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AGAINST BARE PARTICULARS

A RESPONSE TO MORELAND AND PICKAVANCE

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Abstract

In a recent article [Mertz 2001] in this journal I argued for the virtues of a realist ontology of relation instances (unit attributes). A major strength of this ontology is an assay of ontic ('material') predication that yields an account of individuation without the necessity of positing and defending 'bare particulars'. The crucial insight is that it is the unifying agency or combinatorial aspect of a relation instance as predicable that is for ontology the *principium individuationis* [Mertz 2002; 1996]. Or in short, what is ontically predicable, precisely as such, is the cause of individuation. As a preface to this positive doctrine I offered arguments against the coherence of bare particulars as defended in an article by J. P. Moreland [1998]. In a reply contained in this issue Moreland and Timothy Pickavance (hereafter M/P) propose to answer my objections [2002]. The response that follows provides reasons why, I contend, M/P have not succeeded in parrying my objections to bare particulars.

As a explanatory context consider the reasoning that leads to bare particulars. Everything that can be truly predicated grammatically ('formally') of a particular *a* involves a repeatable intension, monadic or polyadic (here *a* would be a relatum). On the assumption that one or more such intensions are, under some theory of ontic predication, proper constituents of this 'thick' particular *a* whereby they contribute to its inherent being (its 'suchness'), then there must be as well one or more non-intensional proper constituents of *a* to account for its unrepeatability (its 'thisness' or *haecceitas*). Simplicity of theory would dictate one such individuator or 'particularizer', p_a, with all of *a*'s characterizing intensions somehow united to it. So, at some atomic ontic level of thick particulars there must be individuals *a* whose individuators p_a are themselves without characterizing intensions as proper constituents—all such p_a's thus being 'natureless' and in this sense 'bare'. For, if an individuator p_a were otherwise then it would be 'thick' enough—in having at least one constituent intension—to require, under the same analysis as its subsuming thick particular *a*, a further constituent individuator p_a', and this begins a vicious regress unless stopped at some ultimate level of intensionless individuators. For M/P the 'atomic level' of intensioned entities includes ordinary static objects of experience (e.g., classical 'substances', such as apple *a*), as well as, apparently, events and quality-instances, whereas I contend that it is located exclusively at the finer level of relation (including property) instances, the latter making up hierarchies of structures that include ordinary objects.

Now it is at this point in the analysis that we must answer the pivotal question: What is the nature of an individuator p_a and its union with intensions F, G, H, . . . , that together constitute (atomic) thick individual *a*? The perditious road to bare particulars starts with the assumption that individuator p_a of *a* is an entity like *a* in the sense of being 'substance-like', i.e., it itself is not a predicable entity but can only be the subject of such. The common and erroneous assumption is that *a* and p_a in being both particulars are necessarily both non-predicable entities. The consequence of this assumption is to then *require* the posit of a dyadic relation predicable jointly of p_a and each of the intensions F, G, H, . . . , to account for their unification essential to the emergence of *a*. M/P call this posited unifier the *tied-to* relation, and distinguish it rightly from what they term the *rooted-in* relation that exists between thick particular *a* and the intensions F, G, H, . . ., insofar as they characterize *a*, what would standardly be called 'exemplification'. It is the ontic separation of every intension from an individuator p_a (as such an absolutely qualityless substratum) and the subsequent forced introduction of an intermediary tied-to 'relation' that result in incoherence. What masks this incoherence from traditional ontologists generally, and M/P in particular, is their failure to recognize the full reality and nature of relations as ontic predicates analogous to, but having as a diminished limiting case, monadic properties, a theme we shall see repeated below.

