PART ONE
PRELIMINARIES

I

Predicates

I *Predicates as linguistic expressions*

Before considering the topic of universals directly, it will be necessary to say something about the notion of a *predicate*.

Although the word "predicate" is a term of art, it is one which is both enriched and encumbered by a long tradition of philosophical discussion in which it has been both used and mentioned. As a result, an exact definition is a hazardous business. Fortunately, however, our purposes do not require such a definition. It will be sufficient simply to indicate in an informal way what is to be understood by the term.

Consider, then, the contemporary logician's dummy sentence "Fa" which is used in place of such sentences as "This is circular" or "Socrates is a man". Any linguistic expression for which the "F" is a suitable dummy is a one-place predicate. Again, in the logician's dummy sentence "Rab", used in place of such sentences as "This is to the left of that" and "John loves Jane", any linguistic expression for which "R" is a suitable dummy is a two-place predicate. Of course, logicians dispute about just how large a class of linguistic expressions "F" and "R" are suitable dummies for. For our purposes here it will be convenient to be extremely tolerant about admitting linguistic expressions into the class. Since it is a central contention of this work that there are indefinitely many predicates to which no universals correspond, such tolerance will have no ontological consequences. For instance, I should admit "exists" as a predicate although denying that existence is a property (or relation).

This informal way of explaining the notion of a predicate also enables an informal explanation to be given of a subject term. In the

dummy sentences "Fa" and "Rab" any linguistic expression for
which "a" or "b" is a suitable dummy is a subject term. Once again,
I wish to be very tolerant about what expressions are admitted into
the class.

   Given a sentence having the form "Fa", and given that the thing
a actually exists, we can say that "F" is *predicated of a*. Predicating
"F" of *a* may yield a false proposition. It may not be the case that *a*
is F. But if and only if this predication yields a true proposition,
then "F" may be said to *apply to a*. Instead of saying that "F"
applies to *a*, many philosophers speak of "F" being *true of a*. I
prefer to avoid the phrase "true of" in this context. My reasons will
emerge shortly.

   But exactly what portions of sentences should we account
predicates? There appear to be three alternatives. The first is to
account as predicates words such as "circular" and phrases such as
"to the left of". The second is to expand these expressions into the
phrases "is circular" and "is to the left of". The third is to identify
predicates with sentence-frames such as "——— is circular" and
"——— is to the left of ———".

   Strawson (1974, pp. 37–8) gives a strong argument for identifying
predicates with sentence-frames. He points out that it is part of the
meaning of different predicates that they are one- or two- or three-
or . . . -place predicates. For example, if somebody thought that "to
the left of" could be predicated of a single thing, then he would have
failed to understand what the expression means. Predicates "accept"
just so many subject terms. Subject terms, by comparison, are not
restricted in this way. They accept predicates with any number of
subject-positions. Justice is done to this feature of predicates if they
are identified with "gappy" sentences, that is, with sentence-frames.

   It may be remarked in passing that there is a common ontological
view that particulars are independent existences but that their
properties and relations are dependent entities. I believe this view to
be at best thoroughly misleading. Particularity and universality, it
will be argued, are aspects of all reality and of equal rank. But does
not the relative independence of subject terms in a sentence, and the
relative dependence of predicates, encourage philosophers to draw
corresponding conclusions about particulars and universals? If so,
we may have uncovered here one, though certainly only one, of the
hidden roots of Nominalism.

   But a reservation must be made about the identification of

predicates with sentence-frames. There is no reason why the copula "is" should be accounted part of the predicate. I would prefer to represent the predicates as "——— [is] circular" or "——— [is] to the left of ———". Copulation of subject term(s) with a predicate is best represented as a filling in of the blank(s). It does not fall within the predicate. (The logician's "Fa" is thus a more satisfactory symbolism.) The desire to force the copula within the predicate seems again to be connected with the attempt to make particulars independent and universals dependent beings.

We must, of course, remember the ambiguity of "is". It may have the force of "is identical with". Then the phrase "identical with" is part of a predicate. Again, "is" may have the force of "is now" and once again the word "now" is part of the predicate and/or part of the subject term. But where "is" is simply the copula, it should be excluded both from the predicate and the subject term.

Strictly, then, predicates should be identified with certain copula-purged sentence-frames. But, having argued this, it will do no harm to the purposes of this work, and will make for orthographic simplicity, if we once again contract the representation of predicates to such expressions as "circular" and "to the left of". The gaps can be understood, not represented.

