

# PHILOSOPHICAL STUDIES

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VOLUME XIV                      Contents January–February 1963                      NUMBERS 1–2

*Bare Particulars by* Edwin B. Allaire, STATE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

*Does Modal Logic Rest upon a Mistake? by* R. M. Martin, UNIVERSITY OF BONN  
and UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS

*Indirect Speech Again by* A. N. Prior, MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY

*Indirect Speech: A Rejoinder to Prof. A. N. Prior by* L. Jonathan Cohen,  
QUEEN'S COLLEGE, OXFORD

*Baier's Test for Practical Rules Re-Examined by* David Barry Lyons,  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

*A Note on Commitment by* Lennart Aqvist, UNIVERSITY OF UPPSALA, SWEDEN

*Lewis' Imperatives of Right by* William K. Frankena, UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

*A Note on Austin's Performative Theory of Knowledge by* Bernard Mayo,  
UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

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## *Bare Particulars*

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CONSIDER 'this is red,' asserted truly of a colored disc. Some philosophers claim that the sentence refers to a fact consisting of two (kinds of) entities, an individual (bare particular) and a character (universal), referred to by 'this' and 'red,' respectively. They claim further that the two entities stand in the exemplification relation, represented by 'is.' Currently, that claim is

widely rejected. Underlying the many arguments supporting that rejection is a rather simple idea which Russell once expressed: "One is tempted to regard 'This is red' as a subject-predicate proposition; but if one does so, one finds that 'this' becomes a substance, an unknowable something in which predicates inhere . . ." <sup>1</sup>

Though awkwardly expressed, Russell's point is clear: The individual-character analysis is at odds with the empirical tradition. That is, if one claims that 'this is red' is a subject-predicate proposition *in the sense that 'this' and 'red' refer to unanalyzable entities of different ontological kinds*, then one has violated the Principle of Acquaintance (PA), <sup>2</sup> a basic tenet of empiricism. One is not acquainted with "a something" which could be construed as an entity of a kind different from red, except in the sense that *this* is a "collection" of the same kind of things as red, e.g., square and bright. The heart of Russell's point is thus that the individuals of the individual-character analysis are unknowable in the sense that one is not directly acquainted with them.

I propose to explore whether or not one can propound the individual-character analysis without abandoning the PA. In particular, I want to discuss Bergmann's assertion <sup>3</sup> that "being acquainted with a red spot, and nothing else, one is presented not with just one thing but two, a particular . . . and a character . . ." If I understand Bergmann, he is maintaining precisely what Russell denies, namely, that one is on such occasions acquainted with an individual or, as he prefers to call it, a particular. His motivation is clear. He attempts to reconcile the individual-character analysis with the PA.

Before discussing his attempt it will be helpful to examine the dialectics which give rise to the problem. I will do that by commenting briefly on two other analyses of the disc: (I) The disc is a collection of what has sometimes been called "perfect particulars." 'This is red,' asserted truly of our disc, is analyzed as follows: 'this' refers to a collection of entities, one of which is referred to by 'red.' This latter entity is such that if there were two red discs, there would be two such entities (perfect particulars), each unanalyzable and numerically different from the other. (II) The disc is a collection of characters (universals). 'This is red' is analyzed as in (I), except that the entities are such that if there were two red discs, the two collections would have one member in common, i.e., one member which is literally the same.

Each of these analyses encounters an immediate and, I believe, insurmountable objection. Consider two discs of the same (shade of) color, size, shape and so on. The objection to (I) is that it *cannot account for the sameness* of the discs since the members of the two collections are all unanalyzable and different from each other. In other words, though both collections contain a member referred to by 'red,' (I) provides nothing they have in

common since the members are unanalyzable as well as different. The objection to (II) is that it *cannot account for the difference*, since each collection has literally the same members.<sup>4</sup>

The individual-character analysis encounters neither objection. That is its strength. The difference of the discs is accounted for by each containing a different individual; the sameness, by each containing literally the same characters (as in (II)). The individual-character analysis thus allows one to solve the problems of sameness and difference, at least as they arise in connection with "things." Speaking more traditionally, it provides a solution to the nominalism-realism issue.

