Particulars, Modes and Universals: An examination of E. J. Lowe's Four-Fold Ontology

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Abstract

Is there a particular-universal distinction? Ramsey famously advocated scepticism about this distinction. In "Some Formal Ontological Relations" E.J. Lowe argues against Ramsey that a particular-universal distinction can be made out after all if only we allow ourselves the resources to distinguish between the elements of a four-fold ontology. But in defence of Ramsey I argue that the case remains to be made in favour of either (1) the four-fold ontology Lowe recommends or (2) the articulation of a particular-universal distinction within it. I also argue that the case remains to be made against (3) a spatio-temporal conception of the particular-universal distinction.

1. Introduction

If we really want to understand what the constitution of reality is like then it seems that we must answer the question: what is the distinction between particulars and universals? In his 1925 paper "Universals" Ramsey famously returned the answer that there is no particular-universal distinction, any appearance to the contrary being generated not by an underlying reality but rather the subjective needs and purposes that fashion our idiosyncratic perspective upon the world. In response E.J. Lowe has argued that the distinction between particular and universal "is as fundamental, objective and real as any difference could possibly be" and rejects "the spurious arguments to the contrary advanced by some philosophers, such as Frank Ramsey" (see Lowe 2004, 307).

That Lowe should respond in these terms should come as no surprise. For Lowe has developed his own distinctive 'Aristotelian' metaphysic – where substantial particulars are distinguished from non-substantial ones (modes), substantial universals (kinds) contrasted with merely characterising universals, and the instantial relations between the different varieties of particulars and

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universals cleanly separated. This Aristotelian framework provides a far richer theoretical environment in which to articulate the particular-universal distinction than any of the metaphysical systems Ramsey considered. In these latter systems the categories of *particular* and *universal* fail to be subdivided, and particulars and universals are conceived alike as abstractions from states of affairs. Where the theoretical constraints upon the concepts particular and universal are so slight it should (perhaps) come as no surprise that the particular-universal distinction eludes effective characterisation.

In this paper I will examine the Aristotelian framework within which Lowe endeavours to articulate a convincing conception of the particular-universal distinction. I will argue that the distinction that emerges from this framework is neither 'Aristotelian' (in the intended sense) nor lays to rest the kind of scepticism about the particular-universal distinction that Ramsey advanced.

2. Can Universals be Wholly Present in Different Locations?

Before proceeding to outline this framework in detail it will be instructive to pause and consider an alternative proposal for distinguishing particulars from universals. According to this proposal particulars and universals may be distinguished in spatiotemporal terms. For whereas universals may be wholly present in many different locations at the same time – present wherever their instances are to be found – particulars may not. But if particulars and universals may be distinguished in this way then there can hardly be need to appeal to heady metaphysical doctrines (about substances, modes and so on) to do so. However Lowe, like Ramsey before him, rejects this popular conception of the particular-universal distinction.[1] If we are to understand the theoretical motivation for distinguishing particulars from universals in the more sophisticated metaphysical setting that Lowe recommends it is therefore necessary to examine the reasons that he provides for rejecting the proposal that particulars and universals be distinguished in the more straightforward terms proposed.

The first reason that Lowe offers is this. He denies that there is any significant sense in which universals may be said to be wholly present in the diverse locations of their instances. This claim is supported by the following argument. Assume that P_1 and P_2 are distinct, spatially separated particulars that both instantiate a universal U at the same time. For the sake of simplicity also assume that P_1 and P_2 are simple entities without proper spatial parts. Then it follows not only that U is wholly in the same place as P_1 and wholly in the same place as P_2, but also that P_1 and P_2 are wholly in the same place as U even though

[1] See Ramsey 1925, 9, Lowe 1998, 155-6, 205 and Lowe 2002a, 229-31.

they are not co-located at that time. But this Lowe finds "utterly mystifying". Moreover, given the assumption that *x is wholly in the same place as y* is an equivalence relation, it is tantamount to a contradiction: if this relation is symmetric and transitive then P_1 and P_2 must be wholly in the same place, contrary to assumption. Lowe concludes that universals cannot be wholly present in the location of their instances.

