Philosophy 125 — Day 4: Overview

- Administrative Stuff

  - **Final rosters for sections have been determined**. Please check the sections page asap. **Important: you must get on the waitlist in order to be added to the rolls**. If you're not already in the system, get yourself in.

  - More texts should be at Ned's in the next few days. Meanwhile, you can download chapter 1 (see course home page, requires Adobe Reader 6).

- Remaining Agenda for Unit 1, Part 1 (Realism and the Problem of Universals)

  - Remarks about "applications" of realist metaphysics

  - Revisiting the Russellian self-exemplification Paradox: An Analogy

  - Brief review of Parmenidean Regress & Responses

  - Bradley's Regress & Responses

  - Defined *versus* undefined predicates

  - Unexemplified universals

  - Armstrong's Alternative Realist Theory of Universals

Remarks About "Applications" of Realist Metaphysics

- We have seen three "applications" of realist metaphysics (attribute agreement, predication, abstract reference). What are they supposed to show?

- The realist is not *merely* showing that their metaphysics *can be used to* make sense out of attribute agreement, predication, and abstract reference.

- They also want these "success stories" to provide *reasons to accept* the underlying realist metaphysical (and ontological) claims. But, *how*?

- Analogy: Many *scientific* realists (*e.g.*, Harman) would take the overwhelming explanatory success of science as evidence that its best theories are true, and (more to the point) that their *theoretical* (*unobservable*) terms *refer*.

- This is sometimes called "inference to the best explanation" (see Harman). The *metaphysical* realist wants to play an analogous game. If the realist accounts turn out to be the "best explanations", then doesn't this count as evidence in favor of their truth, and that *their* theoretical terms *refer*?

Restrictions on Realism I (Revisited): The Russellian Paradox & An Analogy

- We saw last time a paradox associated with assuming that there is a property (non-selfexemplification, or $\mathbb{N}$ for short) corresponding to the the predicate "does not exemplify itself": $\mathbb{N}$ exemplifies $\mathbb{N}$ iff $\mathbb{N}$ does not exemplify $\mathbb{N}$.

- Loux claims that "To avoid the paradox, we have no option but to deny that there is a universal associated with the general term 'does not exemplify itself'." And, I mentioned that I didn't see how this followed.

- Here's an analogy (and another very famous paradox involving self reference). Consider the following somewhat strange sentence:

    (*) Sentence (*) is not true.

  (*) says *of itself* that it is not true. **Fact**: (*) is true iff (*) is not true (exercise).

- This is paradoxical, to be sure. But, what should we conclude from this? One (not obviously crazy) thing we might conclude is that the sentence (*) is *meaningless* (hence, *neither true nor false*). Question: Couldn't we say the same thing about "$\mathbb{N}$ exemplifies $\mathbb{N}$"? And, if so, isn't this another option?

Restrictions on Realism IV (Review): The Parmenidean Predication Regress

- A Parmenidean regress also seems to plague the realist account of predication.

- The realist account of the truth of subject-predicate claims of the form:

  (9) a is F.

  postulates the existence of a universal (F-ness) and a relation (exemplification), such that the following obtains:

  (9′) a exemplifies F-ness.

- Parmenidean: this just introduces a *new* predicate ('exemplifies F-ness'). And, to account for the truth *this* case of predication, we'll need to appeal to:

  (9″) a exemplifies the exemplification of F-ness.

  which introduces *another* predicate ('exemplifies the exemplification of F-ness')

  (9‴) a exemplifies the exemplification of the exemplification of F-ness.

- And so on, *ad infinitum* — the promised account can't be completed.

Restrictions on Realism V (Review): Three Responses to the Parmenidean Regresses

- #1 (real, vicious): Restrict the scope of (†) & theory of predication. Say that *only some* distinct forms of attribute agreement involve distinct universals (*only some* semantically distinct general terms express distinct universals).
    - Seems *ad hoc*. Do we have a *principled way* of setting such restrictions (aside from 'restrict so as to avoid objections')? Loux rejects this response.

