

Privileged Ontology

Five Pillars

Humean Honesty

- ‘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* (Oxford University Press: 1975), 633).

Hume's Problem

- Let the world have as its sole basic constituents *tropes*.
 - Let a trope be a particular property: *this red*, or *this circularity*, or *this hope*.
- Tropes can be bundled: a bundle of tropes is simply an aggregate of tropes $t_1 \dots t_n$.
 - Every aggregate of tropes exists.
 - 'Given any collection of objects, no matter how disparate or widely scattered, there is a further object composed of them all' (—Van Cleve, 'The Moon and Sixpence: A Defense of Mereological Universalism,' 321).
- Yet Hume thinks, or seems to think, that he is one kind of bundle and the moon and six pence is another, lesser kind.

So, One Easy Solution

- You, Hume, *do* exist:
 - After all, *every* aggregation of tropes exists. You're n aggregate—just one aggregate among many.
- You're only troubled because you think you're *special*.
 - Such troubles are merely the manifestation of a presumed, unarticulated and unacknowledged *privileged ontology*.

Collections and Objects

- Consider the following objects:
 - my left shoe and the lace threaded through its eyelets
 - my right shoe and the lace threaded through the eyelets of the Prime Minister's left shoe
 - the Eiffel Tower and the tip of Napoleon's nose
 - the moon and six pennies scattered upon a desk
 - Hume
- One easy thought: they all exist. Aggregates are *free*.
 - There is a problem here only if the last item on this list is privileged relative to the others

Two Ways to be Privileged

- Existentially privileged

- a is existentially privileged with respect to b iff a exists and b (perhaps despite being a putative object of reference) does not.

- So, where $a =$ Xanthippe and $b =$ Antigone, Xanthippe is existentially privileged with respect to Antigone.

- Categorially privileged

- a is categorially privileged with respect to b iff (i) both a and b exist, and (ii) an essence-specifying account of b perforce makes asymmetric reference to a

- So, where $a =$ Xanthippe and $b =$ Xanthippe's surface, Xanthippe is categorially privileged with respect to Xanthippe's surface.

Hume's Problem Clarified

- Hume might be worried. . . .
 - . . . because he thinks that he exists and the other aggregates do not—but, evidently, they do.
 - So, if this is his worry, he should relax and enjoy himself as his labyrinth dissipates before his (aggregated) eyes.
 - . . . because he thinks that he is some kind of basic being, a chap of privilege, whereas the others are not—but he does not see how this can be so.
 - Perhaps, e.g., he thinks he enjoys a kind of unity the others do not.
 - If this is his worry, then the problem is that he thinks the other aggregates are *heaps* and that he is either (i) not a heap at all or (ii) something else in addition to being a heap, something special.

Heaps and Privileged Unities

- Let us say that:
 - x is a heap iff and only if (i) x is a composite; and (ii) everything that can be said about x in relation to its parts may be given as a list.
 - A list for our purposes is an extensional entity that can fully describe an extensional entity itself bereft of order. That is:
 - (i) the list $\mathbf{L}^1 \{L_1, L_2, L_3\}$ is the same list as $\mathbf{L}^2 \{L_3, L_1, L_2\}$;
and (ii) \mathbf{L}^1 characterizes the same heap as \mathbf{L}^2 , if either characterizes a heap at all.
- In short, a heap is an extensionally specifiable aggregate.

Basic Terms of Mereology

- Let ' $x < y$ ' stand for ' x is a part of y '.
- Further, let the notion of 'part' be taken as primitive, with no immediate restrictions what may qualify as a part of what
- Then:
 - x is a *proper part* of y iff $x < y$ & $x \neq y$
 - x and y overlap iff there is some object z such that (i) $z < x$, and (ii) $z < y$
 - x and y are disjoint iff x and y do not overlap
 - x is a sum of the y s =_{df} the y s are all parts of x and every part of x overlaps at least one of the y s.

Basic Axioms of Mereology

- If x is a part of y and y is a part of z , then x is a part of z
 - parthood is transitive
- $\exists x (x \text{ is a member of } A) \rightarrow \exists x (x \text{ is a sum of } A \ \& \ (\forall y) y \text{ is a sum of } A \rightarrow x = y)$
 - the existence of sums: every non-empty set has an object which is its sum
 - the uniqueness of sums: every non-empty set has at most one object which is its sum

The Existence of Sums

- Consider the Special Composition Question:
- What necessary and jointly sufficient conditions must any x s satisfy in order for it to be the case that there is an object o composed of those x s?
- An Argument for universalism
- In response to the SCQ, we must be either: (a) universalists; (b) nihilists; or (c) moderates.
 - (1) Nihilism is untenable.
 - (2) Moderation is untenable.
 - (3) Hence, universalism is the only possible response.
- Hylomorphism's answer: (3) is true as regards heaps; but (2) is false (and so with it, (3)) where categorially privileged beings are concerned.
 - The x 's form a privileged unity when and only when they are elements in a privileged hylomorphic compound.

