "(deities and spirits, if such there be, are not my concern either)…When I speak of the world—and defend the monistic thesis that the whole is prior to its parts—I am speaking of the material cosmos and its planets, pebbles, particles, and other proper parts." Thus, the view he defends—that there is exactly one *material* concrete thing that isn't grounded in any other *material* concrete thing—is consistent, strictly speaking, with theistic monism (and with the denial of cosmic monism, as I've formulated it). And he's entitled, of course, to put forward a more restricted thesis. But I don't see how he's entitled to be unconcerned with deities and spirits, *if such there be*, when he gets to his *arguments*; he can't properly ignore them, even if he's arguing for the more restricted conclusion, since (as will become clear in Section 5) the arguments wouldn't support the existence of a unique material object prior to all others if there's a unique *immaterial* object that is prior to all other objects, period.

In any case, if Schaffer himself put forward only the more restricted claim, then my discussion targets a less modest counterpart of Schaffer, who puts forward the full-blown cosmic monism, and defends it along the lines that Schaffer defends his own version.

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relation between the basic thing(s) and the cosmos. To take a particularly historically influential example: according to idealism the whole of concrete reality consists in a Mind or minds, together with the *ideas* in those minds. And—at least if we've already taken on board the ideology of basicness—it's very natural to take idealism to also be committed to the Mind or minds being the only basic things, everything else being dependent on it or them. But, on the other hand, it's not obvious at all that the ideas—things like tables and chairs—are literally *parts* of some Mind. They are ideas *in* the mind, but they don't literally *make up* the mind. (Note that if the Supreme Mind is God, and we did construe the *in-the-mind* relation as parthood, then God and creatures would overlap, contrary to our characterization of monotheism.) So we have a non-mereological relation between the basic things and the (rest of the) cosmos, which nonetheless allows it to be the case that if the basic thing(s) serve as a complete blueprint: If you duplicate the Mind or minds, you will have duplicated Reality. A theistic monist can opt for still other non-mereological relations, such as modification, manifestation, or performance.[11]

Second, the argument *from Covering* for the cosmos being the only viable candidate for the One implicitly assumes a mereological principle that is non-trivial: the Weak Supplementation Principle (WSP), a principle whose name makes it sound more obvious than it is. The principle says that for any x and y such that y is a proper part of x, there is some part of x that doesn't overlap y. From WSP, together with *Covering*, it does indeed follow that if there's only one basic thing, then it's the cosmos. If there's only one basic thing, and it isn't the cosmos, then it is a proper part of the cosmos (the cosmos is the fusion of all the concrete things, among which is the one basic thing). But then by WSP, there is some part of the cosmos that doesn't overlap that one basic thing. So then it's not the case that the fusion of the one basic thing is the cosmos (by definition of "fusion"), contra *Covering*.

But a theistic monist might reasonably have a different idea for how a single being might cover the cosmos—and with that idea, a reason to reject WSP. Allow me to introduce the so-called Null Individual, a concrete thing that (if it exists) is *part* of every concrete thing.[12] If there is such a thing as the Null Individual, then it would be an excellent theistic candidate for the One (aka God), since it would quite plausibly *ground* every concrete thing (assuming parts ground the wholes of which they are parts).[13] And if there is such a thing as the Null Individual, then it does not follow even from *Covering* that the cosmos is the only viable candidate for the One. The Null Individual would cover the cosmos just as the cosmos itself would. And finally, if there is such a thing as the Null Individual, then (since there is more than one concrete thing) pretty clearly WSP is false.[14]

Note: it's not just a theistic monist who might find WSP non-obvious. WSP doesn't seem to be a conceptual truth, as evidenced by the fact that highly competent philosophers, who presumably

[11]On manifestation (of a power) as a possible relation between God and creation, see Triffon-Reshef (n.d). Likewise, a "Russellian cosmopsychist" could conceivably identify the cosmic mind that underlies the structure of the physical universe with God, and see the physical universe as a manifestation (or something akin to it) of God. On performance (of a divine act of will), together with constitution (by that performance), as a possible relation between God and History, see Pearce (2017). (To be clear, what's meant by 'modification' is not the Spinozistic claim that God *is* the whole of Nature, and all the bounded parts are just modifications–a claim that's incompatible with the transcendence requirement of theistic monism–but that Nature itself is a mere modification of God.)