Gaps or no gaps, copula or no copula, predicates in this work are taken to be linguistic expressions. In taking predicates to be linguistic expressions, and so parts of sentences, I am following the usage of contemporary and also mediaeval philosophers (for the latter see Kretzmann, 1970, p. 768). But there is another tradition which goes back to the Stoics and which was dominant between the mediaeval and strictly contemporary period. This tradition took predicates not to be parts of sentences, but rather *parts of propositions*.

The two traditions would fail to be distinct if sentences were identical with propositions. However, this identification cannot be made. We can, for instance, ask of a sentence what language it is a sentence of. Is it an English or a French sentence? Now the class of English sentences has few, if any, members which are also members of the class of French sentences. But there are many pairs of English and French sentences which "express the same proposition". So it is not the case that sentence = proposition. The logical relations of sentences and propositions may be very close. At any rate, the argument just given does not rule out close relation. But the relation is not that of identity. So the tradition which makes

predicates parts of sentences is certainly a different tradition from
that which makes predicates parts of propositions.[1]

Light can be cast upon the ambiguity of the term "predicate" by
noticing similar ambiguities in the meaning of some other terms.
Consider the word "belief". It may mean a mental existent, some-
thing in somebody's mind. In this sense of the word, beliefs are
acquired, retained and lost. But it may also mean what is believed,
the *content* of the belief in the first sense, a certain proposition. (We
believe propositions, not sentences.) Beliefs in this second sense
cannot be acquired or lost. What is believed is not a mental existent
at all, although, of course, it is only spoken of as a belief in virtue of
the fact that it is the "content" of something mental. In the first
sense of the word "belief" we can draw a distinction between
belief-token and belief-type. If two people both believe that the
earth is flat, then there are two belief-tokens but only one belief-
type. But if the word "belief" means "what is believed", *viz.* the
proposition that the earth is flat, then it makes no sense to speak of
different tokens of the same proposition.

These two senses of the word "belief" are exactly parallel to the
two traditions among philosophers of use of the word "predicate".
Predicates may be linguistic expressions or they may be what is
predicated by the linguistic expressions. If by "predicate" we mean a
linguistic entity, then we can distinguish between predicate-types
and predicate-tokens. Suppose that two speakers both utter sent-
ences which contain the predicate "F". They bring into existence
two distinct tokens of the same predicate-type. But if by "predicate"
is meant part of a proposition, then there is no room to distinguish
different tokens of the same type. There is just the predicate F.

Other terms exhibit the same sort of ambiguity. Some are mental
terms, such as "desire". Others, like the term "predicate", are
semantic terms. The term "statement", for instance, may refer to
speech-acts of stating. The distinction between type and token then
applies. But it may refer to what is stated (the proposition stated)
and then no such distinction can be drawn.

[1] It is very unfortunate that quotation-marks are conventionally used by philosophers
to refer both to sentences and to propositions. This may help to obscure the fact
that they are not identical, although I do not know whether the convention is more
cause or effect of the confusion. In this work, quotation-marks around a sentence
always form the name of the *sentence*, usually the sentence-type, never the proposition.
For the best account that I know of the way in which quotation-marks are used to
form the name of linguistic expressions see Barnett, 1974.

It is to be noted further that the ambiguity of words like "belief" and "statement" is, on the whole, a convenient ambiguity in ordinary discourse. It is often useful for a speaker to be able to pass freely back and forth between belief-state and belief-content, between the stating and what is stated, without having to note the passage explicitly. The hearer usually disambiguates the word without any difficulty, without even realizing what he is doing.

Our purposes, however, require that we take explicit note of the ambiguity. I propose therefore to adopt the contemporary usage and reserve the term "predicate" when used by itself without a qualifier for *certain linguistic expressions*. Where there is occasion to speak of predicates in the other sense I will speak explicitly of the predicates of propositions, or of propositional predicates.

