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Excerpt

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## The argument of Volume I

It should be possible to read *A Theory of Universals* without having read its predecessor, *Nominalism and Realism*. A brief recapitulation of the argument of volume I is, however, essential.

An introductory Part considers the notion of a *predicate*. In contemporary fashion, predicates are taken to be certain linguistic expressions which are parts of sentences. Under what conditions should we say that different predicate-tokens are tokens of the same predicate-type? For the most part, phonetic–orthographic criteria are inconvenient for philosophical purposes. So it is laid down that such tokens are instances of the same type if and only if they are synonymous. A convention is introduced. Where phonetic–orthographic identity-conditions are intended, the predicate is supplied with double quotation-marks. Where, as is usual, semantic identity-conditions are intended, the predicate is given single quotation-marks only.

The second Part of volume I is an extended critique of Nominalism, together with Platonic, that is, Transcendent Realism. Nominalism is defined as the doctrine that everything there is is a particular and nothing but a particular. A Realist is one who denies this proposition, holding that universals exist.

It is argued that in the dispute between Nominalism and Realism the onus of proof lies with the Nominalist. For the distinction between token and type is apparently all-pervasive and *prima facie* incompatible with Nominalism. Five Nominalist strategies for analysing the proposition that an object, *a*, has a property, *F*, are distinguished:

*Predicate Nominalism*: *a* has the property, *F*, if and only if *a* falls under the predicate ‘*F*’

*Concept Nominalism*: *a* has the property, *F*, if and only if *a* falls under the concept *F*

*Class Nominalism*: *a* has the property, *F*, if and only if *a* is a member of the class of *F*s

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*Mereological Nominalism:* a has the property, F, if and only if a is part of the aggregate (heap) of the Fs

*Resemblance Nominalism:* a has the property, F, if and only if a suitably resembles the paradigm case(s) of an F.

These analyses are criticized in detail in successive chapters. One simple line of criticism, among the many which are brought, is that in each analysis the particular, *a*, has the property, F, in virtue of its *relation* to something external to it: predicate, concept, class, aggregate or paradigm. Yet it is intuitively clear that *a* might be F even if none of these things existed. Transcendent Realism is equally a Relational analysis:

a has the property, F, if and only if a “participates” in the transcendent Form, F

and the same criticism can be brought against it.

Besides these criticisms of Nominalism, a short chapter recapitulates arguments used by Arthur Pap, and recently strengthened by Frank Jackson, to show that the truth of certain statements demands the existence of universals. Examples are:

(1) Red(ness) resembles orange(ness) more than it resembles blue(ness)

and

(2) Red(ness) is a colour.

Pap’s argument for the necessity of attribute variables (‘He has the same virtues as his father’) is also briefly rehearsed.

The second Part of volume I ends with a chapter on Particularism, the doctrine, associated with G. F. Stout and many others, that properties and relations of particulars are not universals but are, like the things which have the properties and relations, particulars. It is contended, first, that the arguments for Particularism are inconclusive; second, that Particularism leaves the Problem of Universals unsolved, a problem which can only be solved by admitting universal properties and relations over and above the Particularist’s properties and relations; third, that once this admission has been made, no coherent account can be given of the relation between particular properties (and relations) and the corresponding universal properties (and relations).

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The third Part of volume I begins by asking whether, since it seems that we are forced to postulate universals in any case, we should follow Russell and others in giving an account of particulars as nothing but “bundles of universals”. Various reasons, including a traditional line of argument based upon the Identity of Indiscernibles, are given for rejecting this view. It is concluded that, just as the Nominalist errs in trying to reduce universals to particulars, so this Universalist view errs in trying to reduce particulars to universals.

The question then arises how the irreducible particularity of particulars stands to their irreducible universality (their properties and relations). With Transcendent Realism rejected, some form of Immanent Realism must be accepted. A thing’s properties must be brought within the thing. *Relational* Immanent Realism takes the particularity of a particular to be a substratum standing in an indescribable relation to its properties. An argument, in effect F. H. Bradley’s regress, is advanced against this view.