[12]See Martin (1965), Bunge (1966), Hudson (2006), Segal (2014).

[13]Not only would it plausibly *partially* ground every other concrete thing, it would plausibly *fully* ground every other concrete thing. This is because the Null Individual *single-handedly composes* every concrete object. Supposing it's true that if *x* is part of *y* then *x* (at least partially) grounds *y*, then I assume it's also true that if the *x*s compose *y* then the *x*s fully ground *y*. (This seems no less plausible to me if WSP is false than if it's true. Granted, when we try to *picture* a situation that's incompatible with WSP, it might *look* like a case in which a whole can 'outstrip' a proper part that composes it, and hence not be fully grounded in that part. But this seems to be picture-thinking leading us metaphysically astray. We have a mental picture in which there's some extra *stuff* beyond the composing part, even if it is not some*thing*. But that's not how things really are in that situation: a single part that composes a whole distinct from it nonetheless *covers* the whole, in that there's no thing *or* stuff that forms a residue uncovered by the composing part.) Thanks to an anonymous referee here.

On the identification of God with the null individual, see Hudson (2006), (2008), and Segal (2014).

[14]Or, the only way it can be salvaged is if the 'supplement' is allowed to be non-concrete.

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understand the concept of *parthood*, have denied it.[15] And if it's not a conceptual truth, it's not clear why we should accept it. It actually makes mereology *more* complicated.[16] And anyone who takes seriously the analogy between set theory and mereology, and in particular between the parthood relation and the subset relation, should find it somewhat *surprising* if there is not any mereological counterpart to the null set.[17]

What emerges is not just a flaw in the argument from *Covering* to cosmic monism, but a specific way of filling out theistic monism in *mereological* terms—alongside the non-mereological ways I mentioned above. On this way of filling it out, God still lies beyond everything that is tangible or spatial or material, since He is made of none of these things; but He lies *just* beyond these things, since they are literally *made* of Him. As the Hasidic thinker, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Lyady, put it, God "fills all the worlds, and [at the same time] surrounds all the worlds."

Perhaps the most important theoretical upshot of this last mereological option is a severing of the connection between the question of monism versus pluralism and the question of top-down versus bottom-up metaphysical structure. Schaffer treats these questions as equivalent: (priority) monism is true iff the basic thing grounds from the whole to the parts; (priority) pluralism is true iff the basic things ground from the parts to the whole. But the development of monism that identifies the One with the null individual—which we can call "bottom-up monism" for short—shows that at least conceptually speaking there need not be any such link. Monism can be thoroughly bottom-up, just as it can be top-down.

4. Monotheists Should be Monists

So monism and monotheism are consistent—not just logically consistent, but more robustly consistent. One *can in good philosophical conscience* be a theistic monist. But is there a good reason to be? Well, there are whatever reasons there are to be a monist, together with whatever reasons there are to be a monotheist. If those reasons are themselves consistent—or even if just some of them are—then taken together they'd be reasons to accept the conjunction of monism and monotheism. And, for reasons I already mentioned, that conjunction implies that God *is* the One.

But I think there's a tighter evidential relationship between the two views. Each one supports the other. And not just in the "cheesy" and relatively weak Bayesian way that each one raises the probability of the other above its prior, but in the sense that you should accept the one only if you accept the other. Monotheists should be monists; and monists should be monotheists.

There are at least two reasons monotheists should be monists.[18] The first presupposes that the intelligibility of the ideology in which monism has been formulated. *If* there is an intelligible notion of *ground*, then monism is a genuine thesis, and presumably it's either true or false. But if it's false, then there are just two options: the first is that there are *no* basic concrete things. But the way "basic concrete thing" was defined, that would mean that *every* concrete thing is grounded in some *other* concrete thing. So God would be grounded in some other concrete thing. As already noted, that, together with monotheism, would require God to be the source of something in which He is grounded, which seems impossible. The second option is that there is *more than one* basic concrete thing. So, given the intelligibility of "ground," there would have to be something other than God that is part of the basic furniture of the universe.[19] And while it's harder to *show* that this is inconsistent

[15]See Martin (1965), Bunge (1966), Hudson (2006), Smith (2009).

[16]With the null individual, mereology is a complete Boolean algebra. See Tarski (1956).

