

Revisions, and Quiddities

I used to think of the connection between a particular and a universal that it instantiates as a contingent one. Now I think that this is not quite right. This revision, as I now see it, is not a very large one. I still think that the states of affairs (Russell's *facts* in his great *Lectures on Logical Atomism*) that unite particulars and universals are contingent beings. But the connection within states of affairs is, in a certain way, necessary.

It is useful to start from the position of David Lewis regarding the possibility of particulars lacking some property that they actually have, and/or having some property that they actually lack. He asserts that in this situation there is a *counterpart* particular in another possible world. One might think of that counterpart particular as his suggested truthmaker for the modal truths associated with this possibility, though I am not sure that Lewis would have agreed with this. But what he always insisted on, I think perfectly correctly, is that the counterpart is not identical with the actual particular. What I think this shows is that there is a sense in which all the properties of a particular are necessary to that particular, and, furthermore, that it is impossible that the particular have any further properties.

This is not a very big deal. Many metaphysicians hold to this view. For instance, there is a perfectly respectable theory (though I reject it) that a particular *is* just a bundle of universals (Russell's view in his later years). It is clear, is it not, that if you 'add' and/or 'subtract' from this bundle then you have a different bundle? This should not flutter too many doves. The same should be said of my theory, a more orthodox line than Russell's, which accepts that there is, besides the universals, an irreducible particularity involved in the nature of particulars. As a one worlder, I'd reject other-worldly counterparts. But we ought, I think, to have a theory of counterparts. We should think of the counterparts as in our own actual world, the only one that there is. You are a contingent being. Instead of you there might have been a person a little bit different. Think of it as 'annihilation and replacement,' to get a picture. The replacement is not you, it is only a counterpart of you. And, just as Lewis thought, there might have to be minor miracles, that is, minor failures of laws, to allow of 'replacing' you but not altering your environment.

But one vital distinction that we should now introduce is that between relational and non-relational (intrinsic, as some say) properties. It is only the non-relational properties of particulars that 'belong' to the particular. These non-relational properties are, I think, a sort of part or constituent, though not an ordinary part. They 'divide' the object in an unusual way. Where a particular has a plurality of these non-relational properties, these properties 'divide' particulars in a manner that is orthogonal to a division into ordinary parts. Notice that Lewis would have to treat a 'change' in your relational properties as a change to a counterpart, because the unaltered you would have to be in a different world from the actual world, and he allowed no identity of particulars across worlds. But I don't think us one-worlders have to follow him here. If your intrinsic (non-relational) properties remain unaltered, but a counterfactual change in a relational property is envisaged, you would

still be good old you, not a counterpart, because the ‘annihilating and replacing’ would take place elsewhere in our world. Of course, the ‘change’ might make you somewhat different – you might have reacted differently, and that would indeed involve going to a counterpart. But a certain electron jump on Sirius going a different way from the way it actually went might not have changed you a bit.

This does invite us to consider the point that particulars can change their properties, their non-relational properties, over time. Am I then not committed to saying that at each change, negative or positive, we have a different particular? There may be particulars that never change their properties over the time during which they exist. Perhaps this holds for the basic constituents of the world, whatever they are. But ordinary things can certainly change their non-relational properties. What do I make of these changes? I’m inclined to bite the bullet and do an ‘outSmarting’, to use the technical term introduced by Dan Dennett in his *Philosophical Lexicon*. There is a clear sense, I think, in which changing things are never the same thing. But there is a relaxed sense in which we are happy for practical purposes to accept certain space-time worms as the career of ‘one thing’. The marks of such continuity are not merely spatio-temporal continuity and a considerable degree of resemblance in adjoining portions of temporal parts, but, most importantly, I think, causal relations. I agree with Russell, again in his later period, that what we call continuing things are certain *causal lines*.

Going back to the main line of the argument, in recent work I’ve suggested that the particularity of a particular can be thought of as a one that runs through the properties of the particular (its non-relational properties only, I should have emphasized) and so constitutes them a particular. A very simple particular may have one property only, but there must be one, I think. But universals are quite different from particulars. At one point I made what strikes me now as a rather crazy move.¹ Just as the properties of a particular are fixed (at a fixed time) so that to consider the possibility of their having a different set of non-relational properties is to move to counterparts, so, I suggested there, to consider the possibility of a universal instantiated by a different set of particulars from the set it actually instantiates, is to consider a different or counterpart universal. Later I took this back.² Particulars and universals, I said, are different in this respect. Stephen Mumford, however, says that “this response looks *ad hoc* and an unconvincing retreat to a halfway position that will satisfy no one”.³ Nevertheless, it is the one that I now hold.

