THE EXISTENCE OF UNIVERSALS

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Few philosophical issues have proved as persistent as the problem of universals. In virtually every period in the history of philosophy the existence of universals has been a central focus of philosophical concern; and like any recurrent issue, the problem has received different interpretations in different historical contexts. It is, nonetheless, possible to abstract a common theme from the variety of interpretations; for whatever else has been at issue, the concept of a multiply exemplifiable object has always been pivotal in the debate over universals. One party to the dispute (the *Platonist* or *metaphysical realist*) contends that our ordinary notions of property, action, relation, and kind all presuppose an ontology of multiply exemplifiable objects. Different objects, realists have claimed, can *possess* one and the same property; different persons can *perform* one and the same action; different things can *belong to* one and the same kind; and different n-tuples (i.e., pairs, triples, etc.) of objects can *enter into* one and the same relation. According to the realist, their jointly possessing, performing, belonging to, and entering into are all cases of multiple exemplification; and what they jointly possess, perform, belong to, or enter into is a *universal*.

Nominalists, on the other hand, have denied the possibility of multiple exemplification and with it the reality of universals. Some have agreed that objects can and do possess properties, enter into relations, and perform actions, but have contended that it is impossible for different objects to possess numerically one property, for different persons to perform numerically one action, and for different n-tuples of objects to enter into numerically one relation; whereas, other nominalists have refused to attribute any ontological status whatever to properties, ac-

tions, kinds, and relations. Nominalists of this persuasion concede that sentences like:

(1) The Taj Mahal is white,
(2) Socrates was the teacher of Plato,
(3) Socrates and Plato are both men, and
(4) The Dillon brothers robbed banks

can be used to make true statements but deny that their truth presupposes the existence of such things (whether universal or not) as the color white, the relation of being a teacher, the kind *man*, and the action of robbing a bank.

Metaphysical realists have, of course, tried to combat nominalism by argument; and although their arguments have been formulated in a variety of ways, they have tended to stress a fairly narrow range of facts. Central here have been facts about predication, resemblance, and abstract reference. But since they play such an important role in the defense of realism, most of the nominalist enterprise is geared to show that the facts in question fail to support an ontology of multiply exemplifiable objects. The consequence has been that the notions of predication, resemblance, and abstract reference have dominated discussions about the existence of universals. Their centrality in the traditional debate makes them a useful focus for examining the realism-nominalism controversy; and in what follows I shall employ them in this way.

I

Throughout the history of philosophy, metaphysical realists have pointed to the linguistic activity of predication in support of their view. They have argued that the predicate-expressions of true propositions must be construed as having referential force and that their referents must be identified with universals. We can get at the view they were defending if we focus on subject-predicate sentences like the following:

(1) Socrates is wise,
(2) W. V. Quine is a philosopher, and
(3) Richard Nixon is married to Thelma C. Ryan.

It is indisputable that we use sentences like (1)–(3) in making true statements. Employing a sentence like one of these, we pick out a particular and go on to say something about it—to describe it, to classify it, to relate it to something else. Now, these two linguistic activities—referring to a particular and saying something about it—map nicely onto the linguistic expressions out of which sentences like (1)–(3) are composed. In the case of (1), for example, we pick out an object by using the expression 'Socrates'; and by employing the expression 'is wise', we go on and say something about that object.

This account suggests that among the constituent-terms of (1) it is only the expression 'Socrates' that plays a genuinely referring role, but realists have found such an account unsatisfactory. Using (1) we manage to say something true; and the truth of what we say here is grounded in non-linguistic fact. Now, realists have contended that if we are to explain how the "facts of the matter" dictate the truth involved, we must hold that 'is wise' also refers to some non-linguistic object; and they have claimed that this object must be one that stands to Socrates in some special relationship, a relationship that justifies us in saying of him that he is wise.

Realists have, however, been quick to point out that predicates have generality of application; they can, that is, be applied in one and the same sense to different objects. The use of 'is wise', for example, is not limited to (1); the expression can play a role in a sentence like 'Plato is wise' as well; and a sentence like this can, quite compatibly with the truth of (1), be used in making a true claim about the world. But if the claim made in using this sentence is true, the argument sketched out above applies in its case. The expression, 'is wise', as it functions there, must be construed as having referential force; it must pick out an entity so related to Plato as to justify the claim that he is wise. But, according to the realist, it would be wrong to think that 'is wise' takes as its referents different objects in the two cases. What we say about Plato when we apply the predicate 'is wise' to him is precisely what we say about Socrates when we predicate that expression of him; and that, the realist insists, is to say that there is a common ontological ground supporting the two claims. We must hold, then, that there is some one entity which stands in a special relation to both Socrates and Plato;

and it is that entity which the expression 'is wise' takes as its referent in the sentences in question.

