

2021 *TheoLogica*

An International Journal for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology

Published Online First: April 25, 2021

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14428/thl.v5i2.55993>

Craig's Anti-Platonism, Lowe's Universals, and Christ's Penal Substitutionary Atonement

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Abstract: William Lane Craig has defended nominalism as a kind of “anti-Platonism.” To him, Platonism is inimical to God’s aseity. More recently, he also has defended the penal substitution of Christ. However, he has not brought the two subjects into dialogue with each other. In this essay, I will attempt to do that by exploring the implications of two major types of nominalism, austere nominalism and trope theory, for the penal substitution. I will argue that nominalism will undermine the penal substitution of Christ. Instead, to try to preserve both his anti-Platonism and the penal substitution, a better alternative for Craig is to embrace E. J. Lowe’s immanent universals.

Keywords: Atonement, Platonism, Universals, Nominalism, E. J. Lowe

Introduction

Recently, William Lane Craig has defended “anti-Platonism” (AP) as normative for orthodox Christians. His main reason for this position is that he thinks Platonism, understood as the view that there are uncreated, metaphysically abstract objects (AOs), is fatal to God’s uniqueness as the only entity that exists *a se* (Craig 2014a, 115). Instead, he has defended some form of nominalism (or perhaps conceptualism as a fallback position) about things such as properties, propositions, and truth (Craig 2013, 355–64).

Since then, he has developed an extensive defense of Christ’s penal substitutionary atonement, or PS (Craig 2018, 2020a). Motivated by a perceived lack of attention to biblical data even by Christian philosophers, Craig offers “a philosophically coherent account of Christ’s atonement that connects closely with the biblical doctrine of forensic justification” (Craig 2018, 1). Yet, Craig does not see any “intrinsic connection” between his works on the atonement with his anti-Platonism (Craig 2020b, 1). Thus, he has not made explicit connections in his writings to date.

However, I will argue that his nominalist options for AP actually will undermine the PS. To help show that, first I will sketch the contours of his nominalism, which seems to be a form of austere nominalism (AN). Then I will survey Craig's views of the PS, and I will bring them into dialogue with his nominalism, in order to understand implications for the atonement.

Second, I will pose a key problem for AN that will undercut the PS. If so, then it seems Craig would need to find an alternative to AN that could support both AP and the PS. So, third, I will explore two alternatives, trope theory and E. J. Lowe's immanent universals. I will argue that Lowe's universals present the best alternative for Craig.

1. Craig's Nominalism

According to Craig, "God alone exists necessarily and eternally; everything else has been created by God and is therefore contingent and temporally finite in its being" (Craig 2013, 355). Yet, on Platonism, there would be uncreated AOs that also exist *a se*. Thus, Craig believes Platonism is theologically "incompatible with the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and so fundamentally compromises divine aseity" (Craig 2004, 173).

Instead of Platonism, Craig has considered various nominalist options. He maintains that in terms of creation, there exist only concrete particulars that are spatially and temporally located. In his thinking, this position allows for the existence of *created* abstract objects, such as the novel *Anna Karenina*, which would be non-physical and not identical to any of its printed copies (Craig 2014a, 116).

By embracing the reality of just concrete particulars, and not the existence of properties *per se*, it seems that Craig endorses some form(s) of AN. He explicitly states that properties and individuators thereof do not exist (Craig 2020b, 6). As Robert Garcia explains, on AN, "there are no characteristics [or properties *per se*], but only primitively characterized objects" (Garcia 2015, 107). Thus, there is no property of red, but there are red balls. Michael Loux agrees; AN endorses "an ontology incorporating only concrete particulars" (Loux 2006, 46).

For AN, its objects are fundamental. Yet, they do not have metaphysical parts or constituents, and no internal differentiation of properties, which leaves them "relatively structureless" (Armstrong 1989, 38; Moreland 2001, 74). In that case, we have objects such as a billiard ball, which is red-and-round-and-hard, and a red delicious apple, which is red-and-round-and-sweet. Importantly, though these objects may *seem* to be multiply characterized, according to AN, they are simple, which is indicated by the use of hyphens in these descriptions.

Craig follows this pattern, for he suggests there is no further need to analyze such “traits” (Craig 2014b, 140). For example, a red ball does not need to have a property of redness. Instead, it simply is a matter of observation that the ball is red. There is no further need for an explanation by appealing to a more fundamental entity, such as the property of redness. Instead, that the ball is red is just a brute fact.

Despite eschewing a metaphysical analysis of such “traits,” Craig does stress the importance of how we speak about such objects (Craig 2013, 360). For him, the sentence “the ball is red” does not refer to a property of redness. Instead, it simply is a way of talking about the primitively characterized object. Craig draws upon Rudolf Carnap’s linguistic frameworks to explain how we can speak about such objects and other states of affairs, all the while not making ontological commitments. For example, one could speak from a scientific linguistic framework to describe how the ball appears red to us, due to its reflecting photons. Or, we could speak about the ball as though it has various properties, such as a round shape. However, in so doing, we would be focusing our attention on the ball’s shape. Importantly, however, this is simply an epistemic matter, and not one of attributing ontologically real properties. Instead, ontologically speaking, the red-round-ball just is primitively characterized without real properties.

