

PHIL 420: Metaphysics

Handout 4

Professor JeeLoo Liu

D. M. Armstrong, *Universals: An Opinionated Introduction*

[particulars]:

___ Particular, concrete things in the earthly world.

[universals]:

___ The referents of general kind terms such as 'red,' 'horse', etc.

§ Two Competing Views

___ on the relation between an individual thing and the properties that the thing has



= being red, round, solid, extended, hard, a fruit, ... + being in my hand now.....

[A] The Bundle Theories ___ Particulars as Bundles of Universals	[B] The Substance-Attribute Theories ___ Properties as Attributes of the Particular
A particular thing is nothing but a bundle (a collection) of all its properties. Other than these properties (including spatial, temporal properties), there is <i>nothing</i> . [Space and time, being physical properties, are among the things that have to be constructed as bundles of universals.]	It is natural to distinguish a thing from any particular properties that the thing happens to have. These properties are taken to be things it merely <i>has</i> (as attributes); they <i>belong to</i> the substance.

[thin particular]:

___ what Locke calls “substratum” – a mental postulate of the substance without any properties, that is unknowable to us.

___ Suppose that particular *a* instantiates property *F*. *a* is *F*. The thin particular is *a*, taken apart from its properties (substratum). It is linked to its properties by instantiation, but it is not identical with them. It is not bare, because to be bare it would have to be not instantiating any properties.

[thick particular]:

___ **substratum + properties – as Aristotle conceives particulars or individual things.**

___ A thick particular is simply a particular instantiating properties. It enfolds both thin particulars and properties, held together by instantiation. It is thus nothing but a state of affairs.

Armstrong:

___ British empiricists are suspicious of substance because they were reacting against Locke's unknowable substratum. This in turn created a climate of opinion favorable to the Bundle theory, which gets rid of substratum by identifying a thing with the bundle of its properties. But it is not really necessary for a substance-attribute theorist to take a Lockean line.

§ [A] The Bundle Theory*** [The bundle theory]:**

___ The view that a thing (a particular) is nothing but a bundle of properties. Properties are the only ultimate logical subjects. There is no substance underlying properties. Thus, properties are instantiated, but they are not instantiated *by* anything.

[Armstrong's first argument against the Bundle theory]

1. According to the Bundle theory, a thing is nothing more than all its properties bundled together.
2. These properties include the thing's spatial and temporal properties.
3. If a thing occupies the same place at different times, then it has different properties and has to be a different thing.
4. But the thing does not change its identity in time.
5. Therefore, the Bundle theory is wrong.

[Armstrong's second argument against the Bundle theory]

1. According to the Bundle theory, two different things cannot have exactly the same properties, where properties are universals.
2. **[The possibility of universal return]:** Suppose that the history of the universe is cyclical, with no first cycle and the cycles repeating themselves exactly, down to the smallest detail, and doing so forever.
3. Under this possibility, an object in one cycle and its counterparts in all the other cycles are not merely internally exactly the same but their relational properties are exactly the same, including relations to previous and succeeding cycles.
4. But each object IS distinct from its counterparts.

5. Therefore, the Bundle theory is false.

Q: What essentially makes the *same* thing – same particles or same properties? If you have a substance-attributes view, then you can accept changes of properties without giving up identity. However, can a substance survive through changes of particles (or, its constituents)?

* [compresence]

___ **Russell uses this term to describe the relation that holds between any two properties that are properties of the same thing.**

Q: Is compresence symmetrical?

___ If property A is compresent with property B, then B is compresent with A.

Q: Is compresence transitive?

___ If property A is compresent with B, and B with C, then A is compresent with C.

[Armstrong: If we have a particular x which has properties A and B but not C, and a particular y, which has B and C but not A, then we don't have A and C presence. So the relation is not transitive.]

Q: How do we analyze 'compresence' other than spatial, temporal properties? But then how can spatial and temporal properties have a *compresence* relation?

§ [B] The Substance-Attributes Theory – Two competing views on Universals

A substance = something that is capable of independent existence. Substances may depend upon other substances, causally for instance, but it will at least be a logical possibility for individual substances to exist in complete independence. A substance logically requires nothing beyond itself for its existence. It could be the only thing in the universe.

***Q:* Can universals be considered “substances” – i.e., are there “uninstantiated universals”?**

[Uninstantiated Universals]

___ An individual universal can exist independently of any particular and any other universals. It can exist outside any bundle. You could have a possible world that consisted of a number of universals existing in independence of each other. They would form a realm of uninstantiated universals.