This argument appears to beg the question. If there are universals capable of being wholly present in different locations at the same time then it follows straight away that particulars can be wholly in the same place as a universal even though they are not co-located. For, if there are such universals and particulars, then *x is wholly in the same place as y* cannot be an equivalence relation (nor, for that matter, can *x is located where y is*). Lowe endeavours to resist the charge of question begging by arguing that *x is wholly in the same place as y* could not fail to be symmetric (i.e. it could not fail to be the case that if *U* is wholly in the same place as P_1 then P_1 is wholly in the same place as *U*). He reasons like this: if *all* of a P_1 is where *all* of *U* is – so that the particular is *wholly in the same place* as the universal – then they could not fail to be *wholly co-located* (Lowe 2002a, 230).

There are two things to note in criticism of Lowe's reasoning here. First, no advocate of multiply located universals need dispute the symmetry of *x is wholly in the same place as y*. In order to avoid the absurd conclusion that P_1 and P_2 are co-located it need merely be denied that the target relation is transitive (just because P_1 is wholly in the same place as *U* and *U* is wholly in the same place as P_2, it need not follow that P_1 is wholly in the same place as P_2). Second, Lowe's argument relies upon the identity of the relation *x is wholly present in the same place as y* and the relation *x and y are wholly co-located*. But if there are universals that are wholly present in different places then these relations cannot be the same. This is because the location relation for universals of this kind will be one-many, relating the *whole* (not a part) of each universal to the *many* different locations of its instances (at a given time). By contrast the location relation for simple particulars (like P_1 and P_2) will be one-one, relating the *whole* (not a part) of each particular to *one* location (at a given time). So even though *U* may be wholly present in the same place as P_1, and P_1 wholly present in the same place as *U*, it will not follow that P_1 and *U* are wholly co-located, that is, occupants of exactly the same locations. This is simply a consequence of the fact that the location relation for universals is one-many whereas the location relation for particulars is one-one.

Lowe insists, however, that he does not understand what 'being wholly in the same place as' could mean except 'being wholly co-located' and demands

that those who speak of universals being wholly present in many different places provide a far more perspicuous account of what they could possibly mean by talking in this way. But it is unclear what further explanation may legitimately be demanded over and above what I have already offered on behalf of Lowe's opponent. We are familiar enough with relations that are one-many and one-one, that take the *whole* of something to another thing. Consider, for example, the one-many relation that takes a mother – the whole of her, not a mere part – to each of her offspring. We are also familiar with one-many and one-one relations whose ranges overlap. It's easy enough to think up familial situations of this kind where mother and father have different numbers of children by different partners. Evidently there is nothing formally out of order with these relations. Lowe therefore owes us some account of the material features of space that to his mind forbid this logically permissible combination of relations.

This challenge to Lowe may be sharpened. For Lowe appears to allow a formally analogous combination of relations in the temporal case (Lowe 1998, 163). According to Lowe, times are (trivially) located at themselves whereas enduring substances may be located at many different times. So whereas the temporal location relation for times are one-one, the temporal location relation for enduring substances are one-many. This means that (1) times behave with respect to times as particulars behave with respect to places and (2) enduring substances behave with respect to times as universals behave with respect to places (upon the view of universals that Lowe seeks to dissuade us of). What *relevant* differences between time and space forbid this combination of one-one and one-many relations in the spatial but not the temporal case?

There is, however, another argument that Lowe marshals against the proposed spatiotemporal account of the particular-universal distinction (see his 2002, 348-50). According to Lowe's reading of it, particulars and universals are metaphysically "individuated" by their spatiotemporal locations. So if the account is correct, particulars and universals necessarily exist in space and time (if they exist at all). This means it is a consequence of the proposed distinction "that everything that there is *or could be* necessarily exists in space and time". So this conception rules out the possibility of particulars and universals that do not exist in space (e.g. Cartesian egos and their properties) and particulars and universals that do not exist in time or space (e.g. abstract propositions and their properties). But this imposes an implausibly "strong constraint on what is metaphysically possible" and dismisses "out of hand" the views of philosophers that should not be so lightly treated.

Lowe's argument assumes that the particular-universal distinction enjoys the status of a metaphysical axiom that determines independently, and ahead

of any further argument, what is possible and what is not. It may be, however, that the particular-universal distinction does not perform this kind of theoretical role, enjoying rather a status akin to that of a theorem, a distinction that is only adopted once certain metaphysical possibilities (Cartesian egos, abstract propositions) have been precluded on appropriate independent grounds. Indeed, as will shortly become clear, Lowe himself is disposed to think of the theoretical role of the particular-universal distinction in something like this way. Still the case against dualism and the case against platonism remain so very far from having been effectively established. So – granting the tacit assumption that the distinction should be exhaustive and apply even to things that fail to be spatiotemporally located – it would be unwise not to follow Lowe's lead and investigate whether there is an alternative non-spatiotemporal conception of the particular-universal distinction.[2]

