

Philosophy 125 — Day 5: Overview

- Administrative Stuff
 - **Due dates** for study questions & papers announced (see web for details).

Both sets of graded study questions and paper topics will be announced by the 4th & 11th weeks, and due in the 8th & 15th weeks. This gives at least 4 weeks to complete each pair of assignments. I advise you to think about (even sketch answers to!) *all* of the study questions *as we go along* (this will allow you to focus more on the papers). Late papers/questions will be accepted (up to one week), but penalized (up to one full grade). Comments will be given on papers, but not on study questions (graded mainly for effort).
- **Agenda:** Finishing-up Realism, and moving on to Nominalism
 - Review of possible restrictions on Realism, so far
 - Defined *versus* undefined predicates (another possible restriction on Realism)
 - Unexemplified universals (another possible restriction on Realism)
 - Remarks on Armstrong's Non-Platonist, Realist Theory of Universals
 - Moving on to Nominalism



Restrictions on Realism Inspired by Paradoxes and Regresses

- Ontological Restrictions:
 - There is no property corresponding to ‘does not exemplify itself’ (Russell)
 - * Loux recommends this. Alt.: there is no *proposition* corresponding to the *sentence* “*N* exemplifies *N*”. I’ll say more about this in unit 3.
 - There is no property corresponding to ‘exemplifies *F*-ness’ (Parmenides)
 - * Loux does not recommend this (most realists don’t). See M.R., below.
 - There is no relation corresponding to ‘exemplifies’ (Bradley)
 - * Loux does not recommend this (many realists *do*). See M.R., below.
- Methodological Restrictions:
 - There is no explanation of “*a* exemplifies *F*-ness” – *independent* of the explanation of “*a* is *F*” generally (Parmenides/Bradley). Loux approves.
 - No explanation of “*a* exemplifies *F*-ness” is *required* in order to explain “*a* is *F*” completely and adequately (Parmenides/Bradley). Loux approves.



Restrictions on Realism VIII: Primitive *versus* Defined Predicates 1

- Consider the predicate “bachelor”. Does “bachelor” connote a distinct universal? Or, are there only universals (say) corresponding to “male”, “human”, and “married” (in terms of which “bachelor” can be *defined*)?
- We saw a similar question in the Introduction, where there was a debate over whether “summersault” picked out a distinct universal (or was merely defined in terms of more primitive predicates like “human”, “body”, “movement”).
- Some realists have argued that we should restrict the scope of realist theory to (metaphysically) ground only predicates which make ‘direct contact’ with universals. Such predicates are called *primitive* (as opposed to *defined*).
- The problem with this distinction has mainly to do with its *arbitrariness*. We do not want our choice of primitive predicates to be a purely conventional matter of ‘language chopping’. We want to ‘carve the world at its joints’.
- Various proposals have been made concerning primitive predicates ...



Restrictions on Realism IX: Primitive *versus* Defined Predicates 2

- Some have proposed epistemically motivated criteria for the choice of primitive predicates. This involves taking as basic predicates that are favored by some epistemological stance. An empiricist stance might suggest taking certain sensory predicates (colors, sounds, smells, shapes, etc.) as primitive.
 - Problem: relatively few (*e.g.*, scientific) predicates have been definable purely in terms of empirical or sensory (even observable) predicates.
- Wittgenstein (and now many others) was skeptical about the possibility of reducing one set of universals (or predicates) to a primitive (or otherwise privileged) set of universals. Such skeptics are sometimes called *holists*.

Consider for example the proceedings that we call “games.” I mean board-games, card-games, Olympic games and so on. What is common to them all? Don’t say: “There must be something common, or they would not be called ‘games’ ” – but *look* and *see* whether there is anything common to all. – For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but



similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don't think but look! Look, for example, at board-games, with their multifarious relationships. Now, pass to card-games; here you find many correspondences with the first group, but many common features drop out, and others appear. When we pass next to ball-games, much that is common is retained, but much is lost. - Are they all "amusing"? Compare chess with noughts and crosses. Or is there always winning and losing, or competition between players? Think of patience. In ball-games there is winning and losing; but when a child throws his ball at the wall and catches it again, this feature has disappeared. Look at the parts played by skill and luck; and at the difference between skill in chess and skill at tennis. Think now of games like ring-a-ring-a-roses; here is the element of amusement, but how many other characteristic features have disappeared! and we can go through the many, many other groups of games in the same way; can see how similarities crop up and disappear.