Now, I will bring Craig’s form of AN in dialogue with his work on the PS.

2. Craig, the PS, and AN

Craig attempts to develop a philosophically coherent account of the PS, such that Christ’s death satisfied God’s justice (Craig 2018, 37). God is essentially just, and so he must punish sin. He cannot let the guilty go unpunished.¹ Craig argues that we should understand God’s punishment of sin in terms of a theory of retributive justice, which is distinguished by “the positive thesis that punishment of the guilty is an intrinsic good because the guilty deserve it” (Craig 2018, 71). In contrast, he rejects a consequentialist theory of justice since punishment would be just “because of the extrinsic goods that may be realized” (Craig 2018, 66). In that view, an innocent person could be punished, which would be unjust.

Yet, Craig realizes that this is a main objection against the PS, for Christ himself did not sin. That the innocent should not be punished (because they do not deserve it) reflects the principle of negative retributive justice. Surely, since God is essentially

¹ E.g., see Ex 34:7. Craig gives other examples from Scripture to support God’s positive retributive justice. For example, he mentions God’s wrath displayed in the final day of judgment (Rom 2:5) as “ultimately eschatological” and therefore can seem to serve “no other purpose than retribution” (Craig 2018, 68).

just, He would not punish an innocent person. Thus, it seems it would be unjust for Christ to suffer and be punished as our substitute.

In response, Craig uses two arguments. First, he appeals to divine command theory, which, according to Robert Adams, holds that “ethical wrongness *is* (i.e. is identical with) the property of being contrary to the commands of a loving God” (Adams 1979, 76). Moreover, as Craig observes from Anselm, “There is nothing more just than supreme justice, which ... is nothing else but God himself” (Craig 2018, 33; cf. Anselm 2007, I.13). So, God is essentially just, and his commands always accord with his just nature.

Furthermore, since God necessarily will act in accordance with his moral character, it seems hard to see how God could be obligated to fulfill these moral obligations. That is, “there is no foothold for the ‘ought’; there is nothing to make the ought–principle true rather than, or in addition to, a factual statement that S [God] will (necessarily) act in this way” (Alston 2002, 288; bracketed insert mine). In that case, it seems that God is not subservient to his laws for humans. Thus, with reference to Grotius, Craig observes that God is not prohibited from punishing Christ in our place (Craig 2018, 70).

As a second argument, Craig contends that the PS proponent can affirm that since our sins were imputed to Christ, he became *legally* guilty of them. Yet, that imputation alone does not mean that our guilt was *removed* from us. Rather, the guilt for our sins was *replicated* in him, such that he was punished and died as our proxy (Craig 2018, 64, 80). Thus, it is a fiction that Christ committed those sinful acts (Craig 2018, 62).

However, that does not mean Christ’s atoning work was a fiction:

The claim is not that penal substitution is a fiction, for Christ was really and truly punished on such a view. Nor is his expiation of sin or propitiation of God’s wrath a fiction, for his being punished for our sins removed our liability to punishment and satisfied God’s justice. All these things are real. What is fictitious is that Christ himself did the wrongful acts for which he was punished. (Craig 2018, 62)

Now let us examine three more factors of Craig’s treatment of the atonement. First, Craig draws from Francis Turretin in that, due to sin, we owe a debt to God’s justice. Thus, we deserve never–ending death. To satisfy his justice, three things are required: 1) a payment of our debt; 2) an appeasement (or, propitiation) of God’s wrath; and 3) cleansing (or, expiation) of our guilt (Craig 2018, 43). Craig explains our guilt as a *property* of liability to punishment (Craig 2018, 89).

Second, the PS did not merely meet the requirements of God's justice; it also demonstrates his love for us. Craig explains that Jesus "voluntarily bore the suffering we were due as the punishment for our sins" (Craig 2018, 37). Christ's sacrificial death helps motivate people to embrace God's offer of forgiveness by demonstrating God's "objectively expunging a person's guilt, thereby helping him to overcome his sense of shame" (Craig 2018, 97). Additionally, by showing God's justice, the PS encourages "victims of injustice to be open to a loving relationship with God" (Craig 2018, 97). The PS exhibits "God's love of sinners, as He substitutes Himself for them in bearing their just desert, thereby encouraging in turn a loving response to Him" (Craig 2018, 97). For those who accept God's offer of forgiveness, the PS continues to motivate them to live in ways pleasing to God, thus showing the PS's relevance to the "moral influence of Christ's example" (Craig 2018, 54).

Third, and last, Craig draws upon Turretin and surfaces five necessary conditions for the PS. The first is that there is a common nature of the sinner and the substitute, and second, Christ as the substitute freely consented to the substitution. Moreover, third, Christ has power over his own life and thereby can rightly determine what may be done with it. Fourth, Christ has the power and ability to bear all our due punishment and remove it from us and himself. Fifth, Christ is sinless and does not need to atone for his own sins. Since Christ met all five conditions, "it was not unjust for Christ to substitute himself for us" (Craig 2018, 44).