Notice that a proponent of the individual-character analysis, or, as I shall henceforth call him, a realist, explicitly grounds (by means of entities) the sameness as well as the difference of the two discs. There must be entities to account for the discs being called the same or, less accurately, there must be a shared something in order to account for the same word ('red') being truly predicated of 'this' and 'that.' The objection to (I) is in fact sometimes expressed as follows. Since the two red entities of the two collections are different and unanalyzable, there is no way of accounting for their being referred to by the same word ('red'). So expressed the objection is misleading. Moreover, it tempts a defender of (I) to appeal mistakenly to a variant of the meaning-is-use doctrine.

The demand for grounding sameness is at present suspect. The suspicion makes (I) seem attractive. Consider two discs of *different shades* of red. In ordinary language, 'red' may be correctly used to refer to either. It appears that a realist, to be consistent, must also ground the sameness of the different shades. For, if he objects to (I) because it does not explain why the same word is used to refer to two "perfect particulars," he must take seriously the same objection in the case of 'red' when applied to different shades. Moreover, since each shade is simple and unanalyzable the ground (i.e., the shared entity) must be of a different kind. Thus, a third kind makes its appearance. For those of a Platonic stripe, this third is a "transcendent universal or concept."<sup>5</sup> Each shade is red by virtue of *participating* in the same transcendent universal, which is the proper referent of 'red.' Hence, either the PA cannot be maintained or we must be acquainted with ("intuit") concepts. The second alternative has been unacceptable to those who embrace the PA.

The realist thus seems doomed to Platonism. The proponent of (I) who denies the need for grounding sameness does not. This seeming advantage has had its effects. Recently, it has been argued that the root of Platonism is the mistaken way in which we sometimes look at language. In particular, the very attempt to ground sameness reveals the mistaken belief that there must be a referent to justify the use of a word. Not even the "referring use"

of a word requires a referent, or so it is argued. What holds in general holds for 'red.' Hence, its use in referring to different shades need not be grounded. Thus, we are told, "the sameness of the shades" merely means that they are referred to by the same word. Moreover, it is claimed, even in the case of things of the same shade each exemplification of it is really different and unanalyzable. In other words, their sameness also consists merely in their being referred to by the same word.<sup>6</sup>

A defender of (I) may thus attempt to dispose of the objection that he cannot account for the sameness of "things" by arguing that the very attempt to account for it is mistaken. The attempt, he holds, inevitably leads to Platonism with all its horrors of transcendent entities. That shows why the use doctrine may be attractive to a defender of (I).

Consider again two discs of the same (shade of) color, size, shape, and so on. Suppose they are shown to you, one to the left of the other. If after a while you are shown them again, you will not be able to tell which is which. In fact, you will not be able to tell whether the two you now see are the two you saw earlier. You can only tell that the two you now see have all the properties that the two you saw earlier had. In other words, taken as such and in themselves, two perfect particulars of the same shade cannot be told apart. That means that in this case at least the sameness is grounded. We know how the realist grounds it. It remains to be shown that he need not therefore ground the sameness of different shades in order to justify the use of 'red' for any of them.

My realist takes advantage of what the use doctrine has taught us, namely, (a) that from the fact that the same word is used to refer to two things it does not *always* follow that the two share an entity. (Indeed, we could decide to use just one word to refer to green and red.) On the other hand, it does not follow (b) that they *never* do. The proponents of (I) rashly infer (b) from (a). Their rashness, I have argued, may be due to their mistaken belief that even (b) commits one to Platonism. Some things, our two discs for example, are the same shade of color. This is not a linguistic fact; i.e., not merely the fact that they are referred to by the same word. They are the same in that they are indistinguishable as such, or, more precisely, one cannot differentiate them by their color alone.

Let us take stock. The problem of analyzing such things as colored discs arises in the context of the realism-nominalism issue. That issue, we saw, cannot really be handled by accounting for the sameness in the discs in terms of the sameness of words. At some point sameness must be grounded in entities. To believe otherwise is to put upon the meaning-is-use doctrine a burden greater than it can bear. Thus, in our case, it remains the first task of analysis to single out the unanalyzable entities which account for the dif-

## BARE PARTICULARS

5

ference and the sameness of the two discs. The second task or step, as in all cases, is to employ the result obtained in the first step to explicate certain philosophical uses of words, thereby dissolving the traditional dialectics. The realistic analysis provides the required grounding. Yet it is tainted. Like Russell, many philosophers claim that they are not acquainted with individuals. The heart of the matter is whether or not Bergmann's claim that one is in fact acquainted with individuals (bare particulars) is defensible or, even, whether it can be made intelligible.

