

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.

Resembling Resemblances

- ‘If we wish to avoid the universals *whiteness* and *triangularity*, we shall choose some particular patch of white or some particular triangle, and say that anything is white or a triangle if it bears the right sort of resemblance to our chosen particular. But then the resemblance required will have to be a universal. Since there are many white things, the resemblance must hold between many pairs of particular white things; and this is the characteristic of a universal. It will be useless to say that there is a different resemblance for each pair, for then we shall have to say that these resemblances resemble each other, and thus at last we shall be forced to admit resemblance as a universal. The relation of resemblance, therefore, must be a true universal. And having been forced to admit this universal, we find that it is no longer worth while to invent different and unpalatable theories to avoid the admission of such universals as whiteness and triangularity’ (Russell, *MCR* 17).

Resemblances: an Argument

1. If a and b resemble one another in respect of being ϕ , a bears R b and a bears R to b in respect of ϕ and b bears R to a in respect of being ϕ .
2. If a bears R to b in respect of being ϕ and b bears R to a in respect of being ϕ , then either (i) R is itself a universal or (ii) R is a particular.
3. Yet since c and d may equally resemble one another in respect of being ϕ , then in that case c bears R to d in respect of ϕ and d bears R to c in respect of ϕ .
4. If a bears R to b in respect of being ϕ and b bears R to a in respect of being ϕ and c bears R to d in respect of being ϕ and d bears R to c in respect of being ϕ , then (i) either these resemblances merely resemble one another by some particular relation R or (ii) R is itself a universal.
5. Not 4(i).
6. So, R is a universal.
7. If R is a universal, then so too is our original ϕ is a universal
8. So, our original ϕ is a universal.

These Arguments. . .

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