Consider that particulars and universals, though necessarily united in first order states of affairs, are really very different categories of being. (And it is worth remembering that first-order states of affairs are themselves particulars, this being what I call ‘the victory of particularity’.) My argument here has been

¹ How do Particulars stand to Universals? In *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, Vol.1, ed. Dean Zimmerman, 139–154, 2004, p.144.

² Reply to Simons and Mumford, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 83, (2005), pp. 271-276, see p. 274.

³ In his *David Armstrong*, Chesham, Ashgate, 2007, p.191.

that the intrinsic, non-relational, properties of a particular at a certain time are 'fixed' in the sense that contemplating any difference in these properties is moving to a mere counterpart. But considering possibilities about particulars, often not knowing whether the possibility asserted did not or will not manifest itself, is something we are doing all the time. And even where we know what happened to a person or other particular we are extremely ready to consider what might have happened, though it did not. 'If he had not been cut off in his prime, he might have done so much'. Possibility, along with probability, is not *just* the guide of *life* as Hume said (truly), it also guides much *thought*. But we do not have the same attitude to universals (and more generally properties) that we do to particulars. We don't generally contemplate changes in universals. We don't very often propose counterfactuals that involve universals being different universals from the way they actually are. Such a move may seem rather silly.

So I believe that, although I do not know how to *refute* the idea that any contemplated change in its instantiations makes a universal a mere counterpart of the universal it was, I do not have to accept this proposition. I think I can draw a distinction between particulars and universals in this respect. Counterpart theory is for particulars only.

With this in place, I can continue to defend the same general metaphysical position that I outlined in the book *A World of States of Affairs*.⁴ I've got some other small revisions, but won't bother about them here. For now I wish to defend myself against what seems to be the most worrying line of criticism that has been developed in recent years by a number of fellow metaphysicians, which is that the system is irredeemably flawed by its *quidditism*.

I think that the weakness, if it is a weakness, is most clear in my account of the laws of nature. My idea – the Dretske, Tooley, Armstrong idea (DTA) -- was that the laws link universals in a special way, in a way not envisioned by the Humean scheme due to Mill, Ramsey and David Lewis. I think the idea is shown most perspicuously if it is seen as linking states of affairs in a special way. Begin with state of affairs *types*, which are, as it were, eviscerated states of affairs. The state of affairs of *a's* being *F*, with *F* a universal, is of the state of affairs type: *something's being F*. The linking of universals may then be seen as the linking of states of affairs types. Thus, a nomic link holding between the universals *F* and *G* might take the form *something's being F* nomically ensures *that same something being G*, with this *ensuring* being thought of as a contingent relation between state of affairs types.⁵ Please excuse the abstractness and simplicity of the example. A slightly more helpful example might be *something's being F* ensuring that *some further something*

⁴ Cambridge University Press 1999.

⁵ Fundamentally it is *causing*, but causing at the level of states of affairs types rather than states of affairs tokens, thus yielding law-like behaviour. It is an hypothesis that states of affairs types have these causal relations, but it is its explanatory value in explaining the world's regularities that recommends it. I think that this higher-level nomic connection enables me to maintain myself against the best criticism of my position: the critique launched by van Fraassen.

bearing certain relations (e.g. certain spatio-temporal relations) *to the first particular is a G*. We can think of the laws of nature as an organized structure – a best system – on which all the nomic linkings of states of affairs types supervene.

I believe, by the way, that this account of laws of nature makes it superior to the view that properties are particulars, not universals, that they are tropes as it is often now said, following the terminology of D.C. Williams. The DTA idea is unavailable to trope theorists, at any rate those trope theorists who do not identify properties with the *powers* that will shortly be the object of our discussion. If you allow direct nomic connection between universals then the inference from all observed Fs being Gs to all Fs being Gs can be represented as an inference to the best explanation: *being F* and *being G* are directly connected.⁶ By the way, it seems to me that any decent metaphysics ought to give us some reasonable intellectual handle on the problem of induction. I'd say also that the Mill-Ramsey-Lewis approach to laws and causes completely fails this test – as Hume already saw.