But what sort of relationship is it that obtains between the referent of 'is wise' and the individuals, Plato and Socrates, of which that expression can be truly predicated? Although some realists have been wary of using the expression 'relationship' here, they have all agreed that the tie in question is one of exemplification. Plato and Socrates (indeed, all the objects to which 'is wise' is applicable) exemplify or instantiate the entity which that predicate refers to or picks out. But, then, the referent of 'is wise' is a multiply exemplifiable entity, a universal; and the exemplification which binds various objects to this universal grounds the truth of the claim that each, in turn, is wise. The realist, of course, wants to hold that this is a perfectly general point, one holding for all linguistic expressions which function predicatively in true subject-predicate sentences. Qua functioning in those contexts, they refer to universals; and the universal to which such an expression refers is one that is exemplified by all and only the objects to which it truly applies.[1]

The thesis the realist wants to defend, then, is twofold. He wants to say (a) that where a predicate-term '*F*' can be truly applied to a group of objects (*a* . . . *n*), there is some universal, *U*, which *a* . . . *n* exhibit or exemplify; and he wants to claim (b) that when a predicate-term '*F*' functions predicatively in a true subject-predicate sentence, it serves to pick out or refer to that universal, *U*, which is exhibited by all and only the objects of which it is truly predicable. Clearly (b) presupposes the truth of (a); for the proponent of (b) assumes what is stated by (a)—that behind every genuine predicate-expression there is a universal which is exemplified by all and only the objects of which the expression is predicable; (b) merely makes the additional point that when predicate-terms actually function as such, they refer to the universals that underlie their applicability. We are not surprised, then, to find that nominalists have directed the brunt of their criticisms against (a); nevertheless, one occasionally

[1]As far as I know, the argument I present here has never been presented formally by any philosopher, although something very much like it seems to underlie much of what P. F. Strawson says in the second half of *Individuals*. In this argument and in what follows in this introduction, I concentrate on "predicable" universals. For an account of non-predicable universals, see Nicholas Wolterstorff's "On the Nature of Universals," published for the first time in this anthology.

finds nominalists criticizing that part of (b) which is independent of (a)—the claim that when they function as such, predicate-expressions refer to universals. The claim here is that no expression can function as a referring device unless it can serve as the subject of a sentence in which we predicate of its referent some other linguistic expression. Nominalists, however, are quick to point out that predicate-expressions are simply not syntactically suited to play the role of subject-term. Neither 'is wise' nor 'wise', for example, can function as subject in a subject-predicate sentence. They are both general rather than singular terms and so are restricted to the predicate position in subject-predicate discourse. But since predicate-expressions cannot stray from the predicate position, the claim made in (b) that when functioning predicatively they refer to universals is false.

Now, while this line of argument makes a legitimate point, it is easy to over-estimate its force. What the argument shows is that one cannot construe the referential tie between predicate and universal as a special case of the relation between a name and its bearer. While names can and characteristically do function as subject-terms, predicate-expressions cannot stray from predicate to subject position. But while some realists have held that terms functioning as predicate name universals,[2] there have been proponents of (b) who have been unwilling to adopt this view. These realists have insisted that predicate-terms can be referentially tied to universals without serving as their names. On this view, where a term '*F*' functions predicatively, it is possible, without less of content, to replace '*F*' by an expression of the form 'exemplifies *F*-ness'. Thus, where it functions as a predicate, one can substitute for 'is wise' the expression 'exemplifies wisdom'; similarly, for 'is triangular' one can substitute 'exemplifies triangularity'. But, then, while terms functioning predicatively are not names, they are replaceable by expressions which incorporate names. Since they are not themselves names, they cannot stray to the subject side of a proposition; but since they implicitly incorporate a name of a universal, they can be said to be referentially tied to universals.

But if the realist can meet the nominalist's attack on (b), the

[2]Perhaps the most renowned defender of this view in recent years has been Gustav Bergman.

defense of his theory of predication is far from complete; for nominalists have, from a wide variety of directions, brought criticisms to bear on (a). Central to what I have called (a) is the view that no predicate-expressions can apply to different objects unless each exemplifies one and the same universal. Nominalists, however, have contended that this view has to be false since it makes essential use of an incoherent notion—that of multiple exemplification. Towards showing us the incoherence of this notion, the nominalist points out that where different objects jointly exemplify a universal, that universal is wholly and completely present in each. But, then, where the various objects exhibiting a given universal are physical objects (such as my sons' basketball and the basketball Wilt Chamberlain uses in practice), the universal they presumably exhibit can be wholly and completely present in each only if it is possible for a single entity to be wholly and completely present in discontinuous regions of space at one and the same time. The nominalist, however, insists that this is not possible; for if it were possible, then it could be true that an object lies at such and such a distance from itself, that it is approaching itself, that it is drawing away from itself, etc. But, the nominalist contends, none of these claims can ever be true; they all represent the conceptually impossible if not the downright unintelligible.[3]

Some realists have found this an important line of argument; but they have contended that what it establishes is not the falsity of (a), but rather the conclusion that universals do not have spatial location. Thus, realists sometimes distinguish between a universal (e.g., whiteness) and the various individual instantiations of that universal (e.g., the whiteness of Socrates and the whiteness of Plato); and they argue that while the universal itself is not in space, its various instantiations are. But since they hold that each instantiation of a universal is welded to just one object, these realists can deny that the multiple exemplification of a universal generates the sorts of absurd consequences that their critic points to.