[B-1] The Platonic view:

___ We can call the view that there are uninstantiated universals the Platonist view. Once you have uninstantiated universals you need somewhere special to put them, a “Platonic heaven.” They are not to be found in the ordinary world of space and time. The result is that we get two realms: the realm of universals and the realm of particulars. Such universals are said to *transcendent*. → *universalia ante res* [universals before things]

[B-2] Armstrong’s view: Universals as Attributes

___ This may have been the position of Aristotle. We can bring the universals down to earth by thinking of a thing’s properties as universals. → *universalia in rebus* [universals in things]

§ Plato/Socrates’ Arguments for Uninstantiated Universals**[The Argument from Meaning] (p. 78)**

1. Ordinary names must all have a bearer of the name in order to be meaningful (otherwise they are “empty names”).
2. Proper names have particulars as their bearers; general terms (‘horse’, ‘triangular’) must need something that stands to the world in the same general sort of relation that the bearer of the proper name stands to the proper name.
3. Therefore, there has to be an object that constitutes or corresponds to the meaning of the general word.
4. Therefore, there must be universals such as *horseness*, *triangularity*.
5. Furthermore, words such as ‘unicorn’ are perfectly meaningful even though there are no unicorns in our world.
6. Therefore, there must be uninstantiated universals such as *unicorn*.

[Plato/Socrates’ Argument from Perfection] (p. 79)

1. Nothing in the world is perfectly straight or circular, yet in geometry we discuss the properties of perfectly straight lines or perfect circles; nothing in the world is perfectly just or perfectly virtuous, we in ethics and political discussion we discuss perfect justice or virtue.
2. We perceive the world as falling short of certain standards, which are never realized (instantiated).
3. This can be explained if we are comparing ordinary things to Forms, which the ordinary things can never fully instantiate.
4. Therefore, there must be uninstantiated universals.

§ Armstrong’s challenges against uninstantiated universals

1. The first argument depends on the assumption that in every case where a general word has meaning, there is something in the world that constitutes or corresponds to that meaning. And this assumption is not justified.
2. If there is only one Form of circle, why can we consider two perfectly circular cycles?
3. Why cannot ideal standards be things that we merely think of? By extrapolating from ordinary things that approximate to the standard in different degrees, we can form the thought of something that does come up to the standard.
4. People don't assume that particulars can exist uninstantiated, why think this way about universals? I think this is a prejudice, perhaps inherited from Plato.

§ [Armstrong's] Principle of Instantiation

[The Principle of Instantiation]:

___ **Every universal must be instantiated. (For each property universal, it must be the case that it is a property of some particular, and not a "dangler.")**

YES to [The Principle of Instantiation]: **NO to [The Principle of Instantiation]:**

___ anti-realism on universals

___ realism on universals

___ nominalism

___ Platonism

___ empiricism

___ rationalism

___ naturalism

§ States of Affairs

[states of affairs]:

___ Suppose that a is F , with F a universal, or that a has R to b , with R a universal.

A 's being F and a 's having R to b are called 'states of affairs.' Sometimes they are also called 'facts.'

___ **A States of affairs is a "thick particular" – it enfolds both thin particulars and properties, held together by instantiation.**

Q: Why do we need to recognize states of affairs other than particulars and universals?

___ If a is F , then it is entailed that a exists and that the universal F exists. However, a could exist, and F could exist, and yet it fails to be the case that a is F (F is instantiated elsewhere, for example). a 's being F involves something more than a and F The something more must be a 's being F – and this is a state of affairs.

* [The truth-making principle]:

___ For every contingent truth at least, there must be something in the world that makes it true. The “making” is not causality; rather, it is that in the world I virtue of which the truth is true.

* **Armstrong’s claim: particulars and universals only have existence within states of affairs. There are no uninstantiated universals, and there are no *bare particulars*.**

* **[bare particulars]:**

___ A particular that exists outside states of affairs would not be clothed in any properties or relations. It is called a 'bare particular.' A bare particular would not instantiate any universals, and thus would have no nature, be of no kind or sort.

§ [B-3] Universals as Tropes

* **[Trope theory]** (from Chris Daly)

___ The trope theory is a theory of particularized properties and particularized relations. Trope theory denies that there exist universals, *being red*, for example, that are identical between different instantiations of *being red*. If *a*, *b*, and *c* are each red, there are three particularized properties here. There is *a*’s particularized property (trope) of being red, there is *b*’s red trope, etc. Each of these red tropes is a distinct particularized property.