But, of course, an assault has been launched on this sort of theory based on the contingency of these contingent 'connections between universals' – to use the convenient shorthand for causal connections between states of affairs types. If the connections are contingent, then it is possible that *the very same universals might be differently nomically connected with each other*. This leads us, say critics, to look at the universals more closely. If they are to remain the same (and how could a universal not remain the same?) then they must have a nature, a quiddity as it is said, that could survive linking up with other universals in ways that differ from its actual links. But this quiddity is immensely unattractive. It looks rather like Locke's substance, 'something I know not what', which Locke thinks he has to postulate, although he cannot say what it is.

To get away from quiddity, one can instead move to the position that the laws of nature are not, after all, contingent, but are necessary. The universals from their own intrinsic nature dictate what happens in causation and nomic connection generally. To remain in this position without further explanation, however, seems to land one with a heap of necessary connections of an unexplained sort. Necessary connections must, after all, not be postulated beyond necessity. It is here, however, that the critics of contingent nomic connections have come up with a very interesting move. It is to construe the properties involved as *powers*, as powers to bring about a certain result in a certain situation. Suppose this is the way to construe properties. Then you would get a necessary connection with the result (or a necessary connection with a certain probability of the result if the result is not deterministic) and the necessity is explained in a simple, and even beautiful, manner. This turning to the powers is one of the most dramatic returns to the past that analytical

⁶ See my *What is a Law of Nature?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p.55, and John Foster, *The Divine Lawmaker: Lectures on Induction, Laws of Nature, and the Existence of God*, Oxford University Press, especially p.41.

metaphysics has ever seen. In a trice, the reflex scorn that generations of philosophers poured on such notions as ‘dormitive virtues’ became a suspect and superficial scorn. Perhaps Molière’s joke, a joke that generations of students were introduced to, managed to miss something of the utmost importance.

I do agree that the quidditism argument carries some weight. But I have two lines of argument to advance against the suggested remedy: a move to powers. The first argument has as its patron saint the great French general of the First World War, Marshall Foch. When his generals spoke of the difficulties made by the weather he said “It rains on the enemy, too”. The substitution of powers for properties has its own difficulties, difficulties that I think are rather easy to spell out. My second argument, rather more controversial, argues that a purged quidditism is available that may at least blunt the force of the objection from quiddity.

One immediate difficulty that confronts power theorists is deciding whether *all* properties (including relations) are to be construed as powers. I think it is the *external relations*, that is, relations that are not necessitated by their terms, that are the ones that cause the difficulty. Causation and the spatio-temporal relations are the usual examples cited. Causation is clearly not a power, but I suppose that a power theorist can identify it (though the details may be tricky) with the actual *manifesting* of powers. But can such a relation as distance – intimately involved as it is in the gravitation laws – be a power? It is quite easy to think of mass as a power. But the power of masses falls off with distance. Can the distance be also thought of as a contributory, damping down, power? This sort of consideration has influenced some power theorists, George Molnar and Brian Ellis are two, to allow two sorts of property or relation. The spatial relations, in particular, are allowed by them to involve a categorical element.

This dualism about properties is phenomenologically attractive, but it seems gravely to compromise the power theory, because it seems to re-introduce contingency. The attraction is modified by the distance, and the latter is not a power, it is categorical. Where is the necessity that this categorical relation operates to yield an inverse square diminution? Is there anything contrary to reason in the suggestion that this relation might have operated according to an inverse cube formula? At this point, I think, one begins to see the attraction of a *double-aspect* theory of properties, a power side and a categorical side, for *every* true property. This theory was held by C.B. Martin for many years. But that theory is up to its ears in quiddities, so power theorists can’t accept it as better than contingent connection of universals.