Now, with these aspects of Craig's treatment of the PS, let us consider how we should understand them in light of his AP. We should notice Craig's own, direct comment about their relationship:

Now I think it's clear that my more recent work on the doctrine of the atonement has no intrinsic connection with my anti-Platonism. In my work on the atonement, I freely adopt talk of propositions and properties without thinking to be making ontological commitments. So my statements about the atonement serve at best an illustrative purpose to point to certain properties or propositions which the Platonist wants to include in his ontology. (Craig 2020b, 1)

Let us begin with Craig's criteria for the PS. For one, Craig claims correctly that Christ and those for whom he died share a common human nature. Still, this cannot mean that there is a universal, humanness, which would be a one-in-many, for that is what realists would claim. Instead, it seems it simply is a brute fact that Christ and all other humans share a common nature. Moreover, as God incarnate, Jesus Christ is a concrete particular, whom we might describe as the Son-of-God-and-sinless-Son-of-man. It is not the case that, at least *qua* human, he has various, *real* properties.

Nor is there a real particular that metaphysically individuates him. Nevertheless, we can speak of Christ, *qua* human, as having the same essential nature as humans, perhaps by speaking from a property linguistic framework (Craig 2020b, 5).

Similarly, Christ *qua* human has free will, as well as all the other capacities of human nature that qualify them as image-bearers, such as rationality, morality, etc. However, such terms do not mean that there are *real* ranges of properties of humans of which we speak by these words. Again, these merely are ways of speaking of a concrete, simple particular.

For another, consider the nature of our guilt and sin. Craig clearly states that our guilt is a property, a liability to punishment. Before God, it is true that we are guilty of sin. Nevertheless, on his view, it does not seem we should understand these concepts as referring to ontologically real states of affairs, even if understood as privations of properties. Again, this is due to his rejection of the reality of properties. Instead, it seems we should understand guilt and sin as engaging in claims made from a property linguistic framework. The same understanding would seem to be the case for several more of Craig's claims. These would include that Christ's suffering and punishment in our place was real, as was his expiation of our guilt and propitiation of God's wrath.

Third, consider justice and other moral virtues and principles. For Craig, justice is not an AO. Instead, it is an attribute of God. As he explains, "it is bewildering when it is said that in the absence of any people, *Justice* itself exists. Moral values seem to exist as properties of persons, not as mere abstractions" (Craig 2008, 178). While not a universal, Craig still thinks humans can (and should) be just. Similarly, divine commands are concrete particulars that are grounded in God.

Craig is a kind of moral realist, but not of the Platonic sort. He affirms that objective moral values and duties exist, but the "emphasis is not on metaphysics but on the objectivity, as opposed to the mere subjectivity, of moral values and duties" (Craig 2014c). In this, he stresses *alethic realism*, according to which "statements of a certain discourse, for example, mathematical discourse or moral discourse, have objective truth values, that is to say, they are objectively either true or false" (Craig 2014d).

Fourth, Craig draws out an implication of the PS, in that it is the foundation for Christ's moral example for us (Craig 2018, 54). Motivated by Christ's sacrificial offering of himself in our place, believers are to become like him in their character. They are to "embody the moral character qualities of Christ, which they will 'bear' as they abide in (or, draw upon) his life" (Smith 2017, 337).² Yet, for Craig, each of

² E.g., see John 15:1-8; Gal 5:22-23; Col 3:12-17.

these moral virtues of Christ cannot be a one-in-many; while real, they too are concrete particulars. Nonetheless, while speaking from perhaps a property linguistic framework, it would be objectively true that believers can, and should, manifest the moral attributes of Christ.

With this descriptive work in place, now I will turn to explore a key issue for AN and its effects upon the PS.

3. A Problem for AN and the PS

On the ontology of AN and, as we will see shortly, trope theory as well, the objects are simple. They are not the union of two entities, for that would be what realists maintain about the exemplification of a property. Realists understand a property instance (e.g., a human who is just) to be a *complex* entity, that is, the exemplification of a universal tied to a particular. On the other hand, nominalists hold that all particulars are just one thing. For them, there cannot be a *real* distinction between an individuator and a quality (or object).

Let us apply that position to the concrete objects of AN, which are the kinds of things in creation that Craig believes are real.³ The distinction between the particularity and qualitative character of a concrete object must be epistemological, not ontological. That is, they are distinguished by how they are before our minds, how we pay attention to them, and how we conceive or speak of them. If that is the case, it seems we can eliminate either the particularizer or the qualitative character without real, ontological loss. Suppose we eliminate the object's individuator; in that case, we are left with just qualitative character per se, but that seems to be like what realists claim. That qualitative character would seem to be metaphysically abstract. On the other hand, if we eliminate the qualitative content, that leaves us with a "bare" individuator, one that does not individuate anything, which is incoherent. Thus, either move undermines AN.

Nevertheless, Craig has objected that this move is "patently question-begging," for "only if you presuppose a real composition of individuator and universal would the elimination of one leave the other one left over. On anti-realism neither of them exists in the first place, much less after such a mental abstraction" (Craig 2020b, 5). Instead, on Craig's view, there are no metaphysically real properties or individualizers. Thus, "in saying that the elimination of qualities leaves us with just bare particulars left over," I have presupposed realism.