It is concluded, therefore, that although particularity and universality are inseparable aspects of all existence, they are neither reducible to each other nor are they related. Though distinct, their union is closer than relation. Scotus talked of a mere “formal distinction” between the thisness and the nature of particulars. The situation is admittedly profoundly puzzling, but, it is suggested, the Scotist view is the most satisfactory one which can be found. A comparison which may be useful is the way in which shape and size are united in a particular.

A *state of affairs* is then defined as a particular’s having a property, or two or more particulars’ being related by a relation. We may consider particulars along with their properties, or else in abstraction from all their properties. This yields two conceptions of a particular. It is the latter conception which is involved in the conception of a state of affairs. For the former, or “thick”, conception already is the conception of a state of affairs. It seems, therefore, that we can say both that the world is a world of particulars (in the “thick” sense) and that it is a world of states of affairs.

Some universals already involve the notion of a state of affairs. These are the “particularizing” universals, of which *being a man* would be an instance in the unlikely event that the predicate ‘a man’ applies in virtue of something genuinely common to all men. Such universals divide their instances into non-overlapping individuals

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(individual men). A universal of this sort may be said to particularize strongly. *Being one kilogram of lead*, however, is only a weakly particularizing universal (if it is a universal at all) because its instances overlap. The necessity for the notion of a particularizing universal emerges most clearly when it is noted that *being two men* and *being two kilograms of lead* have equal claims with the two previous examples to be universals. These new universals involve the notion of being made up of two instances of the original universals. That is, they already involve the notion of a state of affairs.

If we take a particular four-dimensionally (“as a space-time worm”), then it may be said to occupy a certain spatio-temporal position. The question arises whether this “total” position can be identified with the particularity of a particular. Since it is logically possible that there are particulars which are not spatio-temporal, the concepts of particularity and total position cannot be identical. But if everything there is is spatio-temporal, as it is plausible to assert, particularity may *in fact* be identical with total position. We thus reach the view that it is a particular’s total position plus its properties (including its spatio-temporal *properties*) which constitute a particular in the “thick” sense.

There is reason to think that more than one particular can occupy the very same total position. Possible examples are the “visual cube” and the “tactual cube”. The particular constituted by the sum of all the particulars at a certain total position may be called a *concrete* particular. Its “parts” may be called ‘*abstract*’ particulars. It appears, then, that different particulars may have the same particularity, *viz.* the same total position. They must then have different properties. Contrariwise, different particulars may have the very same properties. They must then have different total position. But a certain total position plus a certain set of properties yields an unrepeatable particular (“a substance”).

In the last chapter of volume I a world-hypothesis is advanced. The hypothesis is that the world consists of nothing but particulars having properties and relations (monadic and polyadic universals). It is argued in the last Part of volume II that these universals themselves have certain properties and relations (the relations constituting the *laws of nature*). But with this exception, it is suggested, no other sorts of entity need be recognized. This hypothesis is less economical than the Nominalist world-hypothesis: that the world contains nothing but particulars. But it is still economical. It

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involves rejecting transcendent universals, realms of numbers, transcendent values, timeless propositions, non-existent objects (“the golden mountain”), *possibilia*, possible worlds and “abstract” classes.

A general argument is given against postulating any of these entities. They all lack *causal* power: they do not act. It is then argued that we have no good reason to postulate anything which has no effect upon the spatio-temporal world.

It is not argued that statements about numbers, propositions, possibilities, classes, etc. are false. But it is suggested that it should be possible to give an account of the truth-conditions of the statements purely in terms of particulars, their properties and their relations. No detailed account of the truth-conditions is given. All that is proposed is a *research-programme*, one that is obviously too vast to be carried out in this work. The argument from lack of causal power is simply intended as a reason for thinking that the research-programme is a promising one.

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PREDICATES AND UNIVERSALS

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*Relations between predicates and  
universals*1 *Empiricism and universals*

We may begin this volume by noticing a complaint against any theory of objective universals made by David Pears in a well-known article (1951). He says that the believer in universals is tempted to “explain” the use of the same predicate to apply to different particulars by giving an obviously circular formula: “We are able to call things red because they are red” (p. 38). Alan Donagan (1963) criticizes Pears, pointing out that he fails to note the shift from mention to use of the predicate ‘red’ in the course of the sentence (p. 151). “We are able to call things ‘red’ because they are red”, is not circular at all. Donagan is, of course, formally correct.