- Non-holist realists (e.g., Armstrong) often accuse holistic realists of *apriorism*, since they seem happy to use armchair speculation on the structure of language as a guide to 'what universals there are'.



- Such non-holistic realists often insist that which universals there are (or are primitive) is a matter for *science* to adjudicate. Here, our best scientific (usually, physical) theories are typically taken as a guide.
- Predicates that are “essential” (or “indispensible”) in our best scientific (usually, physical) theories are to be taken as ontologically primitive.
- Defined predicates (*i.e.*, non-primitives) are either *eliminable* altogether or (at least) they *supervene* on physical primitives.
- If a predicate is *eliminable*, then all true claims involving the predicate can be *reduced to* (*translated into*) claims involving only primitives. If some claim involving the predicate cannot be so translated, then an *eliminativist* will say it’s false, and that the predicate doesn’t correspond to a universal.
- But, even if a predicate is not eliminable, (some say) it can still be the case that all facts involving the predicate are *determined by* the physical facts. Such non-eliminable predicates are said to *supervene on* the primitives.
- Folk psychological predicates like “pain” are often given as examples of non-primitives. Some say these are eliminable, others say they supervene.



Restrictions on Realism XI: The Problem of Unexemplified Universals 1

- *Platonists* believe that there are many Universals that are never exemplified. They even hold that many Universals are *necessarily* unexemplified (slogan: *universalia ante rem*, ‘universals anterior to (or independent of) things’).
- Aristotle was not a Platonist (in this sense). Aristotle believed that Universals do not exist separately (or apart) from particulars exemplifying them. If a predicate is never satisfied by anything, then it doesn’t correspond to any Universal (slogan: *universalia in rebus*, or ‘universals in things’).
- Why be a Platonist — especially one who believes (say) in a property corresponding to the *necessarily* empty predicate “Round-Square-ness”? Let’s think a bit harder about the realist account of predication. Consider the claim
(10) Glass is a solid.
- (10) is false (according to physics). The realist account still applies to (10). If (10) *were* true, it would be (partly) because the Universal (kind) Solid exists.



Restrictions on Realism XII: The Problem of Unexemplified Universals 2

- The Platonist will say that the (general) account of the truth of (10) shouldn't depend on whether or not (10) happens to be true. Now, consider the claim
(11) That plane has a velocity greater than the speed of light.
- (11) is (nomologically) *necessarily* false (it is *physically impossible* to travel faster than light). So, 'having velocity greater than c ' is *necessarily* unexemplified. Is there such a *universal*? It seems a bit strange to say that there are universals corresponding to the predicates 'having velocity greater than x ', for all $x < c$, but none for $x \geq c$.
- The Platonist Challenge: Give a general, unified account of the truth conditions (semantics) for subject-predicate sentences, without ever positing an unexemplified Universal. This is not so easy to do. Another example:
(12) God is omniscient.
- Even if we think 'omniscient' is (necessarily) unexemplified, how can we *make sense of* (12) without positing a Universal called "Omniscience"?



Restrictions on Realism XIII: The Problem of Unexemplified Universals 3

- Non-Platonists (including non-platonist *realists*, like Armstrong and perhaps Aristotle) complain that Platonism requires a “Two-Worlds” ontology.
- If there are universals that are never exemplified (at any place or any time by any particulars), then it seems that they cannot exist *in* the space-time world.
- Then, asks the non-Platonist, *where are* these Platonic (uninstantiated) universals? This (mystical?) place is sometimes called “Platonic Heaven”.
- There seem to be both M & E problems with such a “Two-Worlds” ontology:
 - M: How can concrete particulars and universals be connected or tied to each other if they occupy unrelated realms? Realism requires such a tie.
 - * Reply? Loux’s (p. 50) is not very compelling (what is it?). Problem?
 - E: How can humans (*qua* concrete particulars) ever come to *know* about (unexemplified) universals? How can we have cognitive access to them?
 - * Reply? Analogy/extrapolation with/on knowledge of exemplified ones.



