

Universals

Some Existence Arguments

A Platonic Habit

- ‘We are in the habit of postulating one unique Form for each plurality of objects to which we apply a common name’ (*Republic* x 596a)
- Our question:
 - Is this a bad habit or a good habit?

A Platonist Thought

- In addition to *particulars*, there are *universals*. The world contains not one or the other exclusively, but both kinds of beings.
- Particulars are, as a first approximation, spatio-temporally bounded material beings, familiar referents of singular terms, objects present to sense perception whose existence needs no special pleading.
 - e.g. the queen's crown; a Roman coin; an Olympic medal
- Universals, by contrast, are properties or qualities or characteristics, entities whose existence, in contrast, evidently requires some manner of argumentation.
 - e.g. being golden, being round, being valuable

A Leery Eye

- Antisthenes: ‘A horse I see, Plato — but horseness I do not see.’
- Plato: ‘No, for though you have the eye with which a horse is seen, you have not yet acquired the eye to see horseness.’ (Simp. *in Cat.* 208, 28; cf. Ammon. *In Porph. Isag.* 40, 6)

Preliminaries

- Let us say that ϕ is a universal only iff:
 - ϕ is an abstract, mind- and language-independent entity (AMLIE) which: (i) has all of its intrinsic properties essentially; and (ii) if ϕ is able to be spatially located at all, then ϕ is able to be fully present in more than one spatial location concurrently.
- So, let us say ϕ is a universal only if:
 - ϕ is something other than a material particular
 - N.b. that we can none the less think of universals as *individuals*, in the sense that each universal is trivially one thing.
 - We can stipulate for our purposes as a matter of linguistic convenience that particulars, unlike some *individuals*, viz. those that are universals, do not satisfy both (i) and (ii)
 - N.b. further that this is a necessary condition, so that as far as we are concerned at present, there may be particulars beyond the material particulars (gods, numbers, propositions. . .)
 - ϕ is multiply *exemplifiable* or *instantiable* or *predicable*
 - These are various names for what a first seems to be a sort of *polyadic relation* that universals can stand in to other individuals, including other universals—though this is something we will have occasion to query.

Types and Tokens

- Consider the following sentences:
 - (1) They were a bit chagrined to find themselves wearing the same garish jumper to the office Christmas party.
 - (2) When they discovered this fact, they blushed at the same moment and ended up wearing the same shade of red as well.
- Notice the difference here:
 - (1) *might* be true, when said of the same token.
 - (2) can only be true when said of a type of which there are distinct tokens.

The Identity of Types

- Consider the following minimalist poem by Aram Saroyan:

Silence

Silence

- Query: how many words are there in this poem?

How many?

- Two answers seem possible: one or two.
- Deflationary: There is no single answer to this question. It depends on whether you mean *types* or *tokens*; here we have one type twice betokened.
 - So, we have one type and two tokens. Case closed.
- What, though, is the *one* type twice betokened?
- A crucial question: what is to for two or more tokens to be instances of the *same* type?
- In large measure, the question of realism about universals is a question about the existence and character of types.

A First Approach

- (1) The type SILENCE is either nowhere or wholly present in more than one place at one time.
- (2) If it is nowhere, then it is an abstract entity, and in fact an AMLIE.
- (3) If it is wholly present in more than one place at one time, then the type SILENCE is not a material particular.
- (4) If it is not a material particular, then the type SILENCE is an abstract entity, and in fact an AMLIE.
- (5) If it is an AMLIE and not a particular, then the type SILENCE is a universal.
- (6) So, there are universals.

Predication and Universals

- Consider a simple singular predication:
 - (1) Socrates is courageous.
- ‘Socrates’ is a singular term
- ‘...is courageous’ is a predicate.
- Suppose (1) is true. What makes it so?
- On natural thought: such sentences are made true by certain states of affairs in the world, certain truth-makers.
- Such truth-makers seem, however, to involve two components, a material particular and a *quality*; (1) is true when and only when the quality *being courageous* is *in* (in some sense) Socrates.

An Argument from Predication

- (1) The queen's crown (a) is circular (is golden . . .)
- (2) This Olympic medal (b) is circular (is golden. . .).
- (3) So, there is something, circularity (ϕ) (or being golden (ψ)), which is in both a and b .
- (4) The ϕ (ψ) in a and b is either the same or different.
- (5) It's not different.
- (6) So, the ϕ (ψ) in a and b is the same in both.
- (7) No particular can be in more than one place at one time.
- (8) So, the ϕ (ψ) in a and b is not a particular.
- (9) Everything which exists is either particular or universal.
- (10) So, ϕ (ψ) in a and b is a universal.

Dyadic Predicates

- (1) Edinburgh is to the north of London.
- (2) Berlin is to the north of Munich.
- (3) So, there is some relation R , *being to the north of*, which is realized in Germany and in England.
- (4) This R is either the same or different.
- (5) It is not different.
- (6) So, it is the same relation.
- (7) If R is the same, it is either a particular or a universal.
- (8) R is not a particular.
- (9) So, R is a universal.

Resemblance and Predication

- Basic subject-predicate discourse may seem to implicate us in universals:
 1. The Queen's crown is gold.
 2. This Roman coin is gold.
 3. This Olympic medal is gold.
- The predicate '. . .is gold' seems to predicate the *same* quality of diverse subjects.
- Two hypotheses:
 - The predicate '. . .is gold' predicates a quality, the universal, being gold, of various particulars.
 - The predicate '. . .is gold' merely indicates that the subjects (1), (2), and (3) *resemble* one another in respect of being gold.
 - Yet *resemblance* itself seems to be a dyadic relation: the Queen's crown resembles (i.e. stands in the resemblance relation) to this Roman coin in respect of being gold.
 - One natural question: is this dyadic relation, resemblance, the same or different?
 - It is hard to see how it can be different. Yet if it is same, we are back where we began.

Abstract Reference

- In simple singular predictions, the subject term *names* a subject, whereas the predicate is a general term, which expresses but does not name a quality.
 - So: 'Socrates is courageous.'
- Still, predicate expressions can be and often are nominalized.
 - So: 'Courage is a virtue.'
- A metaphysical realist has an easy story to tell: in cases of abstract singular reference, an AMLIE, a universal, and is named by the singular term just as Socrates is named by 'Socrates'.
- Her detractor? $(x)(Cx \rightarrow Vx)$
 - Is this adequate?
 - It seems not: someone could be courageous but otherwise rotten.

Paraphrase Failures

- Consider: ‘Gold resembles orange more than it resembles purple.’
- One paraphrase strategy to avoid any commitment to universals:
 - ‘For all particulars x , y , and z , if x is gold, and y is orange, and z is purple, then x resembles y more than it resembles z .’
 - Here, however, there are counterexamples aplenty. If x is the Queen’s golden robe and z the King’s purple robe, whereas y is an orange fizzy drink, then x resembles z more than it resembles y .
 - This only serves to remind us that we were talking about the qualities in question and not their instances.

An Argument from Abstract Reference

- (1) Sentences with abstract singular terms in the subject position implicate us in the existence of universals unless there exist adequate (= truth and meaning preserving) paraphrases of them which make no reference to universals.
- (2) There are no such paraphrases.
- (3) So, sentences with abstract singular terms in the subject position implicate us in the existence of universals.
- (4) So, there are universals.

These Arguments. . .

- . . .are all, then, eyes for Antisthenes.