Other realists, however, have denied that the nominalist's argument has any force at all. The nominalist is claiming that no

[3]This objection is examined in Alan Donagan's "Universals and Metaphysical Realism," reprinted in this anthology.

object can wholly and completely occupy different regions of space at one and the same time. In response, these realists claim that universals just are the sorts of things that can enjoy a spatially divided mode of existence. Consequently, they deny that claims to the effect that an object lies at a certain distance from itself or that an object is approaching itself are inappropriate in the case of universals. These realists do, of course, agree that such claims involve conceptual confusion where they bear on particulars; but that, they insist, is simply because the concept of a particular is the concept of an object that *cannot* be multiply exemplified.

According to another criticism, the account of predication inherent in (a) generates an infinite regress. (a) tells us that a predicate-term applies to several different individuals only in virtue of their exemplifying some one characteristic. For the sake of proving it wrong, critics have asked us to assume the principle and have argued as follows: suppose some predicate-term '*F*' is applicable to each of several entities, *a* . . . *n*. The applicability of this expression presupposes that each of the things, *a* . . . *n*, exemplifies some one universal. Call that universal *F-ness*. Now, if it is true that each of *a* . . . *n* exemplifies *F-ness*, then the predicate-term 'exemplifies *F-ness*' can be truly applied to each; but given (a) this presupposes that *a* . . . *n* exemplify some new universal, that of exemplifying *F-ness*. Of course, the exemplification by *a* . . . *n* of this new characteristic allows us to affirm of *a* . . . *n* yet another predicate-term; and this predicate-term presupposes that each of the things, *a* . . . *n*, exemplifies yet another universal; and so on. The analysis never ends; for each new universal introduces a new predicate-term; and that, in turn, requires the postulation of still another universal. Conclusion? (a) must be false since it cannot be applied without landing us in an infinite regress.[4]

Some realists have argued that while real, this regress is not vicious; and in the present context that means that the regress does not render the explanation of the applicability of any particular predicate-term impossible. On this view, the regress would be vicious if it were impossible to explain the applicability

[4]See again Donagan's "Universals and Metaphysical Realism" for a discussion of this difficulty.

of a predicate-term without pointing to every member in the series of intrusive universals; but the contention is that nothing of the sort is necessary here. When we ground the applicability of a particular predicate-term by the appeal to a universal, we do introduce another predicate-term; but our failure to ground the applicability of this second expression leaves our explication of the original predicate-term intact. We can, of course, go on and explain the applicability of this new predicate-expression; but we can also discontinue our analysis without thereby invalidating what has gone before.

But even if this response is correct, the nominalist's objection still carries some force; for it indicates a certain implausibility in the realist's account of predication. We are to believe that behind each predicate-expression in our language there lies a hidden infinity of entities; and if this view is not unintelligible, it nonetheless militates against our desire for simplicity of theory. This consideration has led some realists to argue that the regress in question is not real. They have argued that at each successive stage in the explanation, we can formulate what appears to be a new predicate-expression; but in fact that expression differs only syntactically from those predicate-expressions that precede it in the analysis. Thus, while the predicate-term 'exemplifies wisdom' is structurally different from the expression 'is wise', the two terms are semantically indistinguishable. Their applicability is grounded in one and the same universal, so that the regress underlying the nominalist's attack on (a) can never get started.

The objections I have so far considered have enjoyed a long history. Of more recent vintage is the claim that the view at work in (a) is essentially circular. We have already seen how the realist attempts to ground the generality of language in the generality of fact. He contends that a predicate-term applies to different things because each exemplifies one and the same universal. Now, if this account is to have any explanatory value, it must be possible for the realist to identify the universal underlying the applicability of a predicate-term without a backward reference to the predicate-term in question. The objection here, however, is that such an independent identification is impossible. The realist claims that things are called red, for example, because they exhibit some universal. Which one? The color red.