While giving due weight to the insights that motivated this move, while giving full credit to Molnar and Ellis’s nose for a difference, this dualistic conception of properties and relations seems gravely to compromise the power theory, at any rate if the powers are supposed to be purely powers. The distance of massive bodies clearly contributes to their powers of attracting each other. So here is a contributing relation that is, on the Molnar-Ellis view, a categorical universal. Why then is it *necessary* that the effect produced by the distance

relation is whatever it is? What would be the ground of this necessary connection? And if there is this necessary connection, why should there not be such a categorial ground for *all* powers? The power theory perhaps has to return to a double-aspect theory of properties, as Martin suggested.

A more consistent, more thoroughgoing, power theory was that upheld (for a time only, it appears) by Sydney Shoemaker, who claimed, despite the phenomenological implausibility of the view, that every property *and every external relation* (spatio-temporal relation, in particular, I'd suppose) is a power and nothing but a power.⁷ We get a world of particulars, clothed only in their powers. The theory has an important consequence. Consider what is involved in the manifestation of a power. Some acted-upon particular acquires, or in some cases retains, a certain property. But, on the theory being considered, the manifested properties are nothing but powers. The world involves particulars swapping powers according to certain rules and that is all that there is.

I do understand that work is in progress with the aim of showing that such relations as distance can be conceived as really being *concealed* powers. But I call attention here to what seems to me to be a particularly difficult case for such a *pure powers* theory of properties. It is a case mentioned by Phil Dowe.⁸ A spaceship is far from other bodies and moving under the impetus given by its own inertia. So what the inertia at any time produces is more inertia. If the inertia is construed as a mere power, it is a power that produces more pure inertia power. But what it actually produces is *motion*. Its earlier motion produces later motion. Is motion just a power? It looks like an actuality in the full non-deflationary sense, the sense that is not recognized by the pure powers theory.

Suppose, though, that such difficulties can be overcome, and that manifesting of powers is just the acquiring of powers. Is this not objectionably deflationary? Particulars are always in potency, never in act. I'm not arguing that the potency is not real, as I have sometimes been represented as doing. That, of course, would beg the question against the powers theory. But a theory that doesn't allow the properties of beings ever to get beyond potency seems to me to be profoundly suspect. I'm not arguing that there is any contradiction in the pure powers theory here. I wouldn't have expected to find one. Good metaphysics is not like that. I'll just remark, though, that there seem to be no contradictions in quidditist theories either.

What is a pure power, a power without anything categorial, without any quiddity? It is possessed by a particular, *a*, but it is in itself, very schematically, an 'if *a* is *F*, then *G*', where *F* is a suitable trigger if it comes to be instantiated in a suitable situation, and *G* is some sort of outcome. *F* and *G*, of course, involve nothing but pure powers also. Now, could such metaphysical promissory notes wholly constitute the being of the properties of

⁷ See Sydney Shoemaker, *Causality and properties*, in his *Identity, Cause and Mind: Philosophical Essays*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1984.

⁸ See Phil Dowe, *Physical Causation* (Cambridge Studies in Probability, Induction, and Decision Theory), Cambridge University Press, 2000, Chapter 3.

a? Let me for the sake of argument grant that the powers exist. But ought they not have something more to them? Quiddities may be too much. But the pure powers seem to be too little. They seem too abstract in their being to be decent ontological postulates.

So I suggest that quiddities may actually be the better poison.⁹ One thing I object to is the trying to boost the anti-quiddity argument by claiming that I am committed to saying that there will be the same universals but different laws in different worlds.¹⁰ I'd deny there are other worlds where there are other laws. I'd say that universals are linked in a certain way to give certain laws as a *matter of fact*. Other linkages are pure supposition, elevating a metaphysical possibility – a mere possibility – into a serious alternative.

At this point we might go back to the position that Martin started from. On that dualist or double-aspect view, each property has an inner side – a quiddity one might say – and an outer side, a power side. One thereby gets a necessary connection between power and manifestation. But it would seem that contingency would break in again when we consider the two sides of a property, or else we would get a very opaque necessity. Martin has relatively recently suggested an Identity Theory for the two sides. The quiddity and the power are really identical, but are seen differently, like the Necker cube (his analogy).¹¹ But how does this solve the problem? If the quiddity is the power, and the power is the quiddity, then they are the same nature differently perceived (like the cube case). How, for instance, does this differ from the theory advanced by Shoemaker? Is there something more to powers than there is for Shoemaker? If not, then there seems to be no difference from the Shoemaker theory. But if the powers are more meaty, as it were, then does this not resurrect the two-sided theory? And if we concentrate instead on the quiddity side, then how can they be strictly identical with powers? There seems to be an attempt to have it both ways, postulating an identity between things that are clearly different. (The situation is quite different from the Identity theory of mind and brain, where topic-neutral descriptions of the mental can be given – Jack Smart was the hero here – into which a brain theory can be plugged.) The challenge to Martin, I think, is to say what he is *adding* to the pure power theory. Wouldn't it have to be some quiddity? What else could it be?

