

# An Approach to Particulars II

## On Behalf of Privileged Ontology



# Humean Honesty I

- ‘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)



# One Easy Solution

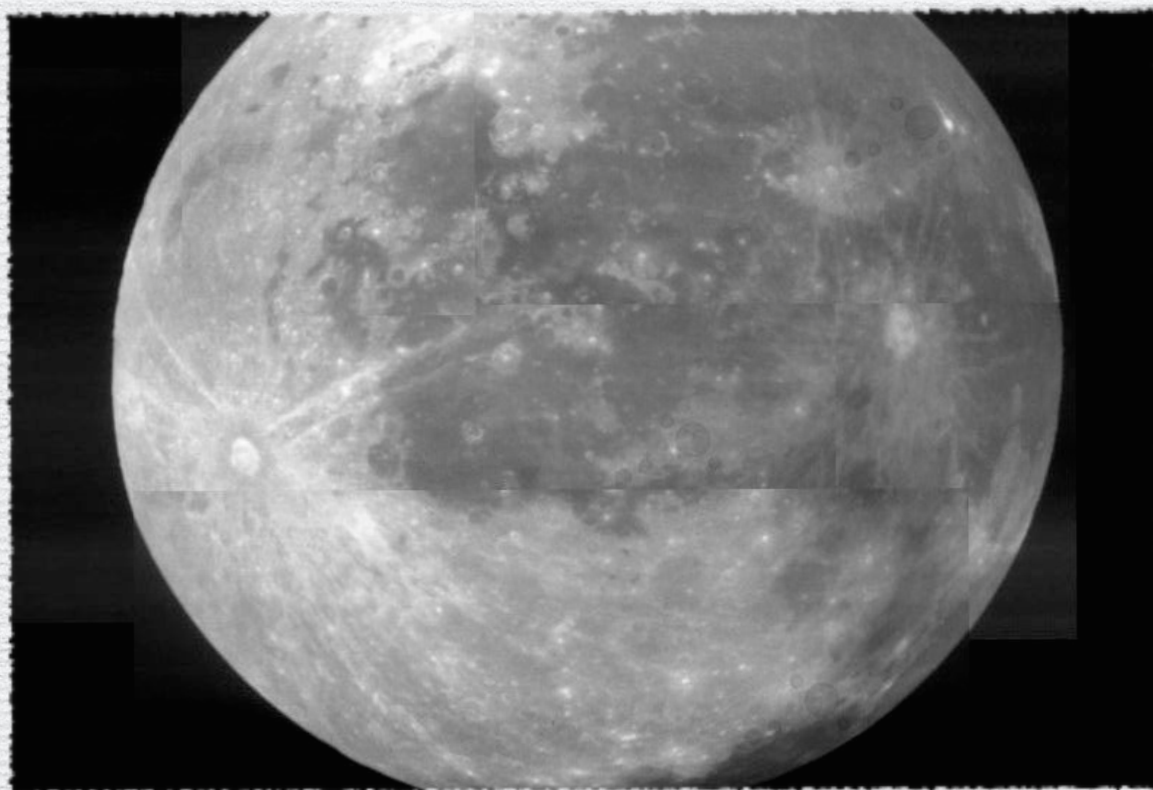
- You, Hume, *do* exist:
  - After all, *every* collection exists. You're a collection—just one collection among many.
- You're only troubled because you think you're *special*.
  - Such troubles are merely the manifestation of a presumed, unarticulated and unacknowledged *privileged ontology*.



# Collections and Objects

- Consider the following objects (from Van Cleve):
  - my left shoe and the lace threaded through its eyelets
  - my right shoe and the lace threaded through the eyelets of your left shoe
  - the Eiffel Tower and the tip of Napoleon's nose
  - the moon and six pennies scattered upon a desk
- What should we say about these collections?
  - 'Given any collection of objects, no matter how disparate or widely scattered, there is a further object composed of them all.' (Van Cleve, 321)







# The Special Composition Question

- When:
  - $x$  overlaps  $y$  =<sub>df</sub> there is a  $z$  such that  $z$  is a part of  $x$  and  $z$  is a part of  $y$ ; and
  - the  $x$ s compose  $y$  =<sub>df</sub> (i) the  $x$ s are all parts of  $y$ , (ii) no two of the  $x$ s overlap, and (iii) every part of  $y$  overlaps at least one of the  $x$ s.
- The Special Composition Question: What necessary and jointly sufficient conditions must any collection of  $x$ s satisfy in order for it to be the case that there is an object  $O$  composed of those  $x$ s?



# One Easy Answer

- Always: any two objects compose a third object.
- More exactly: Unrestricted Mereology + Identity by Aggregation
  - The fusion of any number of objects yields an object.



# 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 =<sub>df</sub> 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

- An argument in response to the Special Composition Question:
  1. In response to the SCQ, we must be either: (a) universalists; (b) nihilists; or (c) moderates.
  2. Nihilism is untenable.
  3. Moderation is untenable.
  4. Hence, universalism is the only possible response.



## (2) Against Nihilism

1. According to nihilism, composite entities are mere *façon de parler* (to say that *o* is a composite object is simply to say that some atoms are arranged *o*-wise).
2. Possibly, there is gunk — that is, atomless, infinitely divisible matter (with the result that there are no simples).
3. So, it is possible that *everything* that exists is a mere *façon de parler*.
4. (3) cannot be.
5. So, nihilism is untenable.



# (3) *Against Moderation*

- Moderation violates uniqueness.
- Uniqueness is required because without it, we suffer from an explosion of reality.