3. Lowe's Definition of the Particular-Universal Distinction

Lowe proposes to define the particular-universal distinction in terms of the notion of instantiation. But Lowe does not offer a single canonical definition, couching several different definitions in instantial terms:

(i) A particular is that which is an instance of something but has no instances (other than itself) whereas a universal is that which has instances (Lowe 1989, 38-9)
(ii) A particular is that which instantiates but is not itself instantiated whereas a universal is that which necessarily has instances (Lowe 1998, 217)
(iii) A particular is that which has no instances whereas a universal is that which has instances (Lowe 2004, 305)
(iv) A particular is that which can have no instances whereas a universal is that which can have instances (Lowe 2002, 351 and Lowe 2004, 305)
(v) "universals differ from particulars in being *instantiable* by entities which are themselves not instantiable – that is, by particulars" (Lowe 1998, 155).

These formulations differ in the instantial requirements they impose upon particulars and universals. By contrast to (i) and (ii), (iii) and (iv) do not require that particulars are instances of anything. By contrast to (iv) – that does not

[2] See MacBride 1998 for further criticisms of spatiotemporal conceptions of the particular-universal distinction that do not turn upon the assumption that immaterial or abstract entities are possible.

require that universals have any instances – (i) and (ii) say that they do. (iii), on the other hand, demands that universals necessarily have instances. By contrast to (i)-(iv), (v) rules out the possibility of higher-order universals that are not themselves capable of being instantiated by particulars.

For present purposes there is no need to delve in to the issues raised by the non-trivial differences between these formulations, differences concerning the possibility of bare particulars, uninstantiated, necessarily uninstantiated and higher-order universals, what should or should not be left in or out of definitions, and so on. I will therefore put these issues to one side and work with the following characterisation of the particular-universal distinction, a characterisation that perhaps best captures the spirit of Lowe's Aristotelian framework:

> (vi) A particular is that which necessarily instantiates something but cannot itself be instantiated, whereas a universal is that which necessarily is instantiated by something else.

Does (vi) provide an effective characterisation of the particular-universal distinction? Or does (vi) succumb too easily to the kind of doubts about the particular-universal distinction that Ramsey entertained?

Famously Ramsey argued that there was no particular-universal distinction on the grounds that the subject-predicate distinction was merely grammatical rather than logical in character. Ramsey based this argument (in part) upon the contention that if subject and predicate terms within a sentence ('Socrates is wise') are reversed the resulting sentence ('Wisdom is a characteristic of Socrates') still "asserts the same fact and expresses the same proposition" (see his 1925, 12). Lowe responds by pointing out that this argument only has force if the difference between particulars and universals is mistakenly defined in linguistic terms, by saying that particulars are denoted by subject terms whereas universals are denoted by predicates (Lowe 2004, 307).[3] Instead Lowe maintains that it is the asymmetry of instantiation that is responsible for inducing a distinction between particular and universal.

This response to Ramsey carries considerable force. After all, (vi) does not offer an overtly linguistic characterisation of the particular-universal distinction. However, Ramsey's doubts concerning the distinction were not based solely upon the argument Lowe considers. After making the conjecture that there is no logical distinction to be made between subject and predicate Ram-

[3] Of course this does not rule out the possibility that Ramsey's argument fails on its own terms, that it fails to establish that the subject-predicate is merely grammatical rather than logical in significance. See Mulligan 2000 for an elaboration of a criticism of this kind. For further discussion of some of the other issues that arise from the interpretation and assessment of Ramsey's arguments in "Universals" see MacBride 2004 and Hochberg 2004.

sey declared: "I do not claim that the above argument is conclusive" (1925, 13). He then went on to consider in greater detail the theories of Russell and W.E. Johnston before eventually reaching the conclusion that the two words "individuals" and "qualities" are "devoid of connotation". Ramsey continued:

> To this, however, various objections might be made which must be briefly dealt with. First it might be said that the two terms of such an atomic fact must be connected by the characterizing tie and/or the relation of characterization, which are asymmetrical, and distinguish their relata into individuals and qualities. Against this I would say that the relation of characterization is simply a verbal fiction. '*q* characterizes *a*' means no more and no less than '*a* is *q*', it is merely *a* lengthened verbal form; and since the relation of characterization is admittedly not a constituent of '*a* is *q*' it cannot be anything at all. As regards the tie, I cannot understand what sort of thing it could be, and prefer Wittgenstein's view that in the atomic fact the objects are connected together without the help of any mediator. (1925, 28-9)

It is the argument Ramsey states here – rather than merely the earlier argument Lowe considers – that plausibly targets (vi) (replace "characterizing" with "instantiating"). What are we to make of it?