[17]Martin (1965) is quite clear that he takes the null individual to be no less upstanding or real than the null set, although it's not entirely clear how seriously he took either.

[18]One might also suggest a third reason, which is that the best argument for monotheism is one that establishes not just monotheism, but theistic monism in particular. See Pearce (2017).

[19]If 'ground' is not intelligible, then it'll be true that more than one thing is a basic concrete thing (not grounded in any other concrete thing), but not because they'll all be part of the basic furniture, but because there *is no such thing* as basic furniture.

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with monotheism, it's hard to imagine a monotheist being *comfortable* with it. At the very least, it's difficult to maintain that nothing else even comes close to God, when *something* else is equally fundamental, equally basic, equally ground-floor.[20]

The second reason a monotheist should be a monist is that monotheism would be *in trouble* without monism. Monotheism is practically a breeding ground for absolutely necessary connections between what appear to be distinct existences. This is most certainly the case for specific versions of monotheism—with their varied commitments to God's essential infallibility, omniscience, and perfectly efficacious will. But it's the case even for *minimal* monotheism as well. The sense in which God is supposed to be the *source* of all things other than It is not one that allows for any *unaccounted-for-gap* between God and everything else. It's not that God exists, and has whatever character God does, and it just so happens that a universe results. It's not that God could have been just as God is and yet nothing else would have existed—or would have existed but have had a different character. That would leave an unaccounted-for-gap. It's supposed to be necessary that *if* God exists and has the character (or will, or whatever other intrinsic features of God are supposed to be the source of the existence of the universe) that God has, then we'd get a universe just like ours. Or if that goes too far for some minimal monotheists (e.g., van Inwagen (1988) on chance, Hasker (1989) on freedom), I take it that at the very least God being the source of everything else is incompatible with the following: for *any* way that the universe could possibly be, it is possible for God to be just as God actually is and for the universe to be *that* way. That extreme degree of modal independence from God wouldn't be consistent with the kind of divine sourcehood at the heart of minimal monotheism. (Indeed, I don't know of a single monotheistic philosopher who would allow for such a thing.) So there are absolutely necessary connections running "from God to the universe."

Likewise, the sense in which God is supposed to be the *source* of all things other than It is not one that allows for *divine dispensability*. It's not that a universe exists, and has whatever character it does, and it just so happens to be sourced in God. It's not that the universe could have been just as it is without having any source at all—or having had a source other than God. That would make the divine source dispensable. It's supposed to be necessary that *if* there is a universe at all then God exists and has the character God in fact has. Or if that goes too far for some minimal monotheists (see Swinburne, 1979), I take it that at the very least God being the source of everything else is incompatible with the following: for *any* way that God could possibly be (including nonexistent, if God only contingently exists), it is possible for the universe to be just as it actually is and for God to be *that* way. Again, that extreme degree of modal independence from God would not be consistent with the kind of divine sourcehood at the heart of minimal monotheism. (Again, I do not know of a single monotheistic philosopher who would allow for such a thing.[21]).

So there are absolutely necessary connections running "from the universe to God," along those that run "from God to the universe." But these absolutely necessary connections are utterly mysterious if God and the rest of the cosmos are *wholly* distinct. How is there this connection that has the force of logic—how *could* there be such a connection—between the intrinsic divine states and the intrinsic non-divine states if they're states of wholly distinct things? These connections give us good reason to deny that God really *is* wholly distinct from the rest of concrete Reality; indeed, to deny that He is wholly distinct from *any* part of concrete Reality.[22] They give us good reason, that is, to think that for every non-divine concrete thing, God and that thing either share a ground, or one is grounded in the other. But the only possibility that's consistent with that and with monotheism is

[20]It's true that not *every* shared property between God and creatures undermines the vast gap there's supposed to be between them; trivial properties, disjunctive properties, and very general properties (like *having some amount of knowledge*) can arguably be shared without compromising the gap. But *being equally F* for some *important* 'F', like 'basic', arguably does do so.

[21]While Richard Swinburne (1979, 2012) goes pretty far toward granting the universe a degree of modal independence from God, even he wouldn't allow for, say, a possibility in which God wills that there be unicorns and the universe is just as it actually is (without any unicorns).

[22]See Schaffer (2010a), Segal (2014).