Central to both M/P's challenges and my responses is M/P's construal of the tied-to and rooted-in relations. I find the following theses more or less explicit in M/P's text. For (pure) monadic properties F, G, H, . . ., *a* an atomic thick particular ('thick' with at least one constituent intension), and p_a an individuator of particular *a*, then:

(1) An atomic thick particular *a* is the structured whole that emerges when a set of properties, F, G, H, . . ., are linked by the tied-to relation to a shared bare particular p_a (analogous, say, to the whole consisting of spokes united to a hub).
(2) For every F and *a*, F(*a*) if and only if Rooted-in(F,*a*)—i.e., for every F and *a*, proposition F(*a*) is true (i.e., F is exemplified by *a*) if and only if F is rooted-in *a*.
(3) For every *a* there exists a unique individuator p_a, such that for every F, Rooted-in(F,*a*) if and only if Tied-to(F,p_a)—i.e., every *a* has a unique bare particular p_a such that, for every property F, F is rooted-in *a* if and only if F is Tied-to p_a.
(4) For every F and p_a, it is not the case that Rooted-in(F,p_a)—i.e., no property F is rooted-in any bare particular p_a.
(5) Necessarily, for every p_a there exists an F such that Tied-to(F,p_a)—i.e., bare particulars cannot exist without 'having' some property or other.
(6) For every p_a there does not exist an F such that, necessarily, Tied-to(F,p_a),—i.e., bare particulars have no necessary properties.

Despite the fact that M/P classify both the tied-to and rooted-in relations as forms of 'exemplification', this is in regard to the tied-to 'relation' an erroneous use of the term and one that misleads M/P in their analysis. In its standard use, e.g., for a monadic property to be *singly exemplified* by a subject *a*, or a dyadic relation R to be *jointly exemplified* by an ordered pair of subjects ⟨*b*,*c*⟩ (e.g., F and *a* in the fact that Rooted-in(F,*a*)), the predicate intension (F or R) has a role in revealing something about the nature(s) of the subject(s). This is so because *in a fact the union of an ontic predicate and its subject(s) require and presuppose of both a reciprocal compatibility of specific qualitative contents*. To know the

facts that F(*a*) or R(*b*,*c*) is to know a compatibility of content or intensional make up of F and *a*, or R and *b* and *c*, respectively, a mutual fit based upon what makes these entities to be what they are—what is constitutive of them in their total being *sine qua non*, essential and accidental—and, by contrast, what is absent in a mere list or set, {F,*a*}, or {R,*b*,*c*}. This is true even with so-called 'external relations' such as *left-of*. The fact that *a* is to the left of *b* requires that *a* and *b* be spatial entities arranged in a certain way, but that they not be numbers or concepts. The *square-root-of* relation is predicably compatible with certain pairs of numbers, but not cabbages or daydreams, though the latter two are predicably compatible with the intension *is-the-subject-matter-for*. This is the basis for D. M. Armstrong's assertion that states of affairs represent a non-mereological form of composition [1997: 118ff].

In regard to monadic properties the 'compatibility of natures' requisite of ontic predication is the basis for M/P saying that a property F is rooted-in that subject, i.e., thesis 2. However, M/P's acceptance of the containment model of predication and the consequent depreciation of polyadic relations prevents them from seeing the relational extension of 2 to:

(2′) For every R and *a*, if R(. . .,*a*,. . .) then Rooted-in(R,*a*)—i.e., if relation R has *a* as a relatum then R is rooted-in *a*.

Indeed, M/P seemingly accept what implies 2′ when they assert that 'Whether or not two entities can stand in a relation to each other is a function of the entities themselves, not the relation per se.' (I would change the last phrase to read '. . ., along with the relation intension itself.') Now let us apply these insights to the tied-to relation itself. First, it cannot in fact be a relation in any standard sense because it cannot be exemplified in the above way. For if tied-to were a standard relation then, just as F being exemplified by *a* implies that Rooted-in(F,*a*) by thesis 2, the tied-to relation being jointly exemplified by F and p_a implies by 2′ that it is rooted-in each of its relata, F and p_a , i.e., Rooted-in(Tied-to,F) and Rooted-in(Tied-to,p_a). Yet the proposition Rooted-in(Tied-to,p_a) cannot be true since by thesis 4 nothing is rooted-in a bare particular p_a. So then what can the tied-to 'relation' be? The only alternative is that in any 'fact' in which it obtains it must provide a non-exemplifying unity, at least in regard to one or more relata, i.e., the unity of arbitrary concatenation or blank association found in a list or class, e.g., {F,*a*} or {R,*b*,*c*}. The unity and hence existence of such associative wholes *qua* wholes is independent of the natures of the elements, only the elements' existences is presupposed, and, of course, this type of unifier—in effect, a 'bare linking'—is precisely what is necessitated by a 'relatum' that is a natureless bare particular. Indeed, M/P have chosen accurately the term 'tied-to' which means 'linked to independently of the content or natures of the so unified entities', though it is here externally restricted to the context of intensions and associated bare particulars. This being so we have the following problem given in my original critique of Moreland. Let F and G be contrary properties (e.g., round and square, or red and yellow), then just as we can arbitrarily associate them with a bare particular p_a to form sets {F,p_a} and {G,p_a}, they can be joined by the here 'subject-indifferent' linking of the tied-to relation relative to p_a, i.e., Tied-to(F,p_a) and Tied-to(G,p_a). But then by theses 3 and 2 it follows that thick particular *a* has contrary properties, e.g., is both round and square, and this is absurd. This line of critique does not occur to M/P because under their