What is absolutely clear is that Ramsey would have no truck with the notion that the verb "instantiates" denotes a special tie or relation. But Lowe would certainly agree with Ramsey about this. With an eye to avoiding Bradley's regress, Lowe wishes to treat instantiation as a purely formal (non-referring) concept.[4] What is less clear is how Lowe proposes to distinguish particular from universal once it has been conceded to Ramsey that there is no characterising tie or instantial relation.

If (vi) is to distinguish particulars from universals then it must effect an exclusive division between all the particulars on the one hand and all the universals on the other. It is tempting to suggest that (vi) achieves this by incorporating reference to a dyadic asymmetric relation of instantiation: particulars figure solely in the first argument position of this relation whereas universals figure in the second argument position (if there are higher-order universals then universals, unlike particulars, figure in both the first and second argument positions). But since Lowe disavows the existence of any such relation or tie he cannot express himself in this way. What Lowe can do, however, is express the difference between particulars and universals at the level of truths. For whereas, according to Lowe, it is true that a instantiates *q*, it is not true that *q* instantiates *a*. So, Lowe may claim, *a* is a particular whereas *q* is a universal.

This way of distinguishing particulars from universals relies upon (at least)

[4] See Lowe 1998, 218, 2002a, 236, and Lowe 2004, 309.

two assumptions. First, it is assumed that "*a* instantiates *q*" says something different (in the relevant sense) from "*q* instantiates *a*". Second, it is assumed that it is "*a* instantiates *q*" rather than "*q* instantiates *a*" that it is true. But since no theoretical basis has been offered for either of these assumptions, Lowe has yet to provide grounds for supposing (vi) to offer an adequate characterisation of the particular-universal distinction. Moreover it is important to bear in mind that it cannot simply be assumed that reality admits of the asymmetric organisation required to give content to the particular-universal distinction; it cannot be a matter for stipulation that we have succeeded in fixing our thought upon the class of particulars and distinguished it from the class of universals. In the above passage Ramsey endorses Wittgenstein's theory that the constituents of an atomic fact hang together without benefit of a mediator. Earlier in "Universals" Ramsey describes the view in the following terms:

> there is Mr Wittgenstein's theory that neither is there a copula, nor one specially connected constituent, but that, as he expresses it, the objects hang together one in another like links in a chain. (1925, 17)

What this description brings into focus is the theoretical possibility that there need be no asymmetric organisation amongst the constituents of an atomic fact. Perhaps Wittgenstein and, following him, Ramsey are wrong about this. But it cannot be stipulated by an opponent of Ramsey and Wittgenstein that they are wrong, that rather than hanging together like "links in a chain" the constituents of an atomic fact are inevitably configured by a preordained ordering (an asymmetric relation of instantiation).

Lowe articulates his conception of the particular-universal distinction within the context of his own favoured four-category ontology (particular objects, kind universals, non-substantial universals, modes).[5] Whilst Lowe does not explicitly substantiate the assumptions underlying (vi) he does offer the intriguing remark "But, although this is an important distinction [between particular and universal], it serves to explain nothing in ontology that is not fully explicable in terms of the defining features of the four categories" (Lowe 2004, 303). If Lowe is correct then there must be a significant sense in which reality admits – in virtue of the structure of the four categories – a significant division into two mutually exclusive (if not exhaustive) classes of entity, a division that inherits many of the characteristics traditionally associated with the distinction between particulars and universals. It is therefore to an examination of Lowe's four-fold ontology that I now turn.

4. Lowe's Four-Fold Ontology

[5] See Lowe 1998, 180-3, 203-4, Lowe 2002a, 226-8, and Lowe 2004, 301-4.