But this account is circular; for the term whose use was to be explicated appears as an essential ingredient in the explanation.[5]

Realists have responded here by claiming that the charge of circularity is based on a confusion of use and mention; that is, the objection fails to distinguish between the normal (first order) use of a term to signify things that are not words and the less normal (second order) use of a term to signify linguistic expressions. The grammatical signal of second-order discourse is the use of quotes. Now, realists have claimed that if the grammatical signal of second order discourse is made explicit, the circularity in the realist's account disappears. The realist is, then, seen to be claiming that things are called by the predicate-expression 'red' because they all exhibit the color red; and there is clearly no circularity in this claim since we begin with a reference to a word and conclude with a reference to the non-linguistic entity which supports its use.[6]

Now, while agreeing that it is successful in meeting the charge of circularity, one might argue that this response grants too much to the nominalist; for what the response assumes is that it is one and the same term that is mentioned in the statement of the datum to be explained and later used in the explanation of that datum. In the case of a term like 'red' (as well as other color words) this certainly seems to be the case; but when we turn to other examples the point does not hold. Thus, if the predicate-term whose applicability is to be explained is 'triangular', the expression used in identifying the entity grounding its applicability is not the general term 'triangular', but rather the singular term 'triangularity'. The proponent of (a) wants to hold that the predicate-term '*triangular*' applies to objects in virtue of their exemplifying *triangularity;* and likewise that the predicate-term '*courageous*' applies to objects in virtue of their exemplifying *courage*. Now, the fact that in these cases the predicate-term whose applicability is to be explicated does not appear (even in first order discourse) in the realist's explanation suggests that we take another look at the case of 'red'; and when we do, what we find is that it is only apparently the same expression that is

[5]See D. F. Pears' "Universals" (reprinted here) for a clear statement of this objection.

[6]Donagan responds to Pears in this way in "Universals and Metaphysical Realism."

mentioned and then later used. In fact, the term whose application we seek to ground is a general term and the expression we use in pointing to the ground of its applicability is a singular term. The source of the difficulty here is the syntactical ambiguity of color-words. Color-words can function as singular terms naming the various colors and also as general terms predicable of the objects which exemplify those colors; and it is just this ambiguity that underlies all the examples at work in this objection against (a). But, then, it wasn't simply a confusion of use and mention that made the nominalist's charge of circularity seem appropriate; the nominalist was, in addition, misled by the syntactic ambiguity of color words.

In the writings of the later Wittgenstein, we meet with a more direct attack on (a). Wittgenstein simply challenges the assumption that all of the objects to which a particular predicate-term is applicable exhibit one and the same universal. Towards showing this, he asks us to consider the expression 'game'. This predicate-term applies to a large number of objects; and while an examination of these objects reveals many complex patterns of resemblance or similarity (what he calls "family resemblances"), Wittgenstein argues that there is no one property that is all-pervasive. Certain properties recur again and again; but Wittgenstein contends that regardless of the property one selects, there will be objects called games which lack it.[7]

Unfortunately, it is not clear how general Wittgenstein means his analysis to be. Does he mean to suggest that *no* predicate-expressions are grounded in just one universal or set of universals; or does he merely want to make the weaker claim that not *all* predicate-expressions conform to the theory of predication outlined in (a)? The stronger thesis is just not all that plausible; and, in any case, neither Wittgenstein's arguments nor the example he uses establish it. While it is perhaps true, the weaker thesis is compatible with a revised version of (a) that most realists would be willing to settle for. Confronted with Wittgenstein's remarks here, the realist could claim that while (a) does not hold for all predicate-expressions, it provides an account of the applicability of the primitive predicates of language. Thus,

[7]See Renford Bambrough's "Universals and Family Resemblances" (reprinted in this anthology) for a statement of Wittgenstein's views here.

while defined predicates like 'game' need not be grounded in as single universal or set of universals, the undefined, basic predicates must be and indeed are so grounded.

There are doubtless other difficulties with (a) and (b) that I have not considered; but its success in meeting the broad range of criticisms I have discussed suggests that the theory of predication underlying (a) and (b) would withstand additional objections. What we seem to have in (a) and (b), then, is one *possible* account of predication. As the argument leading to (a) and (b) indicates, however, the proponent of this theory wants to make a stronger claim. He wants to say, that is, that it is *only* in terms of an ontology of multiply exemplifiable entities that we can explain how the truth of subject-predicate discourse is grounded in non-linguistic fact.

Nominalists, in turn, have rejected this claim. They have maintained that a nominalistic ontology (i.e., an ontology encompassing only particulars) provides a sufficiently rich framework for grounding the objectivity of subject-predicate discourse. To explain the non-linguistic ground of the applicability of a predicate-term like 'is wise' to an object like Socrates, one does not have to appeal to some abstract entity that stands in some special relation to Socrates; it is sufficient to point out that Socrates is, in fact, wise. In place of the realist's schema for predication, then, the nominalist would have us substitute the more straightforward schema:

> A predicate term 'F' is truly applicable to each of the objects, $a \ldots n$, only if each of $a \ldots n$ is F.

This schema, he claims, is semantically on a par with the realist's; and since it avoids any reference to dubious abstract entities, it is metaphysically preferable.

Now, if the nominalist is right in thinking that an account of predication like that just suggested is adequate, then it would seem that the linguistic activity of predication does not commit us to a realistic ontology. Of course, if there are independent reasons for thinking that an ontology of universals is inescapable, then the theory of predication implicit in (a) and (b) emerges as a plausible account; but of course, it's up to the realist to tell us what these independent reasons are.

