A bronze statue is a lump of bronze – or so it might appear. But appearances are not always to be trusted, and this one is notoriously problematic. To see why, imagine a bronze statue (perhaps a statue of David) and ask yourself: Which lump of bronze is the statue? Presumably, it is the lump that makes up the statue (or, as we say, the lump that constitutes the statue). After all, why should the statue be any other lump of bronze? But if that is right, if the statue is the lump of bronze that constitutes it, then why can the lump of bronze survive being melted down whereas the statue it constitutes cannot? It seems that in fact the bronze statue is not the lump of bronze that constitutes it, since the statue and the lump of bronze have different persistence conditions. But then is it some other lump of bronze? Is it a lump of bronze at all? These questions are troubling; they appear to have no easy answers.

The puzzle I have just described raises what I have elsewhere called the “problem of material constitution” (or “PMC” for short). The PMC arises whenever it appears that an object a and an object b share all of the same parts and yet are essentially related to those parts in different ways. Such situations are puzzling because, as in the example above, we are tempted to say both that a is identical with b and that a is distinct from b.

In this paper, I will present and defend what I take to be the most plausible solution to the PMC. I will concede that, for example, in the region occupied by our statue of David, there really is a statue and there really is a lump of bronze; but I will deny that affirming these two claims carries all of the unpalatable consequences many philosophers think that it does. In particular, I will deny that in saying that there is a lump of bronze in the region we are committed to the claim that there is something in the region that has the essential properties associated with the kind lump of bronze; hence I will

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also deny that in saying that there is a statue in the region and that there is a lump of bronze in the region, we are committed to there being two objects in the region.

My solution is not original. It makes its first appearance in the contemporary literature in Burke 1994a and receives further development in Burke 1994b and 1996. But there still remains much to be said on its behalf. In his articles, Burke shows that rejecting certain plausible theses about sortals enables us to solve some of the puzzles that raise the PMC. In the present article, I will show that rejecting a single plausible thesis about kind membership enables us to solve every puzzle that raises the PMC.

I will begin with some preliminary remarks explaining how and why my discussion of the solution differs terminologically and otherwise from Michael Burke’s. I will then go on to present the solution, first by showing how it solves the lump/statue puzzle, then by showing how it solves every puzzle that raises the PMC. Finally, I will respond to what seems to be the most important challenge facing proponents of this solution: the challenge of providing a satisfactory account of “dominant kinds”.

1. PRELIMINARIES

In his 1994b, Michael Burke argues that the lump/statue puzzle can be solved by rejecting what he calls the “standard account of the relations among objects, sorts, sortals, and persistence conditions”. This is roughly the solution that I will be defending as well, but I part from Burke in my statement of the thesis to be rejected.

According to Burke, the following three propositions stand at the heart of the account to be rejected:

(1) Associated with every sortal is a set of persistence conditions.

(2) Objects that satisfy a given sortal invariably have the persistence conditions associated with that sortal.

(3) Two sortals are co-satisfiable (as are ‘kitten’ and ‘cat’) only if the persistence conditions associated with the one are the same as the persistence conditions associated with the other.