

Matter and mixtures

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In this talk, I consider various conceptions of what matter is, taking into account the particular case of mixtures like lemonade.

Portions of matter and mixtures are typically referred to by mass nouns, such *water*, *gold*, and *lemonade*. So in section 1, I present the two main accounts that have been proposed in order to characterize their semantics. The singularist approach treats them as singular terms referring to mereological sums (e.g. Link 1983). The non-singularist approach is based on the idea that, together with plurals, mass nouns have the ability to refer to one or several things at once (e.g. Nicolas 2008). As we will see, adopting one approach or the other constrains what can be thought about matter and mixtures.

In section 2, I present Barnett's (2004) reasons for arguing that mereological sums are inadequate to capture our intuitions concerning the identity of portions of mixtures over time.

In section 3, I discuss how the non-singularist approach can deal with mixtures. I show that it must treat nouns of mixtures as collective, temporary predicates.

Then in section 4, I turn to chemistry, the science of matter and its transformations, to examine how it can help us clarify these issues. My guide is the work of Needham (2010). Once his perspective on chemistry is adopted, the metaphysical issues raised by Barnett concerning matter and mixtures appear in a very different light.

Bibliography

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