II

Many philosophers have thought that the concept of resemblance provides the realist with just such independent reasons.[8] The view is that the existence of even one case of resemblance presupposes the phenomenon of multiple exemplification; for on this view it is impossible for objects to resemble each other unless there is at least one universal which those objects jointly exemplify. This kind of view is expressed in a variety of arguments. One recurrent line of argument focuses on the alleged incompleteness of resemblance-claims. As the argument is usually put, claims of the form '*a* resembles *b*' are always incomplete; they lack a definite or determinate sense. If we are to complete their sense, we have to indicate the respect in which the resembling objects are alike; but that, realists have contended, can be accomplished only by pointing to some universal or set of universals which the object in question jointly exemplify.

Suppose I say that the cup on the desk resembles the book on the shelf. According to the realist, what I say is incomplete; to complete the claim, I must say *how* the two are alike; but the realist insists that I can succeed in doing this only if I say something like the following: "They resemble each other in *weight*," "They resemble each other in *texture*," or "They resemble each other in *color*," and in each case I make an explicit reference to some object that the resembling objects jointly exemplify, so that what I say in each case presupposes the existence of at least one universal.

Now, it is possible to isolate two different themes in this argument. The first (I shall call it (i)) is the view that it is always necessary to supplement claims of the form '*a* resembles *b*' with an account of *how a* and *b* are alike; the second (I shall call it (ii)) is the view that we can specify *how* two or more are alike only by pointing to some universal which they jointly exemplify.

The first of these claims is seldom defended in any detail; but where (i) is defended, the defense usually turns on the fact that resemblance is a universal relation. The realist contends that

[8]For an argument for realism based on resemblance that differs from mine, see Bertrand Russell's "The World of Universals," reprinted in this anthology.

given any pair of objects, those objects can always be said to resemble each other; and he concludes from this that to make the bald claim that one thing resembles another is not to make any determinate statement. To convert the bald claim into a genuine assertion, we have to indicate *how* the relevant objects are alike.

But surely the realist is wrong here; the alleged universality of the resemblance-relation does not entail the incompleteness of resemblance claims. It entails this no more than the fact that *being colored if green* is a universal property entails that statements of the form '*a* has the property of being colored if green' are incomplete. Indeed, if the realist is right and resemblance is, in the sense indicated, a universal relation, then, so far from being incomplete, statements of the form '*a* resembles *b*' (where '*a*' and '*b*' are non-empty names) would always seem to be both complete and true.

Now, the falsity of (i) might seem to have disastrous consequences for the realist's argument; but, in fact, the realist does not need anything as strong as (i). While statements of the form '*a* resembles *b*' may not *require* supplementation, it is always *possible* to supplement them with an indication of *how* the relevant objects resemble each other; for a resemblance claim always *entails* the truth of some statement in which it is specified *how* the relevant objects are alike. If, for example, I say that two or more objects are alike, then I commit myself to the possibility of indicating *how* they are alike; but if it is impossible to indicate this without referring to some universal which the objects all exemplify, then we still have the desired conclusion: the truth of resemblance claims presupposes the existence of universals.

The crucial question, then, is whether (ii) is true, whether, that is, it is impossible to specify *how* resembling objects are alike without referring to universals. In support of a negative answer, some nominalists have appealed to the concept of individual or particular properties, relations, and actions. Denying that objects resemble each other with respect to universals, they have contended that it is with respect to their numerically different colors, shapes, sizes, dispositions, etc., that ordinary objects are alike or similar. Realists, in turn, have tried to counter this proposal by arguing that objects could resemble each other with respect to their *individual* colors, for example, only if those

colors, in turn, were to resemble each other; but, then, these too must resemble each other *in some way*. Now, given the nominalist's proposal, this requires an appeal to new properties and the same line of argument works in their case. They too must resemble each other, so that once again we need new properties, and so on ad infinitum. But, then, the nominalist avoids the notion of multiply exemplifiable objects only at the expense of postulating an infinitely large hierarchy of individual properties; and, according to the realist, an ontology of universals is not theoretically inferior to one that postulates a pair of infinitely long chains of individual properties behind each case of resemblance.

But is the appeal to individual (as opposed to universal) properties, relations, and actions the only alternative open to the nominalist? I think not. Where objects resemble each other, we can specify *how* they are alike without referring to any objects other than the original resembling entities. We can say, for example, that they are alike in that both are red or that both are books, or that both are six inches high, or . . . and in each case we succeed in specifying how the objects are alike without referring to objects over and above those that resemble each other. But, then, the fact that it is always possible to say how resembling objects are alike cannot, by itself, force us to adopt an ontology of universals. Of course, if there is some other argument which establishes the inescapability of such an ontology, then the appeal to universals here would be both natural and plausible; but once again we must say that it is the responsibility of the realist to formulate this argument.