³ I mention creation since I have not read him address implications of nominalism for God Himself.

In response, it is vital that we keep clear that an object on AN is simple. Yet, that does not mean it cannot play various *roles*. For instance, we can regard a concrete particular, such as a justified–forgiven–human, as playing various roles, including what individuates it and what constitutes its qualitiveness. Moreover, it seems clear that he takes particular humans, along with other examples of concrete particulars, to be real. For instance, some non–human examples would include a brown–short–haired–dachshund or a small–red–delicious–apple. Surely Craig is not trying to say that the dog is not brown, or that the apple is not red.

So, it seems that for him, there is real qualitiveness and particularity to concrete objects, but, since objects are simple, these “features” should not be understood to be ontological constituents thereof. However, this means that an object’s qualitiveness and particularity are identical; there is no distinction in reality. If so, then that qualitiveness just is that particularity, and the object ends up being either a “bare” particular or that qualitiveness. Yet, either result undermines AN. A key to notice is that this result is not due to an epistemological issue. Rather, this result occurs because of the simplicity of objects on AN.

Still, there is another, widely accepted kind of rebuttal to this kind of argument. David Lewis argued that a nominalist could appeal to the existence of certain qualities as primitive, or brute, facts. In his “New Work for a Theory of Universals,” Lewis claimed, “not every *account* is an *analysis!*” (Lewis 1983, 352). Accordingly, when I argued that AN cannot preserve the qualitiveness or particularity of its objects, Craig could reply that I have required an analysis beyond what is necessary.

Following Lewis, Craig could reply that it is a brute fact that objects are simple, particular, concrete objects. For Lewis, “an effort at systematic philosophy must indeed give an account of any purported fact,” and accepting it as primitive is a justifiable way to do that (Lewis 1983, 352). Indeed, “a system that takes certain Moorean facts as primitive, as unanalysed, cannot be accused of failing to make a place for them. It neither shirks the compulsory question nor answers it by denial. It does give an account” (Lewis 1983, 352).⁴

Certainly, Craig and others are entitled to appeal to what they consider to be brute facts. Generally, appeals to brute facts are appropriate when it seems we cannot explain phenomena any further. Yet, the point of my argument is that on Craig’s nominalism, and AN in general, it seems there are *no* qualitative facts, much less any brute ones. There are just “bare” particulars. If so, it seems Lewis’s rebuttal misses the mark.

⁴ For him, a “Moorean fact” is something that “we know better than we know the premises of any philosophical argument to the contrary” (Lewis 1996, 549).

It seems, therefore, that the concrete objects of AN cannot preserve the qualitateness of any created thing. Let us now apply this finding to Craig's work on the PS. First, it does not seem that Christ would have shared in a *common* human nature. If so, then one of the key elements necessary for the PS would not be met. Furthermore, it would not help alleviate this problem by speaking from a property linguistic framework, for fundamentally, the problem is metaphysical, not linguistic.

Moreover, it does not seem that there would be a human nature whatsoever, in which case it is hard to see how we should understand humans as being made in God's image. It does not seem that there would be ontological room for humans to have a will, rationality, or moral capacities. Yet, without them, it seems even harder to make sense of God's requirement that they *be* morally pure and virtuous.

For example, in terms of rationality, it does not seem humans could have a moral principle present before their minds, much less understand it, for these would not be real. It also seems that without a will, they could not be morally responsible for any actions. Furthermore, without qualitateness to them, it seems they could not be morally virtuous or vicious. Thus, it seems there would not be any sin or guilt by humans, and thus it would be immoral for God to hold them morally accountable.

So, it seems there would not be any basis for the PS. Contra Craig, Christ really would not have born the punishment and suffering due for our sin, for there would not have been any sinful people. Nor would the PS have expiated our guilt and propitiated God's wrath.

But, the issue becomes more pressing regarding Christ. For, without sinful people who needed to be reconciled to God, it seems there would not have been any need for his becoming incarnate. Furthermore, AN poses another problem for the incarnation. It seems that without any qualitateness to humans, there would not have been a human nature to assume. *Qua* human, then, Christ would not have been real.

If my argument against AN is correct, then it seems Craig should adopt a different ontology of properties in order to preserve both his AP and the PS. What, though, might be some alternatives to AN, and what might be their implications for the PS? I will consider another major form of nominalism, trope theory, and then I will explore Lowe's immanent universals.

4. Trope Nominalism

In contrast to AN, trope theorists affirm that qualities really exist. Yet, like AN, all such qualities (or, tropes) are primitively simple and particular, and they are located in space and time. According to Anna-Sofia Maurin, a trope cannot have separate grounds for its qualitative content and particularity. Thus, a trope cannot be a union of an individuator and a quality (Maurin 2002, 14–15).

Consider the moral virtue of justice and three instances of it. A realist would understand this as three particular humans who exemplify the universal, justice. Thus, there would be three instances of justice, each of which would be present in a human substance that owns and unifies all its properties. Yet, on trope theory, there would be three particular qualities, justice₁, justice₂, and justice₃. Further, a particular human would be a macro object, composed of many tropes, which are bundled together.