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that every non-divine concrete thing is grounded in God. Assuming that grounding is asymmetric, *or* that there is something basic (metaphysical foundationalism), *or* that God is not grounded in anything else (as I've already argued, given monotheism), monism follows.[23]

5. Monists Should be Monotheists

So monotheists—even *minimal* monotheists—should be monists. But it goes in the other direction as well; monists should be at least minimal monotheists. In a nutshell, that's because there's no argument for monism that is a good argument specifically for cosmic monism (or for naturalistic monism more generally); there *is*, on the other hand, a good argument for monism—what I think is the *best* argument for monism—that is an argument specifically for bottom-up monism; bottom-up monism takes us quite a long way toward theistic monism; and there is no objection to theistic monism that isn't an equally strong objection to its naturalistic monistic counterparts.[24]

5.1. Indifferent monistic arguments

There are a number of decent arguments for monism. But most of them are neutral between cosmic monism and bottom-up monism, and between naturalistic and non-naturalistic monism's more generally. Even though as they've been presented and developed many of these arguments do issue in the conclusion of cosmic monism, it turns out upon more careful examination that it's because they beg the question against other versions of monism. That is, they're *really* arguments for monism just as such, and it's only if we simply assume that cosmic monism is the only monistic game in town that we can go on to draw cosmic monism as a conclusion.

I will move rather quickly here, because I think it's pretty easy to see that the relevant arguments are actually neutral between cosmic monism and other ways to develop monism.

First, the *argument from quantum mechanics*, which draws on the quantum mechanical phenomenon of entanglement (see Schaffer, 2010b). Schaffer sees it as an argument for what he calls "monism"—which is of course specifically cosmic monism. But in order for the argument to even get off the ground, it needs to assume something like the following: For any set of sub-cosmic objects that compose the Cosmos, the members of that set are in an entangled state, that is the quantum-mechanical state of the Cosmos is not determined by the fundamental properties of the members taken individually. But while this is true for all of the *ordinary* sub-cosmic objects that compose the cosmos, it's not true of the null individual, if such a thing exists. The null individual's fundamental properties do determine the quantum-mechanical state of the Cosmos (along with everything else), if it exists. It's only because Schaffer ignores the null individual that he assumes this to be true of absolutely every set of objects that compose the cosmos.

[23]Here I'm following Schaffer (2010a) in understanding the proviso/exception to the denial of absolutely necessary connections in grounding-theoretic terms. If you instead understand it in mereological terms (see Segal (2014)) then the argument here will require two steps: first argue from monotheism to the mereological way of filling out theistic monism—to the claim that God is part of everything—and then argue that parts ground the things they compose.

[24]Recall that theistic monism is here understood as the conjunction of *minimal* monotheism and monism. There are of course particular specifications of minimal monotheism (for example, ones that specify that God is all powerful and morally perfect)–and hence particular specifications of theistic monism–that confront serious objections (from evil, for example) that its naturalistic monistic counterparts don't obviously confront. But that fact does not count as my claim here; it just demands that we attend carefully to what the claim says. (And I am not counting as objections those claims that are "too close" to the denial of minimal monotheism itself. Perhaps the notion of *begging the question* is ill understood (van Inwagen (2004), Fischer and Pendergraft (2013)), but I'll rely on it here: any objection that would *beg the question* against the minimal monotheist is not being counted. This would include "objections" from *physicalism*, or *naturalism*, or a *preference for desert landscapes*. Thanks to an anonymous referee here.) That being said, there are two prima facie non-question-begging objections specifically to bottom-up monism; see nt. 34.

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Likewise, if the argument is going to establish cosmic monism in particular, then it needs to assume something like the following: if there's no set of fundamental subcosmic objects that compose the Cosmos, then cosmic monism is true. But even granting the metaphysical foundationalism that lies behind this assumption, it simply ignores the possibility that the relationship between the One and the rest of the cosmos *isn't mereological*. That is, it just assumes that the One is going to cover the cosmos by *overlapping* every part of it, as opposed to by thinking it, or being manifested in it, or performing it. It ignores all the monistic options that see the One as transcendent. (By the same token, it ignores all the parallel pluralistic options. Once we recognize the other sorts of grounding relations that the basic objects might stand in to the rest of the cosmos, this argument loses much of its force.)