III

Some realists would claim that the required argument hinges on our use of abstract singular terms. These are expressions like 'triangularity', 'mankind' and 'redness' which (characteristically at least) are formed from predicate-expressions (concrete general terms) by the addition of suffixes like '-ity', '-hood', '-ness', '-kind', and '-ship'. What makes these expressions interesting from the realist's perspective is the fact that they appear to play referring roles. They seem, that is, to function as devices for picking out or identifying objects; and what they

appear to take as their referants are abstract objects like triangularity, mankind, and redness—universals.

The contexts in which abstract singular terms play their alleged referring roles are many and varied. They appear, as we have noted, in what might be called *exemplification contexts*, contexts in which, to all appearances, we pick out some object and say that it exemplifies or exhibits some universal. In these contexts, abstract singular terms enable us to say just which universal the object in question exemplifies or exhibits. Thus,

(1) Socrates exhibits wisdom,
(2) The scalene exemplifies triangularity,
(3) The American Flag exemplifies redness.

Abstract singular terms also frequently appear in what we can call *intentionality contexts*, contexts in which we specify the objects of a person's mental acts or states. When they function in such contexts, abstract singular terms appear to serve as devices for identifying the abstract entity that a person's mental act or state is of or about. Examples of this use of abstract singular terms are

(4) Alcibiades aspires to wisdom,
(5) Quines prefers redness to whiteness,
(6) Mathematicians think about triangularity.

Abstract singular terms can also function in *classificatory contexts;* here, we seem to be using abstract singular terms as tools for identifying a universal that we want to go on and classify in some way. We say, for example, that

(7) Wisdom is a virtue,
(8) Redness is a color,
(9) Triangularity is a shape.

At its most general level, the classificatory context engages the various ontological categories. Where abstract terms are coupled with these categories, we appear to be picking out universals and subsuming them under very general kinds. Thus,

(10) Wisdom is a property,
(11) Redness is a property,
(12) Triangularity is a property,
(13) Mankind is a kind,
(14) Murder is an action.

Now, what realists want to claim is that when abstract singular terms function in these different contexts they are playing just the roles they appear to be playing: they are functioning as devices for referring to universals. Furthermore, the realist wants to argue that when one and the same abstract term functions in different contexts, it is playing one and the same role in all of them. Thus, 'wisdom' is playing the same role in (1), (4), (7), and (10): in all these cases it serves as a device for referring to the virtue, wisdom. Likewise, 'triangularity' is playing the same role in (2), (6), (9), and (12): in each case it serves as a device for referring to the shape, triangularity. Finally, 'redness' is playing a single role in (3), (5), (8), and (11): in each case it serves as a device for referring to the color, redness. What realists want to argue, then, is that abstract singular terms play a single role in varying contexts and that one and the same semantical account must be provided for the term as it occurs in these different contexts. Consequently, their claim that the correct account here is one that construes abstract terms as designators of universals can be taken as a kind of challenge. The nominalist is being asked to provide an analysis of abstract singular terms which accommodates all the contexts where these expressions appear but which does not commit us to the existence of universals.

Nominalists have been quick to take up the challenge. Typically they try to rebut the realist's claim that abstract terms are non-eliminable. The general strategy here is to construe abstract singular terms as devices for abbreviating discourse about the objects which satisfy the predicate-terms out of which they are constructed. We are told that contexts incorporating an abstract term can be replaced without loss of content by contexts in which the abstract terms give way to the corresponding predicate-terms. Thus, sentences incorporating the abstract term 'triangularity' are said to be eliminable in favor of sentences incorporating the non-problematic 'triangular', and sentences incorporating the abstract form 'wisdom' are said to be replaceable by sentences incorporating the metaphysically neutral 'wise'.[9]

But at the very best, these remarks mark out a program for the nominalist. If he is to be offering us anything more than a mere promissory note, he has to present us with a determinate schema for the elimination of abstract terms. The standard schema here tells us that sentences of the form '*F*-ness . . .' are synonymous with sentences of the form 'Necessarily all *F*-things. . . .' According to this schema, then, an abstract term, '*F*-ness', is a device enabling us to make, in a short-hand way, apodictic, universal statements about *F*-objects.

By itself, this schema is incomplete. The move from '*F*-ness . . .' to 'Necessarily all *F*-things . . .' will force us to make alterations in that part of the original proposition marked by the '. . .'; for clearly expressions syntactically and semantically suited to appear in conjunction with an abstract term will not be suited to appear in conjunction with the concrete counterpart of that singular term. If, however, we do not demand that these changes be written into the schema, but allow them to be dictated by context, it is not difficult to see how the schema is meant to operate. Thus,

(8) Redness is a color

becomes

(8′) Necessarily all red objects are colored;

and

(9) Triangularity is a shape

becomes

(9′) Necessarily all triangular objects are shaped.

[9]This sort of account is considered in Nicholas Wolterstorff's "Qualities," reprinted in this anthology.

For cases like (8) and (9), then, the schema works well enough. Unfortunately, it won't do for all sentences incorporating abstract singular terms. The schema demands that sentences incorporating abstract terms give way to sentences prefaced by the necessity-operator. The fact, however, is that many sentences incorporating abstract singular terms are simply not apodictic at all. Thus, (1)-(3) are not plausibly construed as necessary; nor are (4)-(6).