Nevertheless, there is something which looks too good to be true about the amended formula. A predicate, a man-made thing, is applied to certain particulars and is applicable to an indefinite number of further particulars. It is then assumed by many Realists that we are automatically entitled to conclude that an objective property, or, in the case of many-place predicates, an objective relation, corresponds to the predicate. But no philosopher with any Empiricist sympathies can feel happy with a conclusion so easily reached. There seems to be no honest toil in it! Here, I believe, we come upon a deep reason why Empiricists have been attracted to one or another variety of Nominalism: because to accept Realism seemed to commit them to objective properties and relations wherever there was a corresponding predicate. *The rejection of Realism about universals was part of the Empiricist rejection of*

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*the notion that one can establish the existence of entities by a priori reasoning.*<sup>1</sup>

I share the Empiricist prejudices on method, but at the same time I find no version of Nominalism satisfactory. I am thus led to consider a purged Realism. I suggest that we reject the notion that just because the predicate 'red' applies to an open class of particulars, therefore there must be a property, *redness*. There must be an explanation why the predicate is applicable to an indefinite class of particulars which played no part in our learning the meaning of the word "red". Furthermore, this explanation must in the end appeal to the *properties* (or relations) of these particulars. But none of this shows that there is a property, *redness*.

What properties and relations there are in the world is to be decided by total science, that is, the sum total of all enquiries into the nature of things. (Philosophy is part of total science, but a mere part and not the most important part.) The question is not to be determined simply by consulting our predicates, although we must begin from, and must not despise, the clues to what properties and relations there are which our predicates offer us.

Philosophers are familiar with the idea that science attempts to discover the laws of nature. Laws of nature link particulars falling under certain universals with the same or different particulars falling under certain other universals, in more or less complex patterns. Further, philosophers are familiar with the idea that it is a weariness and a labour to establish in any degree what these law-like patterns are. But philosophers have tended to assume that there is no particular difficulty in identifying the universals themselves. For many Realists, predicates automatically pick out objective universals. (For Nominalists, or Predicate Nominalists at least, predicates also pick

<sup>1</sup> In volume 1, we have already met two other reasons which may help to explain the appeal of Nominalism. The first was encountered in ch. 1 § 1. As Strawson notes, predicates have a fixed number of gaps where referring expressions must be inserted if a sentence is to result. Referring expressions themselves, however, may be inserted in the gaps quite promiscuously. Since universals are correlated with predicates, particulars with referring expressions, the impression is given that universals are dependent beings, particulars independent. The second reason is the phenomenon of the "victory of particularity" to which attention was drawn in ch. 11 § 111. The particularity or thiness of a particular plus its properties (which are universals) yields *not* a universal but a *particular*. (This is the "thick" conception of a particular.) Hence it is easy, though wrong, to think that the world consists of particulars to the exclusion of universals.

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out universals, because “universals” are simply shadows cast by the predicates.)

What has to be realized, instead, is that determining what universals there are is as much a matter for laborious enquiry as determining how universals are linked in laws. (The two enterprises are, of course, bound up with each other.) Philosophy may have some part to play in the enquiry into what universals there are, but it would be presumptuous folly to think that it has a major role.

The position I wish to reject may be formulated in an admittedly extremist fashion: predicates stand in a one–one correlation to universals. By “predicates” here is meant, of course, predicate-*types*. For each predicate-type, there exists its own peculiar universal. For each universal, there exists its own peculiar predicate. Perhaps there are no philosophers who would actually hold both these propositions, particularly after a few “reminders” have been assembled. But many philosophers reason *as if* they accepted these propositions. This is the model which dominates their thought. In any case, the propositions will serve as a useful limiting case by contrast with which I can advance a completely different view.

The correct view I take to be this. Given a predicate, there may be none, one or many universals in virtue of which the predicate applies. Given a universal, there may be none, one or many predicates which apply in virtue of that universal. In the remainder of this chapter, the two cases of predicates to which no universal corresponds and universals to which no predicate corresponds will be considered. The difficult, and ground-breaking, cases are those which involve one predicate but many universals, and, again, many predicates but only one universal. They will be considered in the later chapters of this Part.