To explore tropes further, let us examine the earlier and later trope theories of Keith Campbell, who has expressed the views of D. C. Williams (Campbell 1981, 477–88). In both of his theories, Campbell seems to treat a trope as one, simple thing—a singly-propertied object with its own qualitative contents. In his earlier version, Campbell treated a trope as an *abstract particular*, which is a member of a set whose members stand in a relation of *exact similarity* (Campbell 1981, 478, 484). For him, this sense of “abstract” is not metaphysical. If it were, then a quality would be abstract like realists claim. That is, it would be one numerically identical quality that is not located spatially or temporally, yet it can be present in many instances.

For Campbell, a trope exists as such apart from our awareness of it, or our theorizing about it. However, he thinks a trope is abstract in the epistemological sense of our “concentrating attention on some, but not all, of what is presented” (Campbell 1981, 478; Moreland 2001, 53). Suppose, for example, that there are present before us some red delicious apples. In Campbell’s earlier theory, each apple is a bundle of tropes, including, for instance, an exactly similar shape that characterizes their bases, having four or five raised, yet rounded, “bumps.” Of course, this shape would not be literally the numerically identical quality present in each such apple. However, by focusing our attention selectively on these exactly similar shapes, we can “abstract” a common (yet not numerically identical) shape. That is, we can consider this shape theoretically or separately from these various apples and their other shape tropes.

Furthermore, according to his earlier theory, a trope is located in a formed volume, and its location individuates it metaphysically as the particular trope it is

(Campbell 1981, 485–86).⁵ For macro objects, such as a human being, its various tropes (for example, hair color, skin color, facial features, thickness of eyebrows, etc.) are compresent in a bundle (Campbell 1981, 483). Accordingly, unlike macro objects, such as humans, tropes are fundamental, particular qualities.

While maintaining his position that tropes are abstract and simple, Campbell revised his later view so that particularity, not location, individuates a trope. A trope is a particularized nature that primitively stands in a relation of exact similarity of nature to other tropes in its similarity set. It is particular and individuated from all others in that set (Campbell 1990, 68–71; Moreland 2001, 60). An example could be a set of exactly similar red color patches, red₁, red₂, red₃, and so forth.

It seems there are some attractive features of trope theory for Craig's purposes. Trope theory allows him to stay within the range of nominalist theories to maintain his AP. Like his own form of AN, it maintains the simplicity of its fundamental "objects," and Craig still could maintain that all that has come into existence is in space and time, thereby preserving God's aseity.

So, how might trope theory serve to explain the PS? Two approaches readily suggest themselves. First, a trope theorist could appeal to a relation of exact similarity between human persons and Christ. On that view, there would not be a numerically identical, essential human nature literally present in all humans, with universal properties that constitute being God's image bearer. Nor would it be the case that God's justice, love, and other moral attributes, are communicable universals, literally able to be present in all humans. Instead, there is an equivalency based on exact similarity between the tropes of humans and Christ such that Christ's atoning work can count and substitute for the sinfulness of humans. Moreover, that these relata stand in an exact similarity relation is a brute fact, with no further ontological explanation needed.

Second, consider the old covenant's use of a lamb as a penal, substitutionary sacrifice. The sacrifice would count as covering over the worshippers' sins in light of God's intention and the right intentions of the worshippers, but not due to intrinsic, numerically identical properties that they shared with the lamb.⁶ The worshippers needed to repent of their sins and place their trust in God to accept the offering as a substitute in their place.⁷ Similarly, under the new covenant, Christ's sacrifice would count as believers' penal substitute in light of these same kinds of

⁵ Location also may help us epistemically to individuate a trope, i.e., to pick it out from amongst others.

⁶ I appreciate this suggestion by an anonymous referee.

⁷ Compare Heb 10 and 11:6.

intentions, yet that equivalency would not require intrinsic, universal qualities that they shared.

What should we think of these two trope theory approaches to the PS? Regarding the former, there is, of course, a well-known realist reply to nominalist appeals to an exact similarity relation to sustain these equivalencies. Realists argue that the trope theorist has presupposed a new universal, *the* exact similarity relation, when in fact there cannot be any such thing. On trope theory, there can be only many exact similarity relations, $ES_{1, 2, 3...n}$. Yet, in what respect are they exactly similar? To the realist, it seems there will be an infinite regress of exact similarity relations, without a way to get started (cf. Moreland and Craig 2003, 212–13). However, the trope nominalist could rebut these charges by asserting that it is a brute fact that the relata are exactly similar.

The second approach presupposes that the people can have before their minds God's intended purpose in their offering of the lamb. While they would not have understood it exhaustively (for only God could) nor infallibly (for they could be mistaken or even suppress truth), still it seems that this second approach trades upon God's intended purpose being a universal, which they can have before their minds. Moreover, the intentional states of the worshippers seem to presuppose another quality they all can (and should) share, namely, the attitude of repentance.

Of course, the trope theorist might rebut these claims as well by appealing to brute facts. At this point, it seems we reach a stalemate. Is there a way to make progress on this apparent stalemate?