Armstrong's Alternative Realist Theory of Universals 1

- According to Armstrong, Universals are ‘ways things are’ (or ‘attributes’). In order to sketch Armstrong’s theory, we need to introduce some terminology (we’ll really need units 2, 3 & 4 to evaluate all of Armstrong’s arguments):
 - **States of Affairs:** If a is F , then a ’s *being* F (e.g., Socrates’ being courageous) is a state of affairs (some call these *facts*)
 - **Instantiation:** If a is F , then a instantiates the attribute F -ness
 - a ’s *being* F is the **truthmaker** of “ a is F ”. It is *in virtue of* a ’s *being* F that “ a is F ” is true. If true, “ a is F ” *corresponds to* the SOA a ’s *being* F .
- According to Armstrong, we need states of affairs in our ontology because we cannot account for the truth of “ a is F ” merely by positing the existence of a , F -ness, and a fundamental tie between them (exemplification or instantiation).
- Particulars and universals (and instantiation) are *not* ontologically basic. They only exist *within states of affairs*. States of affairs are ontological bedrock.



Armstrong's Alternative Realist Theory of Universals 2

- The 'fundamental tie' or 'nexus' (called "instantiation" or "exemplification") is simply the 'coming together' of particulars and attributes in states of affairs.
- On Armstrong's view, all universals are instantiated at some time & place (in the history of the universe). The World is the collection of all states of affairs.
- Armstrong is a physicalist, and he thinks that only physical attributes (those occurring as primitives in our best physical theories?) are real (or primitive).
- He uses *causal* considerations to rule-out universals. He rules-out disjunctive universals, on the grounds that $A \text{ OR } B$ adds no causal efficacy to its disjuncts A, B . a 's being A has causal efficacy, but a 's being $A \text{ OR } B$ does not.
- Similarly, Armstrong rules-out negative universals, on the grounds that only attributes a instantiates can give a causal powers (absences cannot cause).
- Conjunctive universals are OK'd by Armstrong, so long as a instantiates both A and B at the same time (then $A \text{ AND } B$ can have causal significance).



Armstrong's Alternative Realist Theory of Universals 3

- In a way, Armstrong seems only to be paying lip service to universals (and particulars, for that matter!). It is states of affairs that do all the work in his metaphysics. S.Q.: why does he need/want particulars or universals at all?
- How (and why) does he carve up SOAs? He stresses SOAs (his ontological bedrock) are 'more than the sum of their parts' (particular, attribute, instantiation). So, why does he care about their parts (even if there are any)? And, even if they do split, why should SOAs split along lines similar to the Platonic realist's subject-predicate-inspired lines?
- Note: Armstrong thinks arguments from subject-predicate discourse ('meaning arguments') are *bad* reasons to believe in universals. Then, why does *he* believe in them? Why does he think states of affairs *contain* them?
- Imagine a pictorial language with no subject-predicate structure in which the SOA *a's being F* is represented by a picture of that SOA (*e.g.*, snapshot of a red sphere). Why carve this picture along subject-predicate joints? Why not simply take the *whole* as *the* real thing, and view talk of parts as *arbitrary*?



Nominalism I: Why Be A Nominalist?

- Many nominalists see *technical* problems with metaphysical realism. E.g.:
 - The paradoxes and regresses we saw in chapter 1
 - * We have already seen various replies and responses to these.
 - The impossibility of spatio-temporally discontinuous multiple exemplification. How one universal be in two places at once?
 - * This worry seems grounded in intuitions about *particulars*.
 - The impossibility of providing non-circular identity conditions for universals. We cannot identify a universal with its *extension*. But, can we give a non-circular account of the *content* or the *intension* of a universal?
 - * Any definitions of two (allegedly distinct) universals will introduce further universals, and we'll need assurance that these are distinct, etc.
 - Difficulties involved in *knowing about* universals (in the realist's sense)
 - * Not all realists accept a “two-worlds” ontology (e.g., non-platonists)
- But, these technical problems do not seem decisive or motivationally central



Nominalism II: Why Be A Nominalist? (Cont'd)