Second, the *argument from nomic integrity*, which draws on the idea (which he calls "Russellian Laws") that the cosmos is the one and only thing that evolves by the fundamental laws (see Schaffer, 2013). But that idea is plausible only if we restrict our attention to the cosmos and all of its ordinary subcosmic parts. If there is a null individual, or a thinker that has the cosmos as an idea, or a power that has the cosmos as a manifestation, or an agent whose performance constitutes the cosmos, then *that thing* could just as well evolve by the fundamental laws.[25] It's just not obvious—once all of these other options are in view—that, as Schaffer puts it, "The cosmos [is] the one system for which nothing is "outside," [and hence] is the one system immune to disruption."

Next, the *argument from gunk*, which draws on the metaphysical possibility of there being no simples, no mereological atoms (see Schaffer, 2010b). But of course that possibility is ruled out if the existence of a null individual is metaphysically necessary—and presumably, the existence of a null individual is a noncontingent "proposition of metaphysics," it being necessary if it's so much as possible (and so a fortiori if it's so much as actual).[26] Moreover, if the argument is going to establish cosmic monism in particular, it's going to need to assume the following: in a gunky world, the only object that could be basic is the cosmos. But even granting the anti-arbitrariness and minimality intuitions that lie behind this assumption (ibid.), it simply ignores the possibility that the relationship between the One and the rest of the cosmos isn't mereological. That is, it just assumes that the One is going to be distinguished in virtue of its mereological role (the one and only thing that overlaps everything), rather than some other role.[27]

Next and finally, the *Spinozistic-Bennettian argument* that draws on the insubstantiality of material objects (they're all extended, and every extended material thing has parts upon which it depends) and the insubstantiality of proper subregions of the whole of spacetime (they each depend on the whole of spacetime) (see Bennett, 1984, Ch. 4). But even granting Spinoza the additional assumption that there *is* some substance, these premises entail Spinoza's conclusion that spacetime

[25]To be sure, none of them has the ordinary *physical* features that figure into the familiar fundamental *physical* laws governing particles, features like mass and charge. My point, though, is that if any of these things exist, then the fundamental laws presumably will not be the fundamental *physical* laws with which we are familiar. It's admittedly somewhat difficult to understand in any detail how these things would evolve by fundamental laws–physical or otherwise–since it's hard to know what their properties *are*. But we need not understand *how* they would evolve by the fundamental laws in order to understand *that* they could do so. Moreover, we *could* understand how something evolves by fundamental laws, in such a way that we can recover from those laws the ordinary physical laws in which features like mass and charge figure, even if that "something" itself has no mass or charge or any other intrinsic physical feature. Compare to how things go according to Bohmian theory Albert (1996) develops, in which the world-particle and a configuration space are the only basic things, and the path of the former through the latter settles all the physical facts: the world particle has no intrinsic nature, or at least none that's relevant to recovering the physical laws governing 3D space. (It bears emphasizing regarding the null individual in particular that there's nothing in the definition of 'null individual'–nothing in its job description, so to speak–that specifies what its intrinsic nature is. It could, for example, have a rich mental life, which fixes the physical features of the objects it composes, and which figures into the fundamental laws that govern the Null Individual's evolution.) Thanks to an anonymous referee here.

[26]Do we have here an argument, from the possibility of gunk, to the nonexistence of the null individual? No, not until we have a reason to prefer *that* argument to an argument *from* the possibility of the null individual to the impossibility of gunk. See Sider (2013, §10) for a similar reply to an argument from the possibility of gunk against mereological nihilism.

[27]For a response along similar lines, see Lebens (2019, §3).

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is the one and only substance only if we simply ignore the possibility of a substance that is neither material nor a region of spacetime—as the null individual, or an immaterial thinker or agent or power, would be.[28]

5.2. Monistic argument specifically for bottom-up monism

None of the above arguments for monism tells one way or the other between naturalistic and non-naturalistic developments of monism. But there *is* an argument for monism that supports bottom-up monism in particular.