According to Lowe's ontology, *particular objects* or *individual substances* (first category) instantiate *kind* or *substantial universals* (second category). For example, particular trees instantiate the kind universal *Scots Pine*. In addition to kind universals there are also *non-substantial universals* (third category) that include such properties and relations as *greenness*, *squareness* and *betweeness*. These properties and relations are instantiated by *modes* (fourth category). Modes (also called "moments" or "tropes") are particular instances of these properties and relations. For instance, the non-substantial universal greenness is instantiated by the particular *greenness* or green mode of an individual tree. The relationship (a) between particular objects and kind universal and the relationship (b) between modes and non-substantial universals is understood in terms of *instantiation*. By contrast, the relationship (c) between particular objects and modes and the relationship (d) between substantial and non-substantial universals is understood in terms of *characterisation*. A particular object is characterised by its modes. In the *same* way, kind universals are characterised by non-substantial universals. For example, a particular greenness characterises the individual Scots Pine whose greenness it is. In the same way, the kind *Scots Pine* is characterised by the non-substantial universal greenness.

How will this four-fold structure of categories assist us in providing an effective articulation of the particular-universal distinction? In so far as the structure is generated by the relationships of instantiation and characterisation alone, it is unclear how the four-fold ontology will give rise to a particular-universal distinction at all. For in so far as the symmetry or direction of instantation has been called into question by the Ramsey-inspired doubts entertained in the last section, this four-fold structure (of instantiation and characterisation) will not enable us to distinguish between (a) particular objects and kind universals nor between (b) modes and non-substantial universals (just turn the four-fold structure 'upside down'). However, there are other relationships that Lowe claims to hold between the categories of the four-fold structure, so called relationships of "ontological dependency".[6] It may be these relationships that generate the asymmetries we seek.

In fact, Lowe also claims that relationships of ontological dependency are not "fundamental" but rather "constituted" by the relationships of instantiation and characterisation (Lowe 2004, 301). This claim is somewhat awkward in the current context given – as appears to be the case – that instantiation and characterisation cannot alone determine an asymmetry between particular and universal. I will therefore consider the contrary suggestion that the asymme-

[6] See Lowe 1998, 136-53, 158-64, and Lowe 2004, 298-301.

try of instantiation and characterisation arises from the ontological dependencies amongst the categories they relate.

The ontological dependencies that Lowe employs to distinguish the categories comes in two varieties:

> *Rigid existential dependency: x* depends rigidly on *y* $=_{df}$ necessarily, *x* exists only if *y* exists.
> *Non-rigid existential dependency: x* depends non-rigidly on the *y*s $=_{df}$ for some *F*, the *y*s are the *F*s and, necessarily, *x* exists only if there is something *z* such that *z* is an *F*.

Lowe has aired the suggestion that particular objects and modes be distinguished in the following way.[7] Particular objects do not depend rigidly upon entities drawn upon other categories (in this sense they are Aristotelian substances). Modes depend rigidly upon the individual objects they characterise and the non-substantial universals they instantiate (the green mode of the tree is both essentially green and essentially the green *of* that tree). By contrast, kind and non-substantial universals depend non-rigidly on the particulars and modes by which they are instantiated – universals could not exist without some instance or other but they do not require some instance in particular.

There are a number of points to be noted here. First, even granting the existential dependencies Lowe describes, it is not entirely transparent how a particular-universal distinction is generated by these reflections. Particular objects do not depend rigidly upon anything from other categories. But neither do universals. Moreover, modes lie elegantly poised between particulars objects and non-substantial universals, rigidly dependent upon items drawn from both categories. So why think there is some fundamental metaphysical contrast to be drawn that distinguishes between particulars on the one hand and universals on the other?

Second it is seems doubtful that Lowe has given an accurate description of the dependencies that obtain. To bring into sharper focus the dependencies between categories that are present here it is important to realise that non-rigid dependence need not concern us. This is because the four-fold ontology is Aristotelian in intent, demanding that each thing be instantiated or characterised in the relevant sense – there are no bare particulars, modes that are not modes *of* particulars, no uninstantiated universals, and so on. More fully: substances are necessarily instances of kind universals and modes are necessarily instances of non-substantial universals; kind and non-substantial universals are

[7] At the 'Formal Concepts' conference in Geneva.

necessarily instantiated by substances and modes respectively; substances are necessarily characterised by modes and modes are necessarily characteristics of substances; kind universals are necessarily characterised by non-substantial universals and non-substantial universals are necessarily characteristics of kind universals. So non-rigid existential dependency obtains between each of the categories in the structure and cannot determine any asymmetry between them.[8]