Furthermore, the demand that sentences incorporating abstract singular terms be paraphrased in terms of sentences incorporating the universal quantifier is not always met. Thus,

(7) Wisdom is a virtue

is true; the schema in question, however, would force us to construe it as synonymous with

(7′) Necessarily all wise men are virtuous.

Now if it is true that all wise men are virtuous, this is clearly not a necessary fact. Indeed, it is only plausible to think that there are men who are wise but not, for example, courageous or just and so not virtuous. Thus, even the more modest

(7″) All wise men are virtuous

is likely false; and similar problems arise when we attempt to read the universal quantifier into sentences like (4)-(6).[10]

But perhaps the nominalist can handle such cases of appealing to expressions like 'qua' and 'insofar as' (what the medievals called "reduplicative" expressions). Thus, he can say that the abstract term in (7) is to be replaced not simply by the concrete term 'wise', but by the "reduplicative" phrase built out of this expression, 'wise men insofar as they are wise', so that (7) becomes

(7‴) Wise men insofar as they are wise are virtuous.

[10]This difficulty and some other difficulties I point to are discussed in Nicholas Wolterstorff's book *Universals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).

Now, (7‴) seems to provide a satisfactory analysis of (7). Unlike (7′) and (7″), it does not imply that every man who is wise is also temperate, just, prudent, and so on; nonetheless, it does what we want it to—it exhibits the conceptual or logical connection between the predicate-terms 'wise' and 'virtuous'. The success that accompanies "reduplication" in this case suggests that the nominalist dispense with the original schema for eliminating abstract terms and say that sentences of the term '*F*-ness. . . .' are to be replaced by sentences of the form '*F*-objects qua *F*. . . .'

Unfortunately, this schema presents problems of its own. Frequently its application generates paraphrases that are less transparent than the Platonistic sentences they replace. (8), for example, is perfectly straightforward; but the schema we are considering would have us replace (8) with the unwieldy

(8‴) Red things insofar as they are red are colored,

whose precise force is not immediately apparent. In other cases, the results of applying the schema are worse than the stylistic awkwardness of (8‴). Where we have "reduplication" prior to our application of the schema, for example, we get results that are positively unsatisfactory. Thus,

(15) Wisdom qua virtue perfects a man

is both grammatical and true; but the paraphrase our schema dictates for (15) would be something like

(15′) Wise men qua wise men qua virtuous are perfected,

which is simply ill-formed. Finally, there are cases—like (1) to (3)—where it's unclear just what the schema would have us do.

Now, it might seem that it is unfair to demand that a single schema cover all uses of abstract singular terms. Why not allow the context to determine the precise form the elimination is to take? Well, if we do, the realist will object that the nominalist has failed to meet the original challenge. What the realist demanded of the nominalist is an analysis of abstract singular terms which conforms to our pre-analytic intuition that these

expressions remain semantically invariant as we move through the various contexts listed earlier. To meet this challenge head-on, the nominalist must provide a treatment of abstract terms according to which 'wisdom' is one and the same term in (1), (4), (7), and (10); 'triangularity' is one and the same term in (2), (6), (9), and (12); and 'redness' is one and the same term in (3), (5), (8), and (11). The kind of contextual approach suggested above, however, will simply not yield these results.

Nominalists who have been sensitive to the demands imposed by this challenge have frequently given up the assumption that it is possible to "analyze away" abstract singular terms. While conceding the realist's contention that abstract terms are non-eliminable referring devices, these nominalists have insisted that it is possible to interpret abstract terms in such a way that their referents do not turn out to be universals. Quine seems to be taking this ploy, for example, when he suggests that we construe a term like 'redness' as a device for referring not to a universal, but to a global particular—that spatio-temporally discontinuous region of the world that is composed of all the red surfaces that there are. Quine himself, however, finds this view (sometimes called the "exploded object" theory) unsatisfactory; and we can see its shortcomings when we realize that the view excludes *a priori* the possibility of "abstract" entities that are not located in space.

More promising is the suggestion that abstract singular terms are devices for referring not to the metaphysician's universals, but to the classes of the mathematician. In its simplest form, this version of nominalism tells us that an abstract term, '*F*-ness', is an expression for referring to the class composed of all and only the things that are *F*. Thus, 'redness' is a device for referring to the class whose members are all the red objects that there are, and 'triangularity' is a device for referring to the class composed of all the things that are triangular.

Now, at first sight, it may not be clear how this view constitutes any advance over realism; for surely, one wants to say, classes are themselves abstract entities and should play no role in a strictly nominalistic ontology. But while classes may be abstract, they have an advantage over universals in that their identity-conditions are through-and-through extensional; that is, questions about the identity and difference of classes can always

be settled by specifying their members. As the logician puts it, classes are the same if and only if their members are the same.