II *Predicates without universals*

All properties and relations are the properties and relations of particulars. By the Principle of Instantiation, for all properties, P, there exists a particular,  $x$ , such that  $x$  is P. For all relations, R, there exist particulars,  $x, y \dots$  such that  $Rxy \dots$  “Exists” here must not be construed as “exists *now*”. The existential quantifier has nothing to do with the present moment. That  $(\exists x)(\text{Dodo } x)$  is *true*, although, presumably, that  $(\exists x)(\text{Unicorn } x)$  is false. A universal



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exists if there was, is or will be particulars having that property or standing in that relation.

There are predicates which apply to no particular, past, present or future. The predicate 'accelerates through the speed of light' *may* be such a predicate. But if nothing past, present or future accelerates through the speed of light, then there is no property of accelerating through the speed of light. No property would then correspond to this predicate. The fact that it is logically possible that something should accelerate through the speed of light does not entail that accelerating through the speed of light is a property. For a merely possible property is not a property.

Here, however, we may be reminded that there are other sorts of possibility besides logical possibility. Suppose that it is empirically possible to produce a certain heavy element, not found in nature, which, if produced, can be predicted to have a property which no other substance possesses. Suppose, however, that this element is never manufactured, perhaps because of the enormous expense. Might we not still talk about this element *and its property*?

I agree that we might well talk in this way, but I suggest that we should not take such talk seriously for the purpose of ontology. We also speak of particulars in the same way. For instance, we may speak of "the walk we never took that day". The walk is not a particular alongside the walks which do get taken, nor are we inclined to think it is. If mere empirical possibility endows properties with existence, then why does it not do the same for particulars? Why not admit the present King of France as a particular? It is empirically possible that France be a monarchy.

This is not to say that predicates to which no property corresponds may not have their value in the classification of actual things. It is often convenient to classify things in terms of their degree of approximation to "ideal cases" which do not, or even cannot, exist. But a useful fiction is still a fiction.

In the cases considered so far in this section, there is no particular to which the predicate applies. *A fortiori*, therefore, there is no universal in virtue of which the predicate applies. But there seem to be other predicates which do have application to particulars but which fail to apply in virtue of some universal. Every particular is identical with itself. So the predicate 'identical with itself' applies to each particular. But we are not thereby forced to admit that particulars have a property, *being identical with themselves*.

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Two reasons may be given for denying that there is any such property. First, we know *a priori* that a thing must be identical with itself. Now if we take seriously the idea that what properties there are is a matter for scientific investigation, then the existence of this *a priori* knowledge is a good reason for denying that *being identical with itself* is a property. The principle of method involved is one to which constant appeal will be made in this work. It may be formulated in Irish fashion: if it can be proved *a priori* that a thing falls under a certain universal, then there is no such universal.

Second, we may appeal to a plausible necessary condition for something's being a property. If a particular has a property, that property must endow the particular with some specific causal power, or if the property is causally idle, then it must at least be an intelligible hypothesis that the property should endow particulars with some specific causal power. (It would seem, however, that we could never have any good reason to postulate the existence of causally idle properties. Such properties would never make their presence felt in any way, and so would be undetectable.) Now could a thing's identity with itself even be conceived to endow the object with causal power? It is difficult to see how it could. This is another principle to which constant appeal will be made in this work.

The same two considerations appear to show that 'exists' is a predicate to which no property (or relation) corresponds.

Why is it that philosophers have thought, or have been tempted to think, that to each distinct predicate-type there corresponds its own peculiar universal? I think that the answer is clear. It is the influence of the Argument from Meaning which has so often, and so fatally, distorted the Problem of Universals. If universals are conceived of as meanings, and if a semantic criterion is accepted for the identity of predicates, then it follows at once that each predicate-type is associated with its own universal. Realists have then put an inflationary, Nominalists a deflationary, interpretation on this situation.

Many passages might be cited. I select the following one from the (otherwise!) excellent discussion of universals in Timothy Sprigge's *Facts, Words and Beliefs* (1970):

I would support the doctrine of *universalia ante rem* as against the doctrine of *universalia in rebus* in the claim that to say that there is a universal of a certain kind does not imply that that universal is