An obvious objection is that the claim merely springs from the dialectical needs it satisfies and is not borne out by a careful inspection of what is in fact presented. Indeed, Bergmann himself invites this objection. "I, of course, have convinced myself that I am actually presented with two things. Yet I am loathe to rest the case on this conviction; for I am also convinced that a very major part of it is dialectical."<sup>7</sup>

One cannot but wonder how one does convince oneself of such matters. In the light of what he himself says, one is indeed tempted to conclude that his conviction is dialectical rather than phenomenological, if I may so express myself. If so, then he has abandoned the PA. Whether or not under the pressure of the dialectic he has actually done that is not my concern. The point is rather whether or not the "description" he proposes can be defended independently of the dialectics.

Phenomenological description is prompted by philosophical puzzles. One turns to the former as a prelude to the dissolution of the latter. The dangers are obvious. One may think that one still describes when in fact one already argues. That makes all alleged descriptions suspect. The best one can do is elaborate them in several ways, always on guard against the various biases that might creep in. Once a description has been accepted, the puzzles must be solved by speaking commonsensically about it. In the course of thus speaking about it, one may well be led to reconsider it. After all, it was prompted by the puzzles. Nevertheless, one must not and cannot give away the game by maintaining that the description is forced upon one by the dialectics. Bergmann in the quoted passage comes dangerously close to doing just that. The most one could say is that the dialectics directs our attention toward what is presented. But it does not and cannot tell us what actually is presented.

A comparison may help to make the point clear. The later Wittgenstein, believing that the philosophical puzzles arise from the misuse of words, undertook to describe their correct use. The misuses are engendered by what he calls misleading grammatical analogies. Once these latter are recognized as such, the philosophical puzzles disappear. This is his basic idea. To speak as before, Wittgenstein's description of correct (and incorrect) use is the

prelude to his solution of the philosophical puzzles. Are then his descriptions unbiased? There is no guarantee. Nor is it reasonable to demand one beforehand. Wittgenstein's description proceeds directly from what he considers a puzzle and thus indirectly from what he considers an illicit use. Thus, the dialectics may have influenced the description. But once more, the best one can do is guard against the biases that may have been introduced. So, too, with phenomenological description. In this regard all philosophers are in the same boat. They all start from what they consider unproblematical or, as it is sometimes put, from what they hold to be commonsensical. With respect to their starting point they must always be vigilant. One cannot do more; one must not do less.

I return to the issue: Can the realistic analysis be defended on phenomenological grounds? It will be well to distinguish between two uses of 'know.' First, there is the use of 'know' in which to know something means to be acquainted with it. Second, there is the use in which to know something means to be able to recognize it. In the second sense individuals as such or in themselves are unknowable. Consider again the two discs and the situation in which you are shown them twice. Since you can only tell that the two you now see have all the properties that the two you saw earlier had, it follows that if each consists of an individual and the several characters it exemplifies, the individuals as such or in themselves are not recognizable or, as I prefer to say, not reidentifiable. The characters are. To express the point differently, two individuals are merely numerically different whereas two characters are intrinsically different as well.

Russell held that individuals are unknowable. A defender of the realistic analysis may take him to have held merely that they are not recognizable, i.e., that they cannot be known in the second sense of 'know.' This, though, is not at all what Russell meant. Rather, in saying that individuals are unknowable, he used 'know' in the first sense. In turn, I hold with Bergmann that while they are indeed unknowable in the second sense they are known in the first. Accordingly, I cannot get away with just maintaining that they are merely numerically different. I must show in what sense one is acquainted with them. Not to recognize this obligation would be to confuse again the two uses of 'know.' Nevertheless, in pointing out that individuals are not recognizable, i.e., are merely numerically different, one has arrived at the heart of the matter. *Individuals are just those entities which do ground the numerical difference of two things which are the same in all (nonrelational) respects.*

Consider once more the two discs. When presented together, they are presented as numerically different. *That difference is presented as is their sameness with respect to shape, (shade of) color, and so on.* What accounts