The second argument I gave from monotheism to monism was an instance of a more general argument. The more general argument is from pervasive failures of recombination—or the pervasive presence of absolutely necessary connections—between what appear to be distinct existences. The idea behind the argument is that this appearance must be misleading in some way; what appear to be distinct existences must in reality not be. There must be something they share in common. For otherwise nothing *could* explain the fact that they are necessarily connected in this way. And, on the other hand, such a necessary connection is the sort of thing that *needs* to be explained; it cannot just be a brute fact that modal space is constrained in that way.[29] As the cosmic monist sees it, what any two (subcosmic) concrete things share in common is that they are grounded (ultimately) in the cosmos. As Schaffer (2010a, p. 342) puts it, "failure of free recombination is the modal signature of an integrated monistic cosmos."

The first thing to say is that this monistic argument, like the rest we've seen, does nothing to actually establish cosmic monism in particular. The last move in the argument is just cosmic prejudice. The second thing to say is that this monistic argument, unlike the rest we've seen, is *not* indifferent between different views on the nature and identity of the One. If the argument succeeds in establishing monism, then it also imposes certain constraints on what the One could be. Simply identifying the One with the cosmos won't satisfy those constraints.

The first reason is that identifying the One with the cosmos does nothing to explain the relevant necessary connections between subcosmic objects. It gives an *impression* of explaining them, without actually doing so. (I don't just mean that the explanation it provides needs a further explanation; I mean it provides no substantive explanation at all.) The impression of an explanation is due to the fact that according to cosmic monism, the subcosmic objects are indeed both grounded in a single thing, the cosmos. But this all by itself doesn't yet explain why a particular necessary connection obtains—or even why there are necessary connections at all between subcosmic objects. Suppose there's a necessary connection (causal, spatial, or existential) between the Sun and the Moon—that is, between the way each is intrinsically. But now, even if the Sun is the way it is because of how the cosmos is, it's presumably because of the way the cosmos is, as we might say, *sun-wise*; and even if the moon is the way it is because of how the cosmos is, it's presumably because of the way the cosmos is, as we might say, *moon-wise*. The cosmos being the way it is *sun-wise* does nothing all by itself to explain the intrinsic features of the moon. Or at least we have no particular reason to think it does. So then in order to explain the necessary connection between the sun and the moon, the cosmic monist will just have to *add* that there is a necessary connection between the fact that the cosmos is thus-and-such *sun-wise* and the fact that the cosmos is such-and-so *moon-wise*. But that's exactly what we're trying to explain! Or at least it's so damn close to the explanandum that it's clear no explanatory progress has been made. Notice that to begin with we could have easily formulated

[28]The reader will probably have noticed that I don't discuss Spinoza's 'official' argument for monism—the one contained in his Ip14d—that relies on the idea that there is a substance with every possible attribute, and that no two substances can share an attribute. That argument does deliver the cosmic monist conclusion in particular (assuming there is an attribute of extension), and not by simply assuming it to be the only viable form of monism. But this argument encounters so many difficulties that I do not consider it a *good* argument specifically for cosmic monism.

[29]See Schaffer (2010a, 2010b) and Segal (2014) for an elaboration of this argument.

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the explanandum in this somewhat more convoluted manner. (That is: Why is there a necessary connection between the way the cosmos is *sun-wise* and the way it is *moon-wise*?) If we had, then the pluralist would have an explanation where the cosmic monist had none. (Pluralist explanation: Because there is a necessary connection between the sun and the moon.) But whether monism or pluralism has the advantage can't depend on which question we choose to ask. So cosmic monism does no better than pluralism. Which is to say, not very well at all.

But the situation is entirely different for bottom-up monism. That's because the way the null individual is *sun-wise* (the way it is in virtue of which the sun is the way it is)—indeed, the way it is *any-wise*—does something to explain the intrinsic features of the moon. After all, the null individual is *part* of the moon. And so *any* intrinsic feature F that the null individual has *will* give rise to the moon's being a certain way intrinsically. This is just an instance of a general truth about the relationship between the intrinsic features of parts and wholes: for any x and y and F, if x is part of y, and F is a property intrinsic to x, then the property *having a part that has F* is a property intrinsic to y. So, a bottom-up monist won't need to pencil in anything by hand. The claim that the Sun and the Moon (and every other concrete thing) are grounded in the null individual can all by itself explain why it is that there is a necessary connection between the sun and the moon (as it can also explain why it is that there is a necessary connection between the way the cosmos is *sun-wise* and the way the cosmos is *moon-wise*).[30]