___ Tropes are concrete, particularized instantiations; as particulars, they are not repeatable.

___ two kinds of trope theories: (i) tropes are particularized properties only; (ii) tropes are substances themselves

Other names for “tropes”: “abstract particulars”, “modes”, “concrete properties”, “unit-properties”, “property-instances”, etc.

* **[tropes]: (Armstrong)**

___ A trope is an instance of a property or a relation. Properties and relations subsist as many tropes, one for each exemplification. These tropes are particulars, not universals, distinct from the concrete particulars they characterize. The appeal of tropes for philosophers is as an ontological basis free of the postulation of obscure abstract entities such as universals.

Armstrong: One interesting difference emerges between tropes and universals. Let *a* have *P*’ and *b* have *P*’’, where *P*’ and *P*’’ are two exactly resembling tropes. Contrast this with a universals analysis, where *a* has *P*, *b* has *P*, and *P* = *P*. On a trope view, it would seem possible for *P*’ to have a higher-order property *Q*’, where *P*’’ lacks any exactly similar higher-order property *Q*’. But it would not be possible for the universal *P* to have

Q in one instantiation and lack Q in another. P is one and the same thing in each instantiation. So it cannot both have Q and lack Q .

§ Armstrong's Ontology

particulars	states of affairs	uninstantiated universals
Yes	Yes	No

§ Summary of Armstrong's Claims:

1. The *Principle of Instantiation* is true: There are *no* uninstantiated universals.
2. Naturalism is true: There is a world of space and time, and there is not a separate realm of universals.
3. There are no disjunctive property universals; there are no negative property universals.
4. There is no automatic passage from predicates (linguistic entities) to universals; furthermore, deciding what are the true universals is not a semantic decision.
5. Physicalism is true: Physics is *the* fundamental science. Properties envisaged by physics (e.g., mass, charge, extension, duration, space-time intervals, spatiotemporal relations, causal relations, etc.) may be true universals.
6. Ordinary types are merely preliminary, rough-and-ready classifications of reality.
7. States of affairs exist. They are what *make* a particular truth true. [*the truth-maker principle*]
8. Particulars exist, but there are no *bare* particulars. [*the principle of the rejection of bare particulars*] All particulars exist within a state of affairs.
9. The better way to conceive of properties is to view them as *ways things are*. In this way, they cannot be separate from the things that instantiate them.
10. The world is simply a world of states of affairs. These states of affairs involve particulars having properties and standing in relation to each other.
11. Space-time is not a box into which universals are put; rather, it is a conjunction of states of affairs. Universals are constituents of states of affairs; in that sense universals are “in” space-time. But they are in it as helping to constitute it. → *universalia in rebus*.

	Bundle Theories	Substance-attributes Theories
Universals	1. bundles of universals ___ Russell's "bundle of universals" theory	1. Platonic uninstantiated universals theory 2. Locke's bare particular/substratum theory 3. Armstrong's Thick Particulars/States of Affairs/Universals as Attributes theory
Tropes	2. bundles of tropes ___ Stout, Williams	1. C. B. Martin's tropes as attributes

Review Questions:

1. How does Armstrong argue against the Bundle theory? Do you think his arguments successfully refuted the theory? Why or why not?
2. What is Plato's view of universals? How does Plato argue for uninstantiated universals? How does Armstrong argue against uninstantiated universals? Between the two sides, which one has the better argument/view/reasons?
3. What is a state of affairs according to Armstrong? What is the truth-making principle? What role does this notion *state of affairs* play in Armstrong's ontology (theory of existence)? Explain what he means by this pronouncement: **The world is simply a world of states of affairs.**
4. What is Armstrong's view of universals? Explain his theory in detail.

Study questions for Essay 4: [You still need to read the whole thing in order to get to the following specific sections]

[Properties I]

1. (starting p. 26) What reasons does Armstrong have for rejecting disjunctive and negative properties? Why would he allow conjunctive properties (universals)?
2. (pp. 31-38) What reasons does Armstrong give for accepting the reality of complex universals? What kinds of universals are "complex" – give his examples.
3. (starting p. 41) What is the Eleatic argument against uninstantiated universals?

[Properties II]

1. (pp. 47-55) What is the relationship between *determinables* and *determinates*? What are the issues related to this distinction?
2. Skim through the rest of this chapter.