## BARE PARTICULARS

7

for that difference is the numerically different individuals. No character, or group of characters can do that. Thus, to say that there are individuals is to say that things may be merely numerically different. No matter what description one proposes, the numerical difference of two things which are alike in all (nonrelational) respects must be accounted for. Consider (II). To claim that both discs are but collections of literally the same universals does not account for the *thisness* and *thatness* which are implicitly referred to in speaking of them as two collections. That is, the two collections of characters—if one persists in speaking that way—are, as presented, numerically different. Clearly, therefore, something other than a character must also be presented. That something is what proponents of the realistic analysis call a bare particular. Or, perhaps better, that is their explication of ‘bare particular.’

One difficulty remains. Bergmann claims that in being presented with one red spot one is presented with two things. That may be misleading. The most prevalent use of ‘two’ carries a spatial connotation. That is, if there are two things then they are spatially related. Yet exemplification, the “relation” obtaining between a character and an individual, is obviously not spatial. Thus, the sense in which there are two things is merely the sense in which there are two characters (red and square) in the presentation of a red square. For red and square are not spatially related. Nor are an individual and the character or characters it exemplifies. If one should insist that the two characters are in fact spatially related, arguing that they are *at the same place*, I merely ask him what he means by ‘place.’ There is only one answer I can think of which would help. A *place* as such is itself an entity. But, then, this answer makes places into bare particulars. This piece of dialectics is well known.

Consider again ‘this is red,’ asserted truly of a colored disc. To what does ‘this’ refer? That it does refer to something is obvious. It does not always refer to the entity referred to by ‘red.’ That is, ‘is’ in this utterance does not always stand for identity. Hence, ‘this’ can only refer to one of two things: an individual or a collection of characters, one of which is red.<sup>8</sup> We know already that the latter alternative fails, for in the case of two collections of characters the members of which are the same, the numerical difference between the two collections is left unaccounted for. The realistic analysis does account for it. Moreover, two individuals are presented in the sense that the two collections are presented as numerically different. That is not to deny, though, that individuals are merely numerically different from each other and thus not reidentifiable as such. That they are explains why they have been overlooked so often.

I have argued that one can propound a realistic analysis without abandon-

ing the PA. Moreover, one can single out the bare particulars without using 'exist' philosophically, thus avoiding the dialectics of the nominalism-realism issue. In trying to do this, I described, or tried to describe, the sort of entity an individual is. Positively, individuals are the carriers of numerical difference as directly presented to us. Negatively, individuals are not rudimentary Aristotelian substances. Thus, they are not the sort of things Russell probably had in mind when he denied that they can be known. To the sort of thing he had in mind Locke's phrase "a something I know not what" does indeed apply. To what I mean by an individual, it does not. To one who accepts the PA, Locke's phrase provides sufficient ground for rejecting the entities he speaks of. The individuals I want to keep from being overlooked are not such entities. That is why one need not abandon the PA in order to maintain that we are presented with bare particulars.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Bertrand Russell, *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1948), p. 97.

<sup>2</sup> The PA states that the indefinable terms of any "ontological" description must refer to entities with which one is directly acquainted. Furthermore, "an unanalyzable entity" is explicated to mean an entity represented by an indefinable term.

<sup>3</sup> Gustav Bergmann, "Strawson's Ontology," *Journal of Philosophy*, 57:616 (September 1960).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Gustav Bergmann, "Russell on Particulars," *Philosophical Review*, 56:59-72 (1947). Reprinted in *The Metaphysics of Logical Positivism* (London: Longmans, Green, 1954), pp. 197-214.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of concepts, see Reinhardt Grossman, "Conceptualism," *Review of Metaphysics*, 14:243-54 (December 1960).

<sup>6</sup> This explication of sameness may well explicate the *flatus-vocis* doctrine of some medievals.

<sup>7</sup> Bergmann, "Strawson's Ontology," p. 616.

<sup>8</sup> As I have shown, the "perfect-particular" analysis (i.e., (I)) is unacceptable because it does not account for sameness.

## *Does Modal Logic Rest upon a Mistake?*

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PHILOSOPHERS differ enormously as to just what they wish to include under "formal logic." Some wish to include the whole of mathematics, as developed, say, within the simplified theory of types or within an axiomatic set