One reason I have for following the contemporary usage is that I do not really believe that there are such things as propositions. And if there are no propositions, there are no parts of propositions and so there are no predicates in the second sense of "predicate". In saying that there are no such things as propositions and predicates of propositions I am not denying that the term "proposition" and the phrase "predicate of a proposition" frequently occur in sentences which themselves "express true propositions". Indeed, these terms, or their equivalents, seem to be in practice indispensable. But I do not think that there are entities called propositions which have parts. The following is a parallel. There is no such thing as the average man. Nevertheless, the phrase "the average man" occurs in sentences which express truths. It is, indeed, an indispensable phrase in certain contexts. I believe that the same is true of "proposition" and "predicate of a proposition". However, it still seems proper to reserve the term "predicate" for something which does actually exist: *viz*. certain sorts of expression. (For some further discussion of propositions, see Armstrong, 1973, ch. 4.)

If a sentence expresses a certain proposition, then it is natural, and I think correct, to identify the proposition with the *meaning* of that sentence. (If there are propositions to which there correspond no sentences, then these propositions will be *possible meanings*.) Hence, if propositions do not exist, then meanings of sentences do not exist either. Talk about such meanings, however, may still be just as legitimate as talk about the average man, and I believe that it is in fact indispensable in semantics.

If propositions are the meanings of sentences, then propositional

predicates would appear to be the meanings of (linguistic) predi-
cates. This is of great importance for the theory of universals.
Realists about universals, at any rate, have often identified uni-
versals with propositional predicates, or some suitable sub-set of
propositional predicates. The theory of universals is then brought
into very close connection with the theory of meaning. The denial
that there are such things as meanings can then be used as a premiss
in an argument to show that Realism is false and that there are no
universals.

In this work, however, it will be denied that universals (proper-
ties and relations) can be identified with propositional predicates.
This will represent an emancipation of the theory of universals from
the theory of semantics.

Before turning it to the question of identity-conditions for
predicates, it should be noticed that in their ordinary use the ex-
pressions "true" and "false" are applied to propositions rather than
sentences. We do not say that the sentence "Socrates is wise" is true
(or false). Rather, we say that what this sentence is used to assert,
the proposition that Socrates is wise, is true (or false). This is why
I am unwilling to say that the predicate "wise" is *true of* Socrates,
and instead prefer to speak of it as *applying to* Socrates. The terms
"proposition", "meaning", "true" and "false" all belong at the
same level of discourse.

II *Identity-conditions for predicates*

What are the identity-conditions for predicates? When do we have
the same or different predicates? We are not here concerned with
identity-conditions for predicate-tokens, which will be much the
same as those for many other physical phenomena, but with identity-
conditions for predicate-types. Or, to put the matter perhaps more
positively, we are concerned with the conditions under which
different predicate-tokens are accounted different instances of the
identical predicate-type.

It is not clear that there is a true answer to be found to this
question. Rather, it is a matter of choosing those identity-conditions
which are most suitable for the theoretical task in hand. For some
purposes the identity-conditions are given by phonetic and/or
orthographic criteria. Two tokens of the predicate "bank" would
then be tokens of the same predicate-type despite the fact that, in

the sentences in which they occurred, they had different meanings.
Similarly a token of the predicate "ophthalmologist" would be a
token of a different predicate-type from a token of the predicate "eye-
doctor" despite the fact that the two tokens had the same meaning.

For our purposes, however, phonetic or orthographic criteria of
identity would be most inconvenient. Although we have dis-
tinguished predicates, which are linguistic entities, from "proposi-
tional predicates", which are "parts" of propositions, it is obviously
convenient to correlate the two sorts of predicates in some simple
way. This would be achieved if linguistic predicate-tokens were
said to be of the same type if and only if they expressed the very
same propositional predicate. But propositional predicates are
meanings. Hence it is convenient to say that different predicate-
tokens are of the same type if and only if they are synonymous.
Predicates (as opposed to propositional predicates) are linguistic
entities, but the criterion for identity of their type is *semantic*.[1]

It is useful, however, to retain a way of referring to predicates
where their identity-conditions remain phonetic and/or ortho-
graphic. Following a suggestion made by Frank Jackson I will from
this point on use double quotation-marks for predicates whose type
identity-conditions are phonetic–orthographic, and single quota-
tion-marks for predicates whose type identity-conditions are
semantic.

Thus:

"opthalmologist"	=	"OPTHALMOLOGIST"
"bank"	=	"bank" (whatever the meaning)
"opthalmologist"	≠	"eye-doctor"
"red"	≠	"rouge"

but

'opthalmologist'	=	'eye-doctor'
'red'	=	'rouge'

although

'human'	≠	'featherless biped'.