But while their extensionality may provide grounds for preferring classes to universals, it also provides a reason for thinking that classes of ordinary objects cannot be the referents of abstract singular terms; for whatever these expressions refer to, their referants do not have extensional identity-conditions. On the view we are considering, whenever it is true that all the objects satisfying a predicate-term '*F*' satisfy a predicate-term '*G*', and vice versa, the referents of the abstract forms '*F*-ness' and '*G*-ness' must be construed as identical. In fact, however, co-extensionality of predicate-forms does not entail identity for the corresponding abstracta. To see this, we need only reflect on well-worn examples—the predicate-terms 'has a heart' and 'has a kidney' and the abstract singular terms built from those, '*having a heart*' and '*having a kidney*'. The two predicates apply to all and only the same objects and yet we do not want to say what this view forces us to—that the corresponding abstract terms refer to one and the same object.

Now, it is sometimes contended that we can overcome this difficulty if we appeal once again to the notion of particular or individual properties, actions, and relations and construe abstract terms as classes composed of these. On this view, 'wisdom' is a device for referring to the class composed of Socrates' wisdom, Plato's wisdom, etc., and 'redness' is an expression for referring to the class composed of the redness of this flag, the redness of that ball, etc. The advantage of this account is that it does not commit us to the view that co-extensionality of predicate-terms carries with it identity for the corresponding abstracta. To take our former example, '*having a heart*' is a device for referring to the class composed of Socrates' *having a heart*, Plato's *having a heart*, etc.; '*having a kidney*', on the other hand, designates the class composed of Socrates' *having a kidney*, Plato's *having a kidney*, etc.; but since these are different classes, we get the desired result that *having a kidney* is something different from *having a heart*.

This approach, then, avoids the problems of predicate-co-extensionality. Well, at least in *most* cases; for there remains one case where we do not want to construe the referents of abstract terms as identical, and yet the co-extensionality of the

relevant predicate-terms forces us to do this. I am thinking of the case of "empty" predicate-terms, that is, predicate-terms true of or satisfied by nothing at all. Here, there simply are no individual properties, relations, or actions at all, so that the referent of the corresponding abstract term has to be construed as the null class. The difficulty, however, is that, given the identity-conditions for classes, there is just one null class; but, then, where we have another "empty" predicate-term, the referent of its abstract counterpart must also be the null class. Indeed, on this view, there is a single abstract entity to correspond to *all* "empty" predicates. But, then, we are forced to say that the referent of '*being a dragon*' is identical with the referent of '*being a unicorn*'; and that we know to be false.[11]

Now, I have considered only a few nominalistic analyses of abstract singular terms. Others are doubtless possible; and perhaps one or more of these will meet the realist's challenge.[12] The fact that my own account of nominalism ends on a negative note, then, should not be construed as anything like a refutation of the view. My aim has been the more modest one of pointing to the difficulties which abstract terms pose for the nominalist. These difficulties, it seems to me, place the burden of proof on the side of the nominalist. The realist has his own account of the semantics of abstract singular terms; the nominalist owes us one; and until he provides us with a satisfactory account here, his project is not completed. If the argument of this paper is correct, a consequence of the incompleteness of the nominalist's project here is the acceptability of the Platonistic analyses of predication and resemblance considered in Parts I and II. Since the nominalist is unsuccessful in showing the appeal to universals to be gratuitous, the realist has all the warrant he needs for employing universals in dealing with the phenomena of predication and resemblance.

[11]The use of a class as a referent of an abstract singular term is proposed in Wolterstorff's "Qualities." He rejects the interpretation in the later *Universals* for reasons analogous to those I mention.

[12]One powerful analysis is presented in Wilfrid Sellars' "Abstract Entities," reprinted in this anthology. I do not consider his account in this essay because of its complexity. My own suspicion, however, is that if any nominalistic analysis shows promise of success, it is Sellars'.

THE WORLD OF UNIVERSALS

Bertrand Russell

We saw that such entities as relations appear to have a being which is in some way different from that of physical objects, and also different from that of minds and from that of sense-data. In the present chapter we have to consider what is the nature of this kind of being, and also what objects there are that have this kind of being. We will begin with the latter question.

The problem with which we are now concerned is a very old one, since it was brought into philosophy by Plato. Plato's "theory of ideas" is an attempt to solve this very problem, and in my opinion it is one of the most successful attempts hitherto made. The theory to be advocated in what follows is largely Plato's with merely such modifications as time has shown to be necessary.

The way the problem arose for Plato was more or less as follows. Let us consider, say, such a notion as *justice*. If we ask ourselves what justice is, it is natural to proceed by considering this, that, and the other just act, with a view to discovering what they have in common. They must all, in some sense, partake of a common nature, which will be found in whatever is just and in nothing else. This common nature, in virtue of which they are all just, will be justice itself, the pure essence the admixture of which with facts of ordinary life produces the multiplicity of just acts. Similarly with any other word which may be applicable to

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