- Nominalists think that their accounts and explanations are just as good as the realist's — *only simpler* (since they don't invoke universals, only particulars).
- That is, the nominalist thinks they can meet the realist's challenge, and with a simpler, more elegant, and more parsimonious ontological framework.
- If this were true, then there would be strong *methodological* reasons for adopting the nominalist's approach (and eschewing realism's posits).
- There are various forms of nominalism. We will discuss a few, with an eye toward seeing how well they account for or explain the realist's phenomena.
- We begin with *Austere Nominalism* – a version of nominalism that includes only concrete particulars (*e.g.*, people, tables, chairs, etc.) in its ontology.
- The austere nominalist claims that her theory can do all of the philosophical work (worth doing!) that the realist theory can do, but with much less stuff.
- Let's start with the problem of attribute agreement (where our story began).



Nominalism III: Austere Nominalism 1

- So, how does the austere nominalist account for or explain attribute agreement among concrete particulars? They don't. They say it isn't necessary.
- According to austere nominalism, attribute agreement among concrete particulars is simply a basic, unanalyzable, and inexplicable fact.
- Recall that perhaps the most popular realist reply to the (attribute agreement) regress we saw in the last chapter was to claim that “each of $a \dots n$ exemplifies F -ness” does not itself require an explanation (within a realist framework).
- The austere nominalist agrees with this claim, but goes farther. They claim that the *original fact* (*explanandum* for the realist) does not even require explanation. The austere nominalist takes attribute agreement *itself* as basic.
- So, for the austere nominalist, attribute agreement is not something requiring explanation, and so this is only an apparent success story for the realist.
- How about a nominalist account of predication?



Nominalism IV: Austere Nominalism 2

- The nominalist does think that an explanation of the truth of “ a is F ” is in order. For the nominalist, though, this explanation is painfully simple:
(T) “ a is F ” is true if and only if a is F .
- E.g., It is because Socrates is courageous that “Socrates is courageous” is true.
- Realists may be tempted to complain that (T) is (true, but) *trivial*. But, they must be careful, since the same charge seems to threaten their own account.
- Recall the realist ‘paraphrase’ of “Socrates is courageous” — “Socrates exemplifies courage”. If this is equivalent to “Socrates is courageous”, then it is true iff (in fact) Socrates is courageous. How is this any less trivial?
- If, on the other hand, “Socrates exemplifies courage” is *not* equivalent to “Socrates is courageous”, then how can the realist claim to be giving truth conditions for the latter using the former? We’re back to our dilemma!
- What about abstract reference? What do austere nominalists say about that?



Nominalism V: Austere Nominalism 3

- Remember, the problem of abstract reference involves statements like:
 - (2) Courage is a virtue.
 - (4) John's eyes are the same color as his hair.
 - (5) That shape does not occur in nature.
- The realist accounts for the truth of these in exactly the same sort of way that they account for the truth of claims like:
 - (3) Socrates is a man.
- The nominalist must account for the truth of such claims without positing the existence of a universal that is denoted by the subject term of the sentence.
- Claims like (2) seem doable for the austere nominalist. They can say:
 - (2') Courageous persons are virtuous.
- But, do (2) and (2') have the same meaning? (2) seems necessarily true, but (2') may well be false (imagine a courageous person with no other virtue).



Nominalism VI: Austere Nominalism 4

- Perhaps the austere nominalist translation strategy can be pursued, but it'll have to be more subtle. We'll have to say things like:
(2'') *Ceteris paribus* (other things being equal), courageous persons are virtuous.
- Problem: what is the force of the *ceteris paribus* clause? Intuitively, it means that courageous persons *who have all the remaining virtues* are virtuous. But, nominalists cannot say *that* – it reintroduces what was to be eliminated.
- Perhaps they can say “courageous persons *who satisfy all the remaining virtue predicates*” are virtuous. Are there enough virtue predicates to ensure that (2'') cannot be false? Loux thinks not, and concludes CP's are not analyzable.
- Claims like (4) present further problems. The austere nominalist has to explain (4) in terms of concrete particulars agreeing in various ways. One could try to introduce *adverbs* here, and then translate (4) into:
(4') John's eyes and John's hair agree *colorwise*.
- But, (Loux) these adverbs must then be taken as primitive (S.Q. *Why?*).