I believe there is, and in that process, I believe we can assess trope theory's viability for Craig to embrace in his AP as well as the PS. I think we should consider here the argument I used against AN, for it trades upon the simplicity of AN's objects. Since tropes also are simple, perhaps trope theory also might be affected by that critique.

To help explore this, let us return to Campbell's early and later theories of tropes. J. P. Moreland critiques Campbell's views along the following lines (Moreland 2001, 58). Much as we saw in regards to AN's objects, a trope cannot be a union of two distinct entities, namely, an individuator and a quality, for tropes are simple. Thus, the distinction between the particularity and quality of a trope is epistemological, not ontological. That being the case, the individuator and the quality are identical, and so we can eliminate either the individuator or the quality without real, ontological loss. Just as we saw with AN, either move undermines trope theory.

However, a trope theorist might reply that a macro object (such as a human) just is a collection of tropes arranged in the right way, and that human being need not have its own individuator. In that case, perhaps a trope theorist might avoid this

type of objection. Nonetheless, even if we grant this claim, it still seems the fundamental, individual tropes which together comprise the human are simples. Therefore, at that level, it seems the qualities can be eliminated without loss in reality, which would leave us with "bare" individuators. In that case, the human would not have any qualities but would be just a bundle of "bare" individuators, which also seems incoherent. It also seems that appealing to Lewis's rebuttal will not alleviate this problem for tropes, for the same reasons we saw for AN. Therefore, it seems that tropes cannot preserve the qualitateness of any given thing in creation (cf. Smith 2019).

This result would extend to the penal substitutionary work of Christ on our behalf in the same kinds of ways we saw above for AN. First, there would not be a human nature, much less one in which Christ could share. Second, it seems we could not be moral, and thus God would not have a basis for holding us accountable to his moral standards. So, third, there simply is no basis for Christ's PS, and it would not be real in terms of a payment of our debt, expiation of our guilt, or the propitiation of God's wrath.

Furthermore, even if tropes could have qualities, we still would not be able to enjoy the benefits of Christ's atonement. Being at best just a bundle of compresent tropes, our personal identity would be based upon the set of tropes that constitute us at any given time. Yet, we are constantly changing in various ways, and so the set of tropes also would be changing. Therefore, we would not be continuants who remain the same person through time and change. This means that the person who trusted Christ at some time in the past would not be the same person now. Indeed, at the resurrection, it seems the one who trusted Christ in the past is the one who would receive eternal life, and not the one who exists now. Worse, it seems Jesus could not have atoned for our sins, for the Jesus who was raised from death would not consist of all the same tropes as the Jesus who died in our place. Death, which is the wage of sin, actually would have won over the Jesus who died in our place.⁸

It seems therefore that trope nominalism would be a fail to preserve Craig's AP as well as the PS. To what other option(s) may he turn? While Craig has indicated that, failing a nominalist alternative for his AP, a fallback position would be divine conceptualism, I think there might be a realist alternative that he should consider (Craig 2014a, 115).⁹ I will turn now to explore the resources of E. J. Lowe's immanent

⁸ Rom 6:23

⁹ To him, conceptualism offers some important features for AP. For instance, universals are not abstract objects; instead, they are concepts in God's mind. Thus, they are not created *ex nihilo*, nor do they exist *a se*. However, he realizes there are potential pitfalls with conceptualism, such as how God's

universals and his four–category ontology, to see if it might be a way for Craig to preserve both his AP and the PS.

4. E. J. Lowe’s Immanent Universals and the PSA

An Overview of Lowe’s Ontology

In Lowe’s four–category ontology, he distinguishes between universals and particulars, and between substantial and non–substantial entities. In terms of universals, Lowe identifies the categories of *kinds* as substantial universals, and *attributes* (or, properties) as non–substantial universals. Both of these types of universals are metaphysically abstract; that is, they are not located in space and time.

Now, Lowe identifies a relation of *characterization* between substantial and non–substantial universals. That is, substantial universals, or kinds, which correspond with Aristotle’s secondary substances, are characterized by non–substantial universals, or attributes (Lowe 2012, 97–98). For example, in this view, the substantial universal humanness is characterized by the non–substantial universal justice in the sense that justice is an essential moral *capacity* for humans.¹⁰

This characterization depends upon the intrinsic nature, or *essence*, of the two universals. An essence is *what* some entity is. Following Aristotle, Lowe maintains that an essence is an entity’s “real definition,” which involves its identity and existence conditions (Lowe 2012, 104). An essence, however, is not some further entity besides a kind or an attribute (or, for that matter, an object or a mode, as we will see shortly). If an essence is an additional entity, and all entities have essences, then an infinite regress ensues.

In regards to particulars, Lowe divides them along substantial and non–substantial lines. Particulars of both kinds are concrete, being spatially and temporally located. Substantial particulars are *objects*, whereas non–substantial particulars are *modes*. For example, a particular human would be an object, which corresponds with Aristotle’s primary substances (Lowe 2012, 97–98). On the other

thoughts, if particular, can be multiply exemplified (such as God’s concept of red, and the color red that is present in many fire trucks). Moreover, it seems to me that conceptualism mistakenly identifies properties with concepts. The latter seem to have intentionality (the ofness or aboutness of thoughts, beliefs, etc.) as a necessary property. However, many properties, such as justice or red, do not seem to be of or about anything.