containment model of exemplification only monadic properties can be properly exemplified and are therefore relevant to the rooted-in relation. In sum, no matter how one attempts to construe the tied-to relation disaster results.

We are now in a position to critique M/P's specific objections to the above analysis. First, they assert that the attribution of contrary properties to bare particulars is parried by the observation that 'the impossibility of the co-exemplification of contrary properties is a function of the nature of the properties themselves; it is not a function of the nature of the object that may or may not have those properties'. There are two claims here, the first, in two parts, is that the very contents or intensions of two contrary properties (e.g., round and square) prevent them from being co-exemplified by the same subject they would be qualifying (to which I agree), and, from the broader context, that the tied-to relation is like the rooted-in relation as both being species of exemplification (to which I disagree). In my critique above, the possession-of-contraries argument was introduced after the latter assumption was shown to be false, i.e., introduced while examining the remaining alternative that the tied-to relation was simply a bare linking. The second claim is that the nature of an entity is irrelevant to the fact that contrary properties are not simultaneous characteristics of it. This claim is irrelevant to the above argument, but is literally false, and, based upon another statement, apparently not what M/P strictly intend. The second claim is that, for example, on the assumption that disc *a* is round, which by thesis 2 implies rooted-in(Round,*a*), that the nature of *a*—what makes it to be what it is—which surely must mean what is rooted-in it, and hence includes the intension round, is irrelevant to the truth that disc *a* is not square, and this contradicts the first half of M/P's claim. Yet elsewhere, M/P assert their agreement with what they take to be my view: '[It is] the subject *qua* having some property that is the decisive factor for what can subsequently be predicated of that subject already in possession of some property.' It is significant to note that M/P's second claim contradicts what would be the monadic version of the previously quoted claim M/P makes concerning polyadic relations: 'Whether or not two entities can stand in a relation to each other is a function of the entities themselves, not the relation per se.' The limiting monadic version of the latter assertion would be: whether or not an entity can have a property is a function of the entity, not the property per se. This is an opposite but equally erroneous extreme to the second claim above. That M/P do not see the inconsistency here stems, again, from the confusion arising from their failure to see *n*-adic ontic predicates as being all of a type for $n \geq 1$. I reiterate the point that whether or not a subject or subjects can have a property or a relation, respectively, is a joint function of both and their intensional compatibility.

Relatedly, the fact that the intensions of two contrary properties prevents them from being co-exemplified by the same subject does not prevent them from being related by the same relation to the same subject. This was the point of the example in my original article that Contrary-to(Round,Triangle) and Contrary-to(Square,Triangle). The truth of these propositions turn on the requisite compatibility of the relation intension contrary-to with the relata intensions. The purpose of the example was to display the equal *possibility* that both Tied-to(Round,p_a) and Tied-to(Square,p_a) could be true. Based upon this possibility my further point was that because the tied-to 'relation' is but blank association, at least in regard to the bare particular relatum, and so not limited or conditioned by it, then there is a compatibility between the relation, any intension, and any bare particular, and so the propositions Tied-to(Round,p_a) and Tied-to(Square,p_a) would *in fact* be true. Hence