What then of rigid existential dependency? Lowe suggests that it is distinctive of particular objects that they do not depend rigidly upon items in other categories. This does not seem to be correct because Lowe also holds that particular objects are essentially instances of their kinds.[9] So particular objects depend rigidly on the kind universals they instantiate. Lowe offers the four-category ontology as the development of a perspective implicit in Aristotle's early work, the *Categories*.[10] Critical to this perspective is the idea that particular objects are the most fundamental existents – the substances – because everything else ontologically depends upon them. But we now see that kind universals enjoy the greater title to the claim of being substances – particular objects rigidly depend upon them. Moreover, given the transitivity of rigid dependence, modes that depend rigidly on particular objects also depend rigidly on kind universals instanced by those objects. So the four-category ontology approximates more closely to the vision of the mature Aristotle in *Metaphysics Zeta* where (at least on one interpretation) the forms of species turn out to be the fundamental substances.[11]

We thus arrive at our first conclusion: that the particular-universal distinction that emerges from the four-fold ontology is far from 'Aristotelian' in the intended sense. This indicates that rigid existential dependence is too coarse grained a relation for characterising the connections of ontological dependence that Lowe has in mind.

5. Modes Haecceities, Nomic Essentialism and Determinables

But despite the difficulties that Lowe's provisional suggestion confronts it still

[8] Prior to the inclusion of modes in his ontology, Lowe expressed this point in the following way: "But I would stress that my 'Aristotelianism' does not extend to conceding any sort of ontological priority to individuals or particulars, whereby they are in any sense 'more' real than sorts or kinds; rather I see the notions of individual and kind as standing in a quite symmetrical relationship of mutual conceptual dependence – individuals being no less essentially individuals of some kind than kinds are essentially kinds of individuals" (Lowe 1989, 163, see also p. 12).

[9] In order to allow the possibility of phase change a more careful statement of this claim would involve a restriction to the highest kind an object instantiates, "the kind which determines a substance's 'form' for the purpose of providing its criterion of identity". See Lowe 1998, 168, 186-7.

[10] See Lowe 1989, 140, 203, 209, and Lowe 2002a, 226.

[11] See Lear 1986, 273-93 for a sketch of this interpretation of Metaphysics Zeta. Note that on this interpretation, substances are neither particulars nor universals.

appears that we are able to distinguish between the different categories. This is because Lowe also tells us that there is no rigid dependence between kinds and non-substantial universals.[12] There is no necessity that demands that tigers are striped or that gold is yellow, and so on. In the same way, there is no necessity that yellow or striped things belong to a specific kind. This appears to leave us in a position to distinguish particular and universal. Particulars (particular objects and modes) rigidly depend on items from other categories (kind universals, particular objects and non-substantial universals). By contrast, universals (kinds and non-substantial universals) do not rigidly depend upon anything. Never mind if – contrary to Lowe's expectations – universals turn out to be the substances. Here is a distinction with which to grapple. Is this the particular-universal distinction for which we have been searching?

It is one thing to define a distinction between two classes of entities – we've certainly succeeded in introducing some sort of distinction between entities. But it is another thing to establish that the distinction introduced 'articulates' or 'reconstructs' the particular-universal distinction that has informed traditional debate about particulars and universals. Perhaps the distinction introduced bears only a family resemblance to the particular-universals distinction we originally had in mind or perhaps the introduction of the distinction simply changes what we mean when we talk about "particulars" and "universals". I will not attempt to determine here whether the distinction introduced is an effective reconstruction of the particular-universal distinction. To do so would take us too far a field, to questions concerning the intellectual genesis of the concepts of particular and universal and the theoretical forces that have sustained their use. Instead I will consider the question whether we can say with conviction that the distinction in play actually informs reality.

The first difficulty that threatens to undermine such conviction arises when we attempt to apply Lowe's categories to the mathematical realm. According to Lowe, numbers are kinds of sets (see his 1998, 220-27). But it is not evident what modes characterise sets and what non-substantial universals these modes instantiate (if there are any). Indeed this problem appears to arise generally in mathematics where (at least) the interesting mathematical properties appear to be restrictions on kind universals (sortals). So perhaps the four-fold ontology gets no grip on mathematical – or more broadly, abstract – particulars and universals. Perhaps the abstract realm admits of only two categories. If so, Lowe's four-category strategy cannot be employed there to defuse the doubts about the particular-universal distinction Ramsey raised. In so far as

[12] See Lowe 1989, 148 and Lowe 2002a, 231-2.

the particular-universal distinction was intended to apply exhaustively, to apply to both abstract and concrete realms, this is a serious difficulty.

