

Research project 2010-2011: Adverbialism

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The riddle of exemplification and the prospects of generalised adverbialism

The problem of predication is as old as philosophy itself. It shaped the distinctive forms of both Plato's and Aristotle's philosophical systems and was at the center of both the Stoic and the Epicurean research on logic and language in late Antiquity. During the Middle Ages, it was discussed under many different guises and it is arguably one of the problems with respect to which medieval philosophy was most innovative. Medieval philosophers elaborated many useful concepts and distinctions, which have been subsequently lost or neglected, and only now find their way back into mainstream philosophy. Most of these are directly linked to the problem of predication. The theory of reduplication, e.g., makes a distinction between different ways a particular may be said to have or exemplify a property, a distinction which allows one to say that Socrates is essentially rational and only accidentally bipedal *qua* philosopher, but essentially bipedal and accidentally rational *qua* cyclist. Throughout the Middle Ages, philosophical debate was shaped and informed by the quarrel between nominalists and realists which differed mostly in the ontological status they were ready to assign to properties.

Modern philosophy, while less interested in metaphysics generally, nevertheless made some important contributions - which are today seen as contributions best put in terms of theses about the metaphysics of certain classes of properties. Leibniz held a thesis according to which relations are unreal and reduce to their terms and it has proved very difficult to give precise form to this radical claim, partly because the logically prior question, what the exemplification of a relation consists in, has not properly been addressed. Kant's famous doctrine of the epistemic inaccessibility of *noumena* or things-in-themselves has recently been rephrased as a thesis about the inaccessibility of the intrinsic properties of things. Locke's, Berkeley's and Hume's theories of ideas and sensations and their associated accounts of perception play an important rôle in the discussion on response-dependence, which, again, is a discussion about how to define response-dependent *properties*.

Though it has a venerable tradition, the problem of predication has largely been neglected by contemporary philosophy. Focusing on singular reference, philosophers have largely disregarded the other parts of an atomic proposition. Despite the important work of David Armstrong, the questions whether predicates have a sense and a reference and how the semantic values of predicates are tied to those of singular terms have not been asked nor answered in a satisfying manner.

In my thesis, I address some of these questions from an 'Australian' perspective, asking to what extent truthmaker arguments commit us to a realist account of properties, how properties, realistically conceived, enter into the exemplification relation, in what the difference in semantic rôle of singular terms and predicates consists in and whether there is some sense to be made of so-called 'qua-objects', realistic cousins of what some have called 'things-under-a-description'. I give a realistic account of the exemplification relation, defend it against various forms of Bradleyan regresses and the famous charge of Frank Ramsey who argued that the very distinction between particulars and universals rests on our being in the grip of some mistaken theory about the functioning of singular terms and predicates. While pursuing this work, I was struck by the potential a 'robust' account of the exemplification relation seems to have in other areas of philosophy:

Intrinsicness: it has long been observed that the intrinsic/extrinsic and the relational/non-relational distinctions are orthogonal to each other, i.e. that there might be intrinsic but relational and extrinsic but non-relational properties, as (plausibly) *having originated from zygote Z* and *having rest-mass m* respectively. No satisfying account of these two distinctions has been given, however, the most famous characterisation of intrinsicness (by David Lewis) identifying intrinsic properties with possibly non-relational ones. I think that intrinsic properties are those the exemplification of which does not involve any other than the thing exemplifying them while non-relational ones

are those exemplifiable by just one thing alone. Distinguishing between the dependence of the (holding of the) exemplification relation itself and the things that enter into it thereby allows for a new and, I think, promising account of intrinsicness.

Determinables: contemporary metaphysics has long concentrated on perfectly determinate properties, devoting not much more than scattered remarks to determinable properties such as *having a colour* or *having mass*. This has not only kept their theories at a dangerously high level of abstraction (there are only very few perfectly determinate properties, if any), but also saddled them with unconvincing