The cosmic monist can try to mimic the bottom-up monist here. In order to do so, they'd presumably need to assume that any intrinsic feature that the cosmos has will give rise to the moon's being a certain way intrinsically. And presumably *that'd* be because of a general truth about the relationship between the intrinsic features of things and their grounds (for any x and y and F, if x is grounded in y, and F is a property intrinsic to y, then the property *being grounded in something that has F* is a property intrinsic to x), or because of a general truth about the relationship between the intrinsic features of wholes and their parts (for any x and y and F, if x is part of y, and F is a property intrinsic to y, then the property *being a part of something that has F* is a property intrinsic to x). But, as I've indicated already, these general claims are much less plausible than the corresponding claim about parts and wholes. Sure, maybe *some* of the properties that a ground has intrinsically give rise to a "corresponding' property had intrinsically by the grounded thing; and maybe *some* of the properties that a whole has intrinsically give rise to a "corresponding' property had intrinsically by the part. But we've been given no good reason to believe that *every* property had intrinsically by the ground or the whole does the same. Even if the cosmic monist is right, the way the moon is intrinsically intuitively depends only on how the cosmos is *moon-wise*, not *sun-wise*.

The second reason that identifying the One with the cosmos won't satisfy the relevant constraints is that there are actually two things that need to be explained. One is the (relevant) necessary connection itself. The other is the fact that there *can be* a necessary connection, when the connection is between the *intrinsic natures* of the relata. To see that this is a further explanatory demand, suppose we grant the cosmic monist her cheap explanation for the necessary connection, namely that there is a necessary connection between the fact that the cosmos is thus-and-such *sun-wise* and the fact that the cosmos is such-and-so *moon-wise*. Ok. But this has done nothing to explain how it *could be* that there'd be a necessary connection between intrinsic natures. Here we need to keep in mind that providing an explanation for P doesn't all by itself explain how P *could be*. If someone explains the necessary connections between intrinsic natures with the suggestion that God said "let it be so!," then even if that person's explanation is right, they've done nothing to explain how there could be such a thing. So, this is a separate explanandum. And I don't see what the cosmic monist's

[30]To be sure, even the bottom-up monist can provide no more than the *skeletal structure* of an explanation. Putting more meat on those bones would require that she say more about what the null individual is like intrinsically. (See nt. 25.) But even just a skeletal structure of an explanation is significantly better than no explanation at all, which is what we have given cosmic monism.

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explanation is going to be. As I've said, that there is a necessary connection between the fact that the cosmos is thus-and-such *sun-wise* and the fact that the cosmos is such-and-so *moon-wise* doesn't yet explain how there *could be* a necessary connection between intrinsic natures. And the more general point that the sun and the moon share a *ground* doesn't all by itself explain that either, any more than the fact that my cousins and I share *grandparents* explains how it *could be* that we are necessarily connected. What's needed is some further specification of the particular grounding relation in play, and some insight as to how it makes these necessary connections possible. If we can point to a *particular* relation that the One stands in to everything else, which *also* satisfies some interesting further condition, a condition that makes intelligible how there could be a necessary connection between the intrinsic natures of what appear to be wholly distinct existences, then we have the ingredients for an explanation. And that's precisely what we have given bottom-up monism, and lack given cosmic monism.[31] According to bottom-up monism the One is part of everything. And that relation (in that direction) does satisfy an interesting further condition, namely that for any x and y and F, if x is part of y, and F is a property intrinsic to x, then the property *having a part that is F* is a property intrinsic to y. And this makes intelligible how there *could be* necessary connections between intrinsic natures. Identifying the One with the cosmos does nothing to make that intelligible.[32]

5.3. Bottom-up monism to theistic monism

So the only pro-monism argument that actually supports a specific development of monism, supports bottom-up monism, which identifies the One with the null individual. But the null individual has quite a few divine qualities. As Hud Hudson (2006) points out, it is "likely to be a (i) necessarily existing, (ii) concrete, (iii) one of a kind entity; it is (iv) the one and only simple, being a part of everything else. In fact, in virtue of being a part of every point in space time, it has a straightforward (albeit nonstandard) claim to be (v) eternal and (vi) omnipresent."[33] And bottom-