¹⁰ I stress the *capacity* of justice because it is possible that a given human might have that capacity blocked, or privated, by something such as severe brain damage. Yet, that human still would have that capacity for justice, for it essentially characterizes humanness.

hand, a particular instance of justice, which characterizes that human, would be an example of a mode. Just as attributes characterize kinds, so modes characterize objects. A mode can characterize an object due to their respective natures.

We also can consider the relation between modes and objects in terms of their *dependency*. In one sense, a mode is ontologically dependent upon an object which it characterizes. That mode's identity depends upon that object. For instance, a mode of justice depends ontologically upon the human it characterizes, and it could not characterize another human. Yet, in another sense, that human could be characterized by a different mode. Thus, we can say that that a concrete human, say John, is *weakly* dependent upon the modes that characterize it, while the modes are *strongly* dependent upon that concrete human.

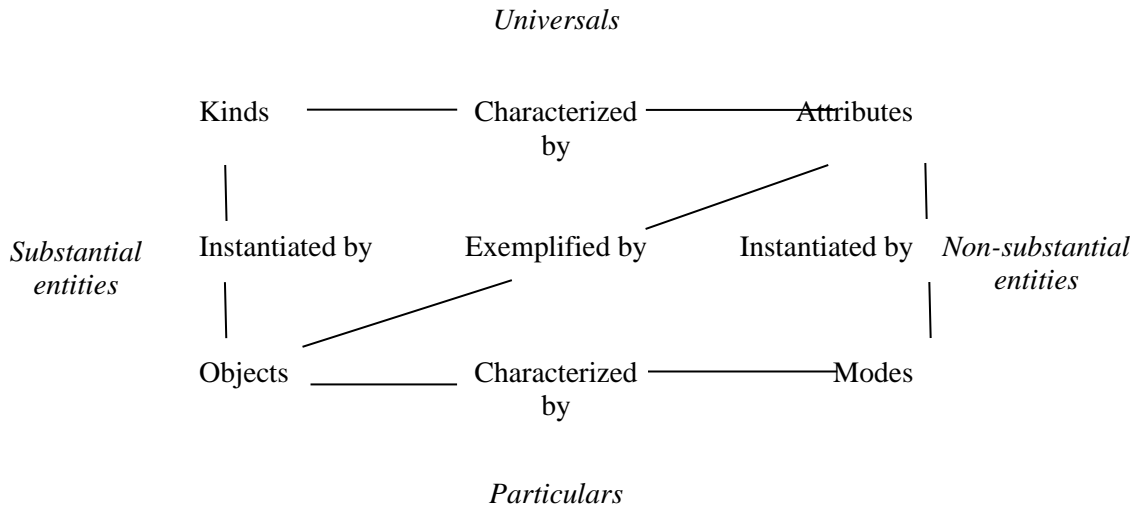
Now, let us consider the relation that can obtain between kinds and objects. Lowe calls this the *instantiation* relation, which is a relationship between substantial universals and particular substances. Importantly, the instantiation relation is not a spatial container relation. Instead, substantial particulars, such as a given human, have the substantial universal, humanness, present in its being. When particularized like this, the substantial universal is the essence of the individual human.

Similarly, attributes are instantiated in modes, which are particular properties. Here, too, this relation is metaphysical, not spatial. In terms of dependency, a given mode of an attribute (say, a particular instance of justice) depends strongly upon the attribute justice. Also, in a sense, it seems attributes depend weakly upon modes thereof. The attribute justice would still exist if all but one of its modes ceased to exist. This belief demonstrated Lowe's commitment to immanent universals, a subject to which I will return shortly.

Let us also consider the exemplification relation. This relation is about how attributes can be predicated of objects. For Lowe, this can happen in two different ways, one being dispositional and the other being occurrent. An attribute is dispositionally exemplified in an object by virtue of its characterizing a kind, which in turn is instantiated in the object. On the other hand, an attribute is occurrently exemplified in an object by virtue of its instantiation in a mode, which in turn characterizes an object. As Lowe expresses these forms of exemplification,

A sentence of the form "a is occurrently F" means "a possesses a mode of Fness," whereas a sentence of form "a is dispositionally F" means "a instantiates a kind K which possesses Fness." Thus, according to this view, properties (in the sense of universals) primarily characterize kinds and only derivatively or indirectly characterize individual substances or objects. (Lowe 2006a, 125)

In summary, this diagram depicts Lowe’s four-category ontology (Miller 2020; cf. Lowe 2006, ch. 2).



It is important to observe that for Lowe, these relations, like essences, are not to be reified as additional kinds of entities. Instead, he treats the exemplification, characterization, instantiation, and dependency relations as formal. If he did treat them as real, then it would seem that further relations would be needed to explain their relatedness to their relata, and so on to infinity (Miller 2020).