the contradiction that the corresponding thick particular *a* is both round and square. As a response M/P put forth what is a Wittgensteinian thesis (*Tractatus*, 2.062 [1961: 13]) that 'Just because two entities can (or cannot) stand in one relation to each other, nothing whatever follows about whether or not those entities can stand in another relation to each other.' I have difficulty in seeing the relevance of the thesis to my argument, but relevant or not, the thesis is false, and I propose, for ontology, profoundly so. For example, the fact that *a* is the father of *b* implies the obtaining of the fact that *a* is genetically similar (in some specifiable sense) to *b*, and the absence of the facts that *a* is the mother of *b*, *a* is a sibling of *b*, *b* was born before *a*, *a* is a prime divisor of *b*, etc. Further, facts resulting from the obtaining of properties and relations among sets of subjects are themselves relata for further emergent properties and relations, necessary and contingent, to form what is structured reality. I note that, analogous to what we have seen above, M/P's own claim of the impossibility of the co-exemplification of contrary properties being a joint function of the properties would contradict the monadic version of the Wittgensteinian thesis: just because an entity has a property (e.g., round), nothing whatever follows about whether or not it can have another property (e.g., square). Once again we have the double standard born of a depreciation of polyadic predicates.

Just as there are insurmountable difficulties resulting from the blank association character of the tied-to relation, there are equally serious problems with the concomitant absolutely 'natureless' nature of bare particulars. For example, any bare particular p_a in having no properties characterizing it has no (efficient) causal properties, nor do the properties (intensions) F, G, H, . . ., as intensions, have causal properties. Moreover, the mere concatenation (which is the most the tied-to 'relation' can effect) can produce no more than a list-like whole with no causal properties beyond those of its elements. Yet, the latter type of wholes is what thick particulars (e.g., apple *a*) as suppose to be, and so absurdly they can have no causal properties. (The same argument applies for the property of spatial extension.)

In addition, I have argued that despite the fact that, to fill their theoretical role, bare particulars are posited as having no nature or characterizing intensions whatsoever—no intensions rooted-in them, they in fact must have properties and have them necessarily, e.g., unrepeatability, simplicity, the property of not having any other properties, and the property of being the constituent of at most one object at a time. This contradicts M/P's thesis 6 above: Bare particulars have no necessary properties. To maintain thesis 6, M/P claim that, first, to assert its denial is to confuse this denial with the truth of thesis 5 (that necessarily, a bare particular has some property or other), and second, that the above 'properties' of unrepeatability, simplicity, etc., are not in fact genuine properties and so constitute no counter-examples to thesis 6. Now, I agree with M/P that it is a condition on the existence of any entity whosoever that it have at least one intension that gives it qualitative content, though I would insist that it must be rooted-in the entity and not simply tied-to it as they assert in thesis 5. Be this as it may, it does not parry my argument against bare particulars. What would deflect it would be, as M/P maintain, that the above 'properties' are short-hand for negative grammatical or linguistic predicates, e.g., 'unrepeatability' being short for 'not repeatable', and 'simplicity' being short for 'not complex', and where these negative formal predicates would not be or correspond to material ontic predicates of the referents of their grammatical subjects. I note that M/P must eliminate as properties simplicity, the property of not having other properties, and

the property of being the constituent of at most one object at a time, otherwise they would have to be at least tied-to each bare particular p_a and so by theses 3 and 2 would have to be exemplified by the thick particular *a*, thus resulting in contradictions. (That M/P do in fact seek to eliminate these properties is indirect evidence that theses 2 and 3 properly represent their views.) Now, I agree with M/P that negative grammatical predicates 'not F' are not themselves elements of entities but rather assert at the level of propositions the absence of F as the intension of an ontic predicate at the level of facts. However, I disagree with M/P in proposing that the negative grammatical predicate 'not F' in a true proposition '*a* is not F' must *correspond to* a specific positive nature of *a* marked by at least one positive ontic predicate G of *a*, these being the grounds or 'truth-makers' for the negative proposition. The proposition that 'apple *a* is not green' is true because apple *a* is characterized by an intension, say red, that is contrary to green and so excludes the latter from qualifying *a*. If it were otherwise, truth of negative assertions would be arbitrary denial and would tell us nothing about reality. This means that even if all of the above grammatical predicates of unrepeatability, simplicity, etc., truly assertable of a bare particular p_a are negatives, they must correspond to positive characteristics that contribute to its total being, and hence, contra its theoretical mandate, p_a has a contentful nature.