- #2 (real, not vicious): Reject demand for 'deeper' explanations. Once you explain that (9) is true because (9′) is true, insist that (9′) explains (9) *completely*, and that no further explanations of (9′), *etc.* are needed.
    - Loux is sympathetic. He argues that *any* account which does not *eliminate* subject-predicate discourse will fall prey to this regress (and should not view it as vicious). S.Q.: carefully reconstruct Loux's argument here.

- #3 (not real, not vicious): Deny there is a regress. Insist that 'is *F*' in (9) and 'exemplifies *F*-ness' in (9′) (and so on) are (all) *semantically equivalent*.
    - But, don't they have different ontological implications? This harkens back to horn 2 of our dilemma about the realist 'paraphrase' of "*a* is *F*" into "*a* exemplifies *F*".

Restrictions on Realism VI: Bradley's Regress

- According to the realist account of predication, "a is F" is true only if:

  (i) the particular a exists

  (ii) the universal (property) F-ness exists

  (iii) "a exemplifies$_1$ F-ness" is true

- But, the relational claim (iii) "a exemplifies$_1$ F-ness" is true only if:

  (i') the $\langle$particular, property$\rangle$ pair $\langle a, F$-ness$\rangle$ exists

  (ii') the universal (relation) Exemplification$_1$ exists

  (iii') "$\langle a, F$-ness$\rangle$ exemplifies$_2$ Exemplification$_1$" is true

- But the relational claim (iii') "$\langle a, F$-ness$\rangle$ exemplifies$_2$ Exemplification$_1$" is true only if

  (i'') the $\langle\langle$particular, property$\rangle$, relation$\rangle$ pair $\langle\langle a, F$-ness$\rangle$, Exemplification$_1\rangle$ exists

  (ii'') the universal (relation) Exemplification$_2$ exists

  (iii'') "$\langle\langle a, F$-ness$\rangle$, Exemplification$_1\rangle$ exemplifies$_3$ Exemplification$_2$" is true

- *ad infinitum* — the realist account of the truth of "a is F" can't be completed

Restrictions on Realism VII: Realist Responses to Bradley's Regresses

- #1 (real, vicious): Restrict the scope of the theory of predication. Deny that the realist account of predication applies to Exemplification itself.
  - Many realists say Exemplification is not a relation but a 'tie' or 'nexus', which 'links objects into relational facts without the mediation of any further links'. Loux: can help avoid the Russellian paradox, too. *How*?

- #2 (real, not vicious): Reject demand for 'deeper' explanations. Once you explain that "*a* is *F*" is true because (i)–(iii) are true, insist that they explain the truth of "*a* is *F*" *completely*, and that no explanation of (iii) is needed.
  - Loux is sympathetic (again). But, he does not repeat his argument that *any* (non-eliminative) account of predication will fall prey to regress. Why *not*? Isn't this just another example of his '*C*-argument' schema (p. 39)?

- #3 (not real, not vicious): Deny there is a regress. How might this be done?
  - Note: Loux does not even *consider* this type of response to Bradley's regress. And, as far as I know, nobody else does either. Why *not*? What would be the analogous strategy, as compared to reply #3 to Parmenides?

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*.

- Non-holist realists (*e.g.*, Armstrong) often accuse holists 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-holists 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 often taken as a guide. Defined predicates are either *eliminable* or *supervene* on physical primitives.

Restrictions on Realism X: 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 XI: 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 'omniscinent' is (necessarily) unexemplified, how can we *make sense of* (12) without positing a Universal called "Omniscience"?

Restrictions on Realism XII: 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

- Armstrong sketches an alternative, non-Platonist realism about universals.

- According to Armstrong, Universals are 'ways things are' (or 'attributes'). In order to sketch Armstrong's theory, we need to introduce some terminology:

  - **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 OR B adds no causal efficacy to its disjuncts A, B. *a's being A* has causal efficacy, but A's being A 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 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*?