It is a more serious difficulty still that it is unclear whether the four-fold ontology applies even to the concrete realm. The four-fold ontology relies upon the existence of modes but the three arguments that Lowe offers in favour of modes are open to question. Let us consider each of these arguments in turn.

First, Lowe offers an argument based upon the phenomenology of perception.[13] According to Lowe, when he sees a green leaf "I see the very greenness of the leaf, rather than just the leaf itself". And when he sees a leaf change in colour from green to brown "I seem to see something *cease* to exist in the location of the leaf rather than the greenness itself". Lowe argues that this phenomenology cannot be accommodated unless modes (of brownness and greenness) are admitted. For non-substantial universal greenness do not cease to exist when an individual leaf changes colour. Moreover, universals cannot be located (recall Lowe's arguments rehearsed in section 2) and the objects of perception "seem, one and all, to be particulars".

In response it may be argued that when we perceive something qualitatively change, we do not witness something going out of existence, but rather the leaf transferring one non-substantial universal for another. Lowe counters to this response: "I can only say that that suggestion strikes me as being quite false to the phenomenology". It is difficult to know philosophically what to make of this reflection. I can only report that the suggestion does not strike me as false to the phenomenology and wonder how we are philosophically to adjudicate between these different reports concerning how the world seems to us. Furthermore, as we have seen, Lowe's attempts to undermine the possibility of spatiotemporally located universals have yet to succeed. It may therefore be doubted whether the objects of perception are, one and all, particulars rather than located universals or, to take another alternative, facts that unite particulars and non-substantial universals (for example, the particular leaf and the universal green). It is correspondingly doubtful whether – as Lowe must claim – the phenomenology of perception cannot be accommodated by appeal to the shifting occurrences of located universals, or, the formation and subsequent dissolution of facts.

Second, Lowe argues that it only by admitting modes that the we can explain "how it is that an individual concrete object, such as an apple, can 'possess' a universal property, such as redness, despite the fact that such a universal is an *abstract* entity and hence non-spatiotemporal in character".[14] Lowe also offers the related consideration that modes are required to explain "in

[13] See Lowe 1998, 204-5 and Lowe 2002a, 229.

virtue of what" an abstract universal applies to a particular object: an apple, for example, 'has' the universal red in virtue of being coloured in a red way, "that is, in virtue of having a *red mode*, where this is itself a *concrete particular,* the particular way in which the apple is coloured".

If, however, there is a mystery about how a concrete object can instantiate an abstract universal, then there can be no less a mystery about how a mode – a kind of entity that is spatiotemporal or concrete in character – could instantiate the abstract non-substantial universals under which it falls. So with regard to explaining the mystery of how concrete and abstract things are related the introduction of modes moves us no further forward. It is also unclear whether there is a genuine "in virtue of what?" question that modes are required to answer. Lowe admits only modes that are instances of non-substantial universals. But if there is a serious question to be raised concerning that in virtue of which a non-substantial universal applies to a particular object then should Lowe not also admit (α) modes of kind universals in virtue of which kinds apply to particular objects and (β) modes of modes in virtue of which the latter are instances of non-substantial universals (and so on)? The obvious regress difficulties that confront Lowe here suggest that there need be nothing in virtue of which a particular instantiates a universal. Perhaps instantiation is perfectly all right just as it is – particulars instantiate universals and there ends the story.

Third, Lowe argues that modes are required for a proper understanding of the contrast between the dispositional and occurrent features of particular objects.[15] According to Lowe, the contrast arises from the two different ways in which a particular object *x* may – in the context of the four-fold ontology – be related to a non-substantial universal *U*. One way, the occurrent way, is for *x* to be characterised by a mode that instantiates *U*. The other (dispositional) way is for *x* to instantiate a kind universal that is, in turn, characterised by *U*. The former way, *x* is occurrently *U* (in the sense of being characterised by an instance of *U*). The latter way, *x* has the disposition to be *U* (in the sense of being a kind of thing that is characterised by *U*).