So the rain falls on the powers theory of properties just as much as it falls on the quiddity theory. I'd say, indeed, that power theories are in more trouble than quiddity theory. And I'll now offer a quiddity theory which I hope removes some (but certainly not all) the objections to quiddities. First for some stage setting. Universals differ in their -adicities (apologies for the terminology).

⁹"Go see what the boys in the backroom will have, and give them the poison they name", See *what the boys in the back room will have*, lyrics by Frank Loesser, from *Destry Rides Again*.

¹⁰ See eg Alexander Bird "The Regress of Pure Powers?" *Philosophical Quarterly* 57 (2007) 513-34.

¹¹ See Martin's contribution to D.M. Armstrong, C.B. Martin, U.T. Place and T. Crane (eds), *Dispositions: a Debate* (London, Routledge, 1996).

They can be monadic, dyadic, triadic, ... and so on.¹² I'd argue that if a universal is *n-adic* in one instantiation, then it is *n-adic* in all instantiations. It is of the essence of universals to be strictly identical in different instantiations. But the *-adicity* of a universal is surely an intrinsic property of the universal (I don't know if 'property' is the right word), which it cannot lose on pain of being a different universal.¹³

But going back to universals, consider two different universals having the same *-adicity*. (Monadic, perhaps.) And let the two universals both be simple universals, which allows us to take different universals of the same *-adicity* and having the same structure – in this limiting case, no structure. Just by being different, the two universals are numerically different. My suggestion is that *this difference is enough*. They have no other difference. That is what constitutes their quiddities. You can see at once how this makes quiddities much less like icebergs with a mysterious seven-eighth unobservable beneath the water. Quiddities become easier to live with because they are less ontologically expensive. There are, of course, complex universals, often involving structure (the methane molecule). But their constituent relations and so on will be constituted by simple universals and these simple universals, if they agree in their *-adicities*, will differ numerically *only*.

This suggestion was presented here on the assumption that complex universals have simple universals as their ultimate constituents, and this, though it seems to me to be likely, may (epistemic 'may') turn out to be false. There may be 'structure all the way down' or, to put it more generally, complexity all the way down. How does this affect my proposal for taming quiddities? Not greatly, I hope. The assumption of simple universals (but perhaps of varying *-adicities*) underlying every complex universal helps us to *understand* my proposal – simpler cases are easier to grasp. But even if a universal is infinitely complex, it can still be argued, if my suggestion is right, that there could be a *plurality* of universals having the same *-adicity* and the same infinite internal structure as each other,

Of course, this attempt to tame quiddity still allows the quiddity objection to be raised, and I concede that the criticism has still some weight. Some law involving a plurality of universals, say U_1 and U_2 and U_3 (organized in states of affairs types), and having the same *-adicity* and structure, would allow the *possibility* that the 'position' of the U s in nomic structures be shuffled around without involving any other change in the order of nature. But notice that it is a *mere* possibility. As I have noted, some opponents of quidditism try to strengthen the argument by saying that the shuffling around is found in other possible worlds. But that will not impress us one-worlders. The shufflings around are, we think, *mere possibilities*.

¹² The same can be said for tropes. Perhaps not much here depends on the universals/tropes dispute. It would be a nice simplification, by the way, if our ontology did not need to go beyond the dyadic universal or dyadic trope.

¹³ The same goes, again, for tropes. Tropes of a different *-adicity* would not resemble *exactly*, but exact resemblance is required for those classes of exactly resembling tropes that trope theorists use as – quite good - substitutes for universals. But tropes, or at any rate tropes that are not powers, give us no help with the problem of induction.

I'm not saying that quidditism is not a burden to bear. But see how hard it rains on the enemy too.

David Armstrong
University of Nottingham