How is moderation tenable?

- ✦ A first precept:
 - ✦ We also affirm that nothing comes to be without qualification from what is not. Nevertheless, we maintain that a thing may come to be from what is not in a certain way, for example, accidentally (*Phys.* 191b13–15)
- ✦ Moderation is tenable if (and only if?) we can motivate two theses, the first regarding *change* and the second regarding *unity*.

Change: the Basic Argument

1. There is change.
2. A necessary condition of there being change is the existence of matter and form.
3. So, there are matter and form.

Change and the PPC

- The Principle of Phenomenological Conservatism:
- If it appears to a subject S as if p , then, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, S has grounds for accepting p .
- Two features:
 - Positive: *phenomena* look beyond themselves to the way things are, to beings rather than to seemings
 - Negative: (PPC) is self-limiting in that *phenomena* qualify as evidentiary but are not thereby guarantors of the truth
- One easy thought: well, there *seems* to be change. So, unless there is a defeater, we have reason to believe in the existence of change.
- One less easy thought: change seems to come in two flavours: generation and alteration. So, unless there is a defeater, we have reason to believe in the existence of generation and alteration.

Parmenides: a Challenge about Change

1. Necessarily, what is and what can be thought are co-extensive.
2. Hence, it is not possible to think non-being.
3. It is possible to think of generation only if it is possible to think of non-being.
4. Hence, it is not possible to think of generation.
5. It is possible to think of change only if it is possible to think of generation.
6. It is not possible to think of generation.
7. Hence, it is not possible to think of change.
8. There is change *iff* it is possible to think of change.
9. Therefore, there is no change.

Matter and Form: First Characterisation

- ✦ x is matter $=_{df}$ x underlies change in the acquisition or loss of a form.
- ✦ x is form $=_{df}$ x is a positive attribute gained or lost by matter in the process of change.

Basic Hylomorphism: First Characterisation

- Basic hylomorphism = df ordinary physical objects are complexes of matter and form.
- x is an ordinary physical object = df x is a complex of matter and form such that the presence of the form makes the matter exist as some ϕ .

Our Approach

- Hylomorphic compounds are privileged unities:
 - a compound C is privileged only if C is an *internally unified metaphysical complex*, where:
 - C is internally unified only if C has a form ϕ , a functionally defined principle the presence of which unifies the elements of C into M when M is the matter of C .
 - Our next question, then, is: what makes a form the relevant sort of principle?
 - Our subsequent question: how, exactly, does form manage to unify?

Hylomorphism Extended

- Thinking about change and generation:
 - ‘This, then, is one way of solving the difficulty. Another is to observe that the same things can be spoken of in terms of potentiality and actuality’ (*Phys.* 191b27–29).
 - ‘Matter exists in potentiality, because it may move into a form; and to be sure, when it exists actually, it is in its form’ (*Met.* 1050a15–16).
- Hylomorphism is modally enmeshed:
 - Actuality and Potentiality
 - x is matter $=_{df}$ x exists in potentiality.
 - x is form $=_{df}$ x makes what exists in potentiality exist in actuality.

Kinds of Forms

- Only substances (or, basic beings: *ousiai*) are said to come to be without qualification. Now in all cases other than substance, it is plain that there is necessarily something underlying, namely the thing which comes to be [a certain way] . . . But that substances, things said to be without qualification, also come to be from some underlying thing, will be clear to one examining the matter. For there is always something which underlies what comes to be, from which what comes to be comes, for instance, animals and plants come from seed (*Phys.* 190a32-b5).
- The Kinds:
 - ϕ is a substantial form =_{df} ϕ is what makes what exists potentially exist unqualifiedly.
 - ψ is an accidental form =_{df} ψ is what makes what exists unqualifiedly as ϕ but is also, while remaining ϕ , potentially ψ , actually ψ .
- Here our question: *makes*?

Hylomorphism and Unity

- There is, indeed, a difficulty about part and whole, perhaps not relevant to the present argument, yet deserving consideration on its own account—namely, whether the part and the whole are one or more than one, and in what way they can be one or many, and, if they are more than one, in what way they are more than one (*Phys.* 185b11–14).

An Abductive Argument for Hylomorphism (AH)

1. There exist non-intention dependent diachronic unities which are (i) bounded in space and time (by, then, non-fiat boundaries), (ii) modally ductile, and (iii) unified non-aggregative compounds. (Call them AC unities.)
2. The best (or only) explanation for the existence for AC unities is hylomorphism.
3. If (2) we should ourselves embrace hylomorphism.
4. So, we should ourselves embrace hylomorphism.

Some Observations

- ✦ As an abductive argument, AH is:
 - ✦ non-deductive
 - ✦ in effect, a two-part argument, the first part of which forms an explanatory hypothesis and the second part of which applies and assesses it.
- ✦ AH-1 should be regarded as a *phainomenon*.
- ✦ Much of the action, then, pertains to (2): why suppose that hylomorphism has such unique explanatory power?