There are two sorts of concern that may be raised here. There is a familiar worry concerning how a *higher-level* connection between universals (this case, kind and non-substantial universals) can give rise to a *lower-level* connection between particulars (particular objects and modes).[16] Until the relationship between these connections is explained, rather than left brute, it is unclear what insight into the contrast between dispositional and occurrent features has been

[14] See Lowe 1998, 182-3, 2002a, 229.
[15] See Lowe 1989, 170-1, Lowe 2002a, 236-8 and Lowe 2004, 304.
[16] See Lewis 1983, 365-6.

achieved. More importantly for present purposes, it is unclear whether modes perform any essential role in the explanation given. It is correspondingly unclear whether any effective case for the admission of modes has been made. Grant that kind universals are characterised by non-substantial universals. Can we not then mark the contrast between dispositional and occurrent features without mention of modes? A particular object *x* is occurrently *U* if it instantiates *U*, whereas *x* has a disposition to *U* if *x* instantiates a kind that is characterised by *U*. Lowe must explain why this account – an account that appeals only to universals – offers any less of an analysis of the occurrent/dispositional contrast than his own.

In sum: none of the three arguments that Lowe has offered establish that there are modes. But if it remains to be established that there are modes then an argument that relies upon them can hardly be used to convince us that there is a particular-universal distinction. It therefore appears that Lowe's four-fold ontology – at least in our current state of knowledge – cannot be employed to defuse Ramsey's scepticism about the particular-universal distinction.

This conclusion receives further confirmation from the fact that even if modes are admitted it still remains uncertain whether a particular-universal distinction should be admitted or not. The pattern of rigid dependencies that give rise to the distinction between, on the one hand, kind and non-substantial universals and, on the other hand, particular objects and modes, arises from specific essentialist assumptions. But the addition of further essentialist assumptions will likely cause the distinction to disappear. Suppose, for example, that haecceities – conceived as universals – are introduced into our ontology. If haecceities are necessarily the haecceities of their instances then it follows that some universals rigidly depend upon their instances. Of course, one might simply identify haecceities with their instances to avoid this problem (c.f. Lowe 1997, 197). But this cannot be a matter for stipulation – it will depend upon the specific theoretical motivations that occasioned the introduction of haecceities. To take another example, suppose we are essentialist about natural laws. Then, kind universals will enter into necessary connections with the non-substantial universals to which they are nomically bound. There will then be rigid dependencies between kind and non-substantial universals.[17] But even if nomic essentialism is rejected there are nearby difficulties. Suppose there are determinable properties. Then whilst it may seem contingent whether fruits falling under the kind *lemon* exhibit a specific shape or size, it does not seem

[17] Of course, Lowe rejects this conception of lawhood, viewing laws as "normative" in character, determining the "tendencies" of particular objects to exhibit the paradigmatic non-substantial features of their kind. See Lowe 1989, 148-55, 2002a, 238.

contingent that they have *some* shape or size. It seems therefore that kind universals are necessarily characterised by, and so rigidly depend upon, determinable non-substantial universals. Since particular objects must be characterised by modes of some shape or size – there are no bare particulars – it also follows that particular objects will rigidly depend upon these universals too.

The pattern of rigid dependencies described also breaks down if essentialist assumptions made by Lowe are weakened. It may, for example, be allowed that particular objects could have fallen under different kinds. Or it may be claimed that at least some modes can change their properties (perhaps this is what we mean when we talk of the colour of the leaf fading). In either case, particular objects or modes no longer rigidly depend upon the universals they instance.

I raise these doubts not because they offer knockdown objections to Lowe's conception of the ontological dependencies that obtain amongst the four categories of his ontology. My point is rather that they reveal the substantial and contentious assumptions made and the need for further investigation into the existence of haecceities and determinables, and a variety of essentialist and anti-essentialist moves. Until the investigation is complete it cannot be settled whether there is a genuine particular-universal to be found within the four-fold ontology.

6. Conclusion

I have argued that Lowe has yet to provide a definitive case in favour of either (1) the four-fold ontology or (2) the articulation of a particular-universal distinction within it. I have also argued that (3) Lowe has not provided us with sufficient grounds for rejecting a spatiotemporal conception of the distinction. But there can be no doubt that Lowe has raised important questions, entertained intriguing answers and staked out a significant ontological position. Whilst I have disagreed with Lowe concerning whether there is a particular-universal distinction, the method he employs for ascertaining whether there is such a distinction is surely the right one: the method of first addressing substantial philosophical questions – concerning essentialism, whether modes exist, and so on – and then looking subsequently to assess whether a distinction between particulars and universals emerges from the distinctions and commitments made. The business of endeavouring to define the particular-universal distinction in isolation from these more concrete issues frequently results in empty or arcane pronouncements. Ramsey and Lowe can certainly agree upon this. They can agree that it is far from evident whether any substantial questions about reality are answered by appeal to the particular-universal distinction itself.[18]

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