# The Uniqueness of Sums

- Consider as a form of moderation *Unenlightened Aristotelianism (UA)*: ordinary objects are compounds of form and matter.
  - So, e.g., a snowball is simply some snow, the matter, given a spherical shape, the form.
  - When some snow is spherically shaped, a new entity comes into being, namely the snowball.
    - Plainly the snowball and the snow which makes it up are not identical: the snow can exist when the snowball does not.
    - So, (UA) violates uniqueness.



# The Explosion

- According to UA, a sufficient condition for the generation of *any* new object is the realisation of some form or other by some quantity of matter or other.
- So, e.g., when the snowball comes into existence, so too does an infinite number of *snowdiscalls* (= a quantity of snow and any shape between being spherical or being disc-shaped). So the same quantity of snow has an infinite number of forms: being round, being round or being a snowdiscall of one degree, being round or being a snowdiscall of two degrees. . .
- Allegedly violates two secure principles of note:
  - It is an affront to common sense to say that so very many items are created each time a snowball comes into existence.
  - Two or more items cannot be in the same place at the same time.



### (3) *Against Moderation (again)*

1. If we accept any form of moderation we are saddled with an explosion of reality.
2. Any such explosion of reality is unacceptable.
3. So, moderation is untenable.



# Explosion and Coincidence

- Explosion is problematic, and if coincidence yields explosion, it too is problematic.
- One question: is there a *principled* way to permit coincidence without being saddled with explosion?
- Consider again the first move towards explosion: it is only according to the proponents of explosion that according to Unenlightened Aristotelianism a sufficient condition for the generation of *any* new object is the realisation of some form or other by some quantity of matter or other.
- But why should the Aristotelian accept this sufficiency condition?



# A Moderating Principle

- I am; but I was not and will not be.
- Living beings seem to be privileged unities: they begin, they grow, they change, they persist for a while, they end.
- Further, they are unlike mereological aggregates: they are modally ductile.
- If I exist and am composite, nihilism is false; if I cease to exist when my particles are scattered (cf. Aristotle, *Met.* vii 17), universalism is false.
- If so, then moderation is mandatory.



# On Behalf of Brutes

- Brutal Composition (BC): There is no true, non-trivial, and finitely long answer to SCQ (Markosian, 2006).
  - A true, trivial, and (perhaps) finitely long answer would be this: a list of all and only compound beings.
- Some putative advantages of brutishness:
  - Consistent with our common-sense conception of things
  - Consistent with non-vague boundaries between genuine unities and mere aggregates
  - Offers a ready response to Theseus-ship style cases, because it is consistent with coincidence



# Initial Worries about Brutishness

- It just seems so brutish — and so unprincipled.
- Compositional facts seem unlikely candidates for being primitive facts.
  - ‘. . .if one bunch of physical simples compose a genuine physical object, but another bunch of simples do not compose any genuine object, then there must be some reason *why*; it couldn't be that these two facts are themselves at the explanatory bedrock of being’ (Horgan, 1993: 695)
- Perhaps, then, moderation equates to mystery?



# Two Telling Remarks

- ‘Mereological sums are composite entities that are not constituted by any essential form —as far as their existence is concerned, nothing matters but their matter.’ (‘The Moon and Sixpence: A Defense of Mereological Universalism,’ 326)
- ‘One word of advice before we begin about what is at issue. If you accept that there is such a parcel or aggregate of matter as that composed of the moon and the pennies, you already agree with me, even if you don’t consider the aggregate to be very thing-like. It need not be a *thing*, in any narrow sense of the term; it need only be *there*.’ (‘The Moon and Sixpence: A Defense of Mereological Universalism,’ 323)



# Two Importantly Different Questions

- Both pertaining to the existence of complex beings:
  - On oft-asked question: what are the basic *constituents* of complex beings?
    - Let us call this the *ingredient question* (IQ).
  - A relatively neglected question: what if anything grounds the unity ?
    - Let us call this the *unity question* (UQ).



# Constituent Ontology

- Let all complex objects comprise some  $n$  constituents (where, of course,  $n > 1$ ).
- IQ: what are these constituents?
- UQ: what unifies them into one?



# For Constituent Ontology

- Constituent ontology rejects *function ontology*, according to which some function  $f$  takes one from the constituents of  $o$  to  $o$  as a single, unified entity.
  - Here the  $f$  in question is not itself a constituent of  $o$ .
- ‘I simply do not understand how any coordination among entities can be its own ontological ground. Who or what does the coordinating? I cannot silence the question.’ —Bergmann (1967, 8)



# On Behalf of Constituent Ontology

1. Unless one is a nihilist about complex objects, one must be either a universalist or a moderate.
2. Nihilism is untenable.
3. Universalism is untenable.
4. So, we should be moderates.
5. If one is a moderate, one must be either a brute or principled.
6. Brutishness is untenable (or, if you like, is the last, desperate resort of metaphysical scoundrels).
7. So, we should be principled moderates.
8. If we are principled moderates, we must adopt either constituent ontology or function ontology.
9. Function ontology is untenable.
10. So, we should adopt constituent ontology.



# Our Map

- Unrestricted Mereological Composition or Nihilism
- Restricted Mereological Composition
  - Brutish
  - Principled
    - Intention-dependent
    - Non-intention-dependent



# Humean Honesty II

- ‘. . .I am persuaded, there might be several useful discoveries made from a criticism of the fictions of the ancient philosophy concerning substances, and substantial forms, and accidents, and occult qualities, which, however unreasonable and capricious, have a very intimate connexion with the principles of human nature.’ (Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature* I. 3. 4)