A Source of Tension

- Hylomorphic compounds are (or seem to be) counted amongst the basic beings.
 - They thus satisfy some commitment of ontological independence.
 - So, o is a BB =_{df} o is ontologically independent
 - First pass: o^* is ontologically independent of o^{**} =_{df} (i) o^* can exist without o^{**} ; and (ii) o^{**} cannot exist without o^* .
 - So, o is a BB =_{df} there is no o^* (where o^* is not identical with o) such that necessarily, if o exists, then o^* exists.
 - Hylomorphic compounds are (or seem to be), well, compounds, that is to say complexes of form and matter.
- They thus depend upon their parts and so seem not to be independent of them.
- So, hylomorphic compounds are and are not BBs.

A Home for Hylomorphism

- ✦ Hylomorphism is best articulated within the broader context of *privileged ontology* (PO).
- ✦ Taken in isolation, hylomorphism wobbles unsteadily, liable to tumble in the face of incursions from a variety of challenges.
 - ✦ It requires a set of commitments which jointly secure it and which it in its turn renders defensible.
- ✦ This set of commitments constitutes PO.

Two Roads into PO

PO: the Way of Contrast

PO: Core Commitments

PO: the Way of Contrast

- Let us start with a meta-ontological question: when we engage ontological questions, what sorts of questions do we engage?
- Two sorts of approaches:
 - We seek an extensional answer to the question: What exists?
 - We are wanting to determine what there is—our end game is a long list. We compile. Then we stop.
 - Our list is, like all lists, flat; likewise, our ontology is flat.
 - We seek an intensional answer to the question: What is the nature and order of what exists?
 - We are wanting to determine what kinds of things exist; what the different kinds are essentially; what dependency relations, if any, these kinds bear to one another of necessity; and whether some one or more of those kinds enjoy a kind of privilege or basicness or fundamentality.
 - Our theory tracks privilege; likewise, our ontology is privileged.

A Quinean Approach

- ‘A theory is committed to those and only those entities to which the bound variables of the theory must be capable of referring in order that the affirmations made in the theory be true.’ —Quine (1948, 33)
 - So, if a theory θ contains the sentence ‘ $\exists x \phi(x)$ ’, then if θ is true, there is at least one entity which is ϕ .
 - Or, if you like the bound variable x must range over something ϕ if θ is true.
 - This is the sense in which θ is ‘ontologically committed’ to ϕ s.
 - Such commitments are distinguished, not always clearly or consistently from θ ’s ideological commitments—those concepts expressible within θ , whether or not θ is ontologically committed to them.
 - This leaves open the precise nature of ontological commitment, in the sense that it does not tell us when, according to θ , something is (or must be) bound by a variable.

A Quinean Presupposition

- One presupposition of the Quinean approach: quantifier invariance.
 - The existential quantifier always and everywhere has exactly the same force, or, if you like, *means exactly the same thing*.
 - The quantifier is binary, non-scalar, and unforgiving.
 - binary: either something exists or it does not exist; if it exists, then it is not the case that it does not exist; if something does not exist, then it is not the case that it does exist.
 - non-scalar: nothing exists more or less than anything else.
 - It is not the case that the following is a syntactically complete, meaningful, true sentence: 'a is more than b.'
 - unforgiving: there is no half-way house of shadow existence—no subsistence, no quasi-existence, no inexistence, no intentional existence, no objective existence (in the manner of an *ens rationis*)

Carnap's Deflation

- Existence questions are internal or external.
 - An internal existence question is relative to a linguistic framework L .
 - Every existence question relative to any L is trivial.
 - Do numbers exist? Well, according to a linguistic framework positing numbers, yes, they do—trivially.
 - An external existence question is raised independently of any linguistic framework.
 - Every such question is a pseudo-question.
 - 'Yes,' we say, 'but do numbers *really* exist?'
 - This is a question lacking cognitive significance.

Neo-Carnapian Attitudes Relevant to our Study

- Hirsch (2002) supports quantifier variance for different domains of quantification: putative differences pertaining to existence in different domains are merely verbal.
- Armando says that some heaps exist but others do not, while Beatrice insists that all heaps exist. They are not really disagreeing.
 - They are using different quantifiers and thus talking past one another—as if one castaway were to say, overjoyed, ‘There is a ship on the horizon.’ and the other were to respond ‘No there’s not—nothing can be *on* a horizon; so, obviously, there is no ship on the horizon.’
 - The important point for us: on this approach, there is no privileged quantifier.
 - We think there is no privileged quantifier either—but only because we do not subscribe to more than one quantifier.

PO: Core Commitments

- One methodological: PPC
- There are privileged unities, namely hylomorphic compounds—these are *basic beings*.
- Basic beings have more than merely modal *essences*.
- The privilege enjoyed by basic beings is categorial rather than existential.
 - As a corollary: hylomorphism can be characterized and defended only against the background of an articulated category theory.
- Though privileged categories enjoy priority relations to dependent categories, the single quantifier is binary, non-scalar, and unforgiving.