Moreover, at least three of the four mentioned properties are independent of each other, i.e., a subject can be characterized by any one of them without being characterized by any of the others, and this implies that the corresponding positive characteristics of bare particular p_a that ground the negative grammatical predicates must be distinct in their ontic contribution to p_a, and hence p_a is complex, again contrary to its theoretical mandate. Finally in this regard, I note the irony in the fact that the definition of the predicate 'is-a-Bare-Particular' has as a conjunctive component a predicate negative in apparently the same way that M/P claim 'unrepeatability', 'simplicity', etc., are negative predicates, i.e., 'is a bare particular' is equivalent to 'is a particular *and* does not exemplify (have rooted-in it) any property'. Because one conjunct does not represent a real property, presumably neither does the entire conjunction, and hence 'is-a-Bare-Particular' does not represent a genuine property, one neither rooted-in nor tied-to any subject. Hence, there are no bare particulars!

I would respond briefly to the two remaining points made by M/P. First, in regard to the posit of the tied-to relation in his original article I had charged Moreland with being ad hoc. My claim was that there is no independent motivation for the tied-to 'relation', it being a construct distinct from all other relations and intended only to save bare particulars from contradiction. I have tried to reinforce this point above. M/P reject the charge and characterize the introduction of the tied-to relation in terms of 'discovery': they talk as if with the use of the proper analysis as an instrument one can, with enough attention, bring into conceptual view what is the pre-existing tied-to relation. My counter claim is that under their analysis what one will discover is *the need* to have certain (conflicting) characteristics accounted for, but not *an entity* that has these characteristics. The same is true with the posit of bare particulars: an analysis that requires the principle of individuation of a thick particular *a* be itself a non-predicable particular, and requires that the distinction in abstraction of repeatable intensions from the individuator reflect a real complexity in *a*, generates a set of incoherent needs, but does not spotlight an entity that fulfills them. The concept of 'bare particular', like that of 'phlogiston', stems from a troubled theory rendered obsolete by subsequent advancements—against 'bare particulars'

the advance is the recognition of the combinatorial and individuating agency of ontic predication.

Secondly and reinforcing this last point, Moreland in his original article and M/P again in this issue make use of the Principle of Constituent Identity: If entities contain the same constituents, then they are identical. Paralleling an argument from set theory demonstrating that the null set is unique, I had argued that bare particulars satisfy the antecendent by default and so are all identical to a single one. M/P reply that the principle must be interpreted as applying to entities that have only proper constituents. So restricted it is the case that my original argument is nullified. Yet, the question is: Why, other than to save bare particulars, must the principle be so restricted? Under the theory of bare particulars it is simply a 'brute fact' that two internally simple bare particulars are numerically distinct, and so accepting the theory one would have to restrict the constituent principle. But whether to accept the theory is precisely the issue, and, it should be noted, the global applicability of the constituent principle is retained under the individuation by combinatorial predication assay. In this regard, I would refer to an instructive and apparent counter example to the restricted constituent principle proposed in the literature, viz., if R is non-symmetric (e.g., R = Love) and the facts that R(a,b) and R(b,a) both obtain (e.g., a loves b and b loves a), then these facts have apparently exactly the same constituents yet are not identical, one ceasing to obtain while the other not. What saves the Principle of Constituent Identity is the insight that, though the predicate intensions are identical in each fact, the combinatorial, predicable agency among the relata (including ordering) conditioned by this intension is in each fact numerically distinct and unique to that fact. This means that ontic predication is a cause of individuation of attributes and subsequently of the subjects they characterize. In sum, I propose that the theory of bare particulars remains severely challenged and, more importantly, is unnecessary as an account of individuation.

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