(The ' = ' sign is here intended only to assert identity of predicate
type.)

It is presumably no objection to the notion of synonymy that
while some predicates are clearly synonymous and others are clearly

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[1] The distinction between phonetic–orthographic and semantic criteria of identity
seems to correspond to Abelard's distinction between *vox* and *sermo*.

non-synonymous, borderline cases can be found where it is not
clear what the situation is and in which, perhaps, any decision must
be arbitrary. For in this respect the concept of synonymy resembles
most, perhaps all, other empirical concepts.

W. V. Quine has placed the notion of synonymy under a cloud by
declaring it to be an incoherent concept. I shall therefore say briefly
why I reject Quine's strictures.

First, unlike such concepts as analyticity or logical necessity,
synonymy is an untechnical concept freely employed in ordinary
thought and discourse. The actual word "synonymy" is a technical
one. But the notion of sameness (and difference) of meaning is one
which we constantly employ and appeal to. The notion is applied to
a body of material, *viz*. linguistic expressions, which everybody
agrees to exist; and there is very widespread non-collusive agree-
ment as to what expressions are synonymous and what are not.
Indeed, the notion has such deep roots in our ordinary talk and
thought about linguistic matters that we do not know how to dis-
pense with it in that talk and thought. Now a concept which has
these characteristics has an extremely strong claim to be a coherent
concept.

But it is not merely the case that the notions of sameness and
difference of meaning are indispensable in the course of our ordin-
ary, untheoretical, talk and reflection about linguistic matters. The
notions are also indispensable to the science of linguistics as it is at
present conceived and practised, a science which is making far
greater progress now than at any other time in its history. In the
recent past, under the influence of Behaviourist thinking, linguists
tried to dispense with the 'mentalistic' notion of meaning. But their
attempt is generally held to have failed. Consider the notions of
paraphrase and *ambiguity*. These notions are essential tools of
Chomskian and post-Chomskian linguistics. Their theoretical
usefulness and fruitfulness is not in doubt. Yet a paraphrase of a
sentence is another sentence which means the same as the original
sentence. An ambiguous sentence or phrase is a sentence or phrase
which can mean different things.

So both commonsense and science use, and seemingly cannot
dispense with, the notion of synonymy. All that can be said against
the notion is the undeniable fact that it has proved exceedingly
difficult to give any satisfactory philosophical account or logical
analysis of synonymy. But this fact I take to be simply a tribute to

the great difficulty of the task. It is, after all, notorious how difficult
it can be to pass from a practically satisfactory but unselfconscious
grasp of some notion which is central in our thought to an explicit
account of the logical structure of that notion. It would not be
surprising if this held in the case of synonymy.

So it is granted that the notion of synonymy is philosophically
opaque, but it is urged that this is no reason for jettisoning it. It may
still be, and I believe is, the most satisfactory criterion to use for the
type identity of tokens of predicates.

Having made these preliminary remarks about predicates we can
embark on the direct examination of the Problem of Universals,
beginning with a consideration of Nominalism.

PART TWO

THEORIES OF UNIVERSALS

*. . . that old man of the sea, nominalism, which has ridden so much
modern empiricism.*
Donald Williams (1966, p. 223)

2

Predicate Nominalism

I *Nominalism versus Realism*

There is one sense in which everybody agrees that particulars have
properties and stand in relations to other particulars. The piece of
paper before me is a particular. It is white, so it has a property. It
rests upon a table, so it is related to another particular. Such gross
facts are not, or should not be, in dispute between Nominalists and
Realists.

G. E. Moore never tired of emphasizing that in the case of many
of the great metaphysical disputes the gross facts are not in dispute.
What is in dispute, he contended, is the account or analysis to be
given of the gross facts. This appears to be the situation in the dis-
pute between Nominalism and Realism. Both can agree that the
paper is white and rests upon a table. It is an adequacy-condition of
their analyses that such statements come out true. But the analyses
themselves are utterly different.

We start with a basic agreement, then: that in some minimal or
pre-analytic sense there are things having certain properties and
standing in certain relations. But, as Plato was the first to point out,
this situation is a profoundly puzzling one, at least for philosophers.
The same property can belong to different things. The same
relation can relate different things. Apparently, there can be
something identical in things which are not identical. Things are
one at the same time as they are many. How is this possible?
Nominalists and Realists react to the puzzle in different ways.