An Approach to Particulars I

Bundles and Substrata
Where Things Stand

• We have:

• . . . motivated the doctrine of universals.

• . . . offered several positive arguments, and found arguments concerning referring general terms especially compelling.

• . . . reviewed and rejected various versions of nominalism, noting that all linguistic and meta-linguistic versions succumb to objections, but that trope-theoretic nominalism fares better, at least with respect to these objections.
Next: Particulars

• N.b. that nominalist rejections of universals have presupposed a notion of particulars as unproblematic.

• Indeed, several arguments for the existence of universals have done the same.

• What, though, are particulars?

• We seek an account adequate to both the synchronic and diachronic identity of particulars.

• Three phenomena:
  • There are particulars, both synchronic and diachronic.
  • At least some particulars are mereologically complex: some particulars have parts.
  • At least some particulars are bounded in space and time.
Two Good Thoughts... 

• One must remain sympathetic to the attempt to find a *deep* ontological distinction between unified and arbitrary particulars. . . (Armstrong, *A World of States of Affairs*, 111-112)

• We cannot know what something is without knowing how it is marked off from other things. Identity is thus of a piece with ontology. . . (Quine, ‘Ontological Relativity,’ 55)
• . . . If the world can be partitioned into unchanging particulars that are strictly identical through time, then one could certainly see the point of describing these things as the true particulars. (*A World of States of Affairs*, 112)

• . . . Accordingly, it is involved in the same relativity. (‘Ontological Relativity,’ 55)

• Ontology is indeed doubly relative. Specifying the universe of a theory makes sense only relative to some background theory, and only relative to some choice of a manual of translation of the one theory into the other. (‘Ontological Relativity,’ 54-55)
Our Approach

• There are non-arbitrary, non-intention-dependent particulars. That is, some particulars are *privileged*.

• At least some of these particulars undergo change. These are beings capable of remaining numerically one and the same while sustaining material replenishment.

• This judgment is made against the background of a theory; but the theory in question is categorial in character and abductively justified.

• Abduction is here understood as a two-stage process: (i) we make an observation which would be wildly improbable were there no explanation at all for it and for which a justifying explanation is tendered in the form of an hypothesis; and (ii) a deduction is formed on the basis of that hypothesis.

• Our dominant claim: privileged diachronic continuants are *substances*. 
Substances?

• x is a substance =_{df} x is . . .
  • . . . a bundle of properties (BT_p) or tropes (BT_t)
  • . . . a subject or substratum
  • . . . a hybrid of a bundle and a subject
  • . . . a categorically delimited basic being
Setting Aside an Alleged Impediment

• A Lockean Worry

1. Necessarily, $S$ has a meaningful concept $c$ only if $S$ has been directly acquainted with an instance of $c$.

2. No-one is ever directly acquainted with any substance.

3. Hence, no-one has a meaningful concept of substance.
Bundle Theories

- The idea of a substance is nothing but a collection of simple ideas that are united by the imagination and have a particular name assigned them by which we are able to recall, either to ourselves or others, that collection. (Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature* I vi)

- Ordinary objects are ‘bundles of qualities’. (Russell, *Inquiry into Meaning and Truth*)
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Two General Problems

- In its property version, all substances exist of necessity; but some (all?) substances are contingent; hence, BT\(_p\) fails.

- In any version, BT holds that substances are identical with extensionally given bundles; such bundles are static, whereas substances can change; hence BT fails.
Substratum Theories

- Two flavours, pure and qualified:
  - $ST_p$: $x$ is a substance $=_{df} x$ is a substratum (some stuff?) in which properties inhere
  - $ST_q$: $x$ is a substance $=_{df} x$ is determinate substratum (a definite bounded quantity of stuff) in which properties inhere
Some Problems for ST

• ST is difficult to state: substances seem to be bare particulars, to have no intrinsic properties essentially; yet a substratum must perforce exemplify properties (logical properties, categorial properties, being a substance. . .).

• ST is difficult to specify: is substance *bounded* stuff? If so, how so? If not, is there more than one?
A Hybrid View

- HS: x is a substance $=_{df}$ x is a complex of: (i) a substratum (some stuff?), and (ii) the property instances which inhere in it.
And a Difficulty for HS

• First, the worries about ST stay with us.

• Second, this seems hardly category-specific.

• Third, the complex is or is not mereologically extensional: if it is, then the theory is false; if it is not, then the theory is at best incomplete.
An Impasse?

1. Substances are unified, non-instantiable, non-occurrent entities capable of existing diachronically as independent and determinate Fs.

2. If a substance is a unified complex, then it is unified: (a) in virtue of its own intrinsic features; or (b) by dint of the activities of entities extrinsic to it.

3. If (2b), then complex substances are not independent (and so, by (1), not substances after all).

4. If (2a), then a complex substance is united in terms of either BT, ST, or HS—and all of these are false.

5. Hence, there are no complex substances.
Something Amiss

• ‘But upon a more strict review of the section concerning personal identity, I find myself involved in such a labyrinth that, I must confess, I neither know how to correct my former opinions, nor how to render them consistent.’ —Appendix, Treatise on Human Nature (1975, 633)