[31]As a referee pointed out, that's not to say that no such particular relation could be specified that would be *consistent* with cosmic monism. Builes (2023), for example, accounts for absolutely necessary connections between things like the sun and the moon by appealing to the conjunction of monism and the *grounding view of powers* (the view that fundamental qualities ground corresponding dispositional properties), and noting that the latter can in turn be motivated by the conjunction of *Russellian Panpsychism* (the view that (at least some of) the categorical properties of fundamental physical entities are phenomenal properties) and the *Phenomenal Powers View* (the view that categorical phenomenal properties may ground certain physical dispositions purely in virtue of their intrinsic phenomenal character). The basic idea is that necessary connections between fundamental physical entities can be made intelligible if such entities are all just perceptions in a single mind, and their phenomenal feel, which *just is* their categorical nature, can ground certain dispositions to have other perceptions. But notice that while Builes does identify monism with cosmic monism–that is he assumes that the One is the cosmos–that identification actually plays no role in the explanation. The explanation relies only on the idea that the One is an (extraordinary) Mind and ordinary objects are perceptions in that Mind. That's consistent with cosmopsychism but also with theistic idealism. And like bottom-up monism, while it isn't quite monotheism, it takes us quite a long way down the monotheistic road.

[32]One might try to restore symmetry between cosmic monism and bottom-up monism in another way: won't the bottom-up monist have to leave certain facts unexplained that the cosmic monist can explain? In particular, a bottom-up monist can't explain facts about differences between different ordinary objects, since, on her view, they're all composed of the very same thing (see nt. 34); a cosmic monist, on the other hand, can point to the differences between the objects from which they're (ultimately) composed. (Thanks to a referee for raising this.) Two answers: (1) even the cosmic monist can't adequately explain the differences between ordinary objects, since they're supposed to all be (ultimately) grounded in the very same thing, that is the cosmos; (2) the trouble for the cosmic monist is not just that she's forced to leave unexplained something that the bottom-up monist can explain, but that she's forced to leave something unexplained that *requires* an explanation, that *can't* be brute, namely a *necessary connection.* See Segal (2014).

[33]For elaboration and defense of each of these claims, see Hudson (2006, 646–647). See also Hudson (2008). (Note that the Null Individual is transcendent, on my definition of "transcendent" in Section 2.1: it is "neither identical with nor made up of anything tangible or spatial or material." The null individual makes up the whole tangible/spatial/material world, not vice versa. And yet, as Hudson says, it is concrete, at least on certain standard ways of drawing the concrete/abstract distinction: it's a particular individual, not the product of abstracting away from a thing's other features, and it explains the way everything is. True it's not in space or time, but that does not usually preclude philosophers from categorizing God as concrete.)

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up monism says that this thing's existence and nature grounds the existence and nature of every other concrete thing. The claim that there is something with features (i)-(vi) that grounds everything else isn't *quite* monotheism, but it takes us quite a long way down the monotheistic road.[34]

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Aaron Segal is Associate Professor of Philosophy and John and Golda Cohen Chair in Jewish Philosophy at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. His research focuses on metaphysics, philosophy of religion, and Jewish philosophy, and he is presently working on the systematicity of philosophy and on the problem of evil.

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[34]But aren't there *objections* to the null individual, and hence to bottom-up monism? In my (2014) I discuss two non-question-begging objections to the null individual (see nt. 24), and provide replies to them. One objection is that the existence of the null individual rules out WSP. But in addition to the fact that WSP doesn't seem to be a conceptual truth (as I noted in Section 3), I also point out that the the existence of the null individual, and the truth of bottom-up monism, is consistent with a slightly weaker principle (dubbed the '*Very* Weak Supplementation Principle', or 'VWSP'), which likely captures what's supposed to be intuitive about WSP in the first place: VWSP says that for any x and y, if x has y as a proper part, then there exists a z such that z is a proper part of x and z is not *a part* of y. A second objection is that the existence of the null individual is incompatible with what I call (2014) the 'Local Supervenience on the Composers' (roughly, as a matter of necessity, for any two things that differ qualitatively there is a qualitative difference in the things that compose them). But as I note, we can still have *Global* Supervenience on the Composers (roughly, any two worlds that agree on how their simples are and stand to each other will agree on how everything is, qualitatively), which might be all we are justified in believing anyway. The local supervenience claim is in tension with many constitutionalist views, which would allow things like Lumpl and Goliath to differ qualitatively even though they are composed of the very same things.

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