Now, as I already observed, while Lowe maintains that universals exist, nonetheless he is an immanent realist, and not a Platonist. That is, universals follow a “weak” doctrine of immanence which

just amounts to an insistence upon the instantiation principle—the principle that every existing universal is instantiated. Applied to a universal such as the property of being red, it implies that this universal must have particular instances which exist “in” space and time, but it doesn’t imply that the universal *itself* must literally exist “in” space and time. (Lowe 2006, 99; emphasis added)

This result applies not just to non-substantial universals, but also to substantial ones. Without the existence of at least one human, the universal humanness would not exist.

A reason why Lowe endorses immanent realism is that he does not think universals exist “in” space and time. Therefore, they *themselves* cannot reflect photons or enter into causal relations. In light of Lowe’s objective to provide an

ontology that will undergird science, universals, as opposed to modes, of objects seem to fail to provide a way to account for perception and causation.

Last in this survey, let us consider his views about substance dualism and personal identity through time and change. As objects, humans are the union of two substances. One is a person, who is the subject of experience and bearer of mental properties. The other is a body, which bears the human's physical properties. The one substance cannot be reduced to the other, and thus the person is not identical to his or her body (Lowe 2008, 95–96).

One key argument he offers for this nonidentification is the “unity” argument, which is as follows:

1. “I am the subject of all and only my own mental states.”
 2. “Neither my body as a whole nor any part of it could be the subject of all and only my own mental states.”
- Therefore,
3. “I am not identical with my body nor with any part of it.” (Lowe 2008, 96)

Yet, Lowe's substance dualism is not Cartesian, for he argues that the person can bear both mental and physical properties. Lowe holds that

This sort of substance dualist may maintain that I possess certain physical properties *in virtue of* possessing a body that possesses those properties: that, for instance, I have a certain *shape* and *size* for this reason, and that for this reason I have a certain *velocity* when my body moves. (Lowe 2008, 95)

Moreover, Lowe believes that the conditions needed for personal identity of a human through time and change are inherited from its kind, humanness. In turn, humanness has its identity and existence conditions as part of its essence. So, a particular human exemplifies his or her essential attributes, and it is the sameness of this set of attributes through time and change that accounts for that human's personal identity.

Lowe additionally argues that humans are not merely bundles of particular properties. To think that they could be makes a mistake to

suppose that an object is even partially constituted by its particular properties, as this inverts the true direction of ontological dependency between object and property. Particular properties ... have no being independently of those objects and consequently cannot in any sense be regarded as ‘constituents’ of objects. (Lowe 2006a, 97)

Lowe's Ontology Applied to Craig's AP and Christ's PS

Now, how might Lowe's immanent universals and four-category ontology fare in regards to addressing Craig's concerns with AP, as well as preserving the PS? I think the prospects are great in every respect.

To begin, Lowe's immanent universals help address two key concerns. They help address Craig's chief theological concern with Platonism, that there would be uncreated abstract objects that exist *a se*, thereby undermining God as the sole entity that exists *a se*. While Lowe's view does support the reality of abstract objects (i.e., kinds and attributes), nonetheless these are dependent for their existence upon the instantiation of at least one particular object or mode, respectively. Due to this dependency, it seems that these universals do not exist *a se*. Therefore, Lowe's immanent universals do not seem to present an obstacle to Craig to accept as a solution to the core theological problem he sees with Platonism.

Next, Lowe's universals do not face the problem that AN and trope nominalism suffer due to their objects being simple. This led to a number of problems for Craig, including the inability to preserve the reality of humans and the rest of creation. In contrast, I argued that, as complex entities, Lowe's modes and objects do not face this problem.

Furthermore, there are specific issues I posed for the PS on the basis of AN or trope nominalism, which I argued threaten Craig's otherwise good defense of the PS. However, I think Lowe's view will help address those difficulties. First, on these forms of nominalism, I argued that there would not be a basis for a common human nature that Christ could have had, which would undermine a necessary condition for him to be our penal substitute. Worse, *qua* human, it seems Christ would not have been real, nor would any other human being. Yet, Lowe's view provides a solution by positing a real, universal kind, humanness, which all humans, including Christ, share.

Second, on nominalism, I argued that we cannot preserve the image of God in humans. That would include moral, rational, volitional, and other capacities. Yet, if that is so, humans would not be able to be moral, nor grow into Christ's likeness. This in turn means that there is no basis for them to be sinful before God, and therefore there would not be a need for Christ to bear the suffering and punishment due them.

Yet, on Lowe's views, humans have their essential capacities due to their being instances of their kind. In turn, we can draw upon theology to unpack those capacities in terms of the qualities to which God has endowed humans to be His image-bearers. There is an ontological and thus a teleological connection between

humans and Christ. For he is fully human, yet without sin, and humans are to become like him.

In these respects, it seems that Lowe's version of realism could provide an important option for Craig to consider for his AP, all the while avoiding the problems I have surfaced for AN and trope theory. Moreover, it seems Lowe's realism is able to solve the problems that nominalism poses for the PS. In these ways, his position seems to be a rationally superior option for Craig to consider.

Conclusion

I have argued that Craig's AP, when based upon AN or even trope theory, cannot sustain the reality of the created order, including humans. Nor can it preserve the reality of the PS for our sins. Instead, I urge Craig to consider alternatives, and I think Lowe's kind of realism is an important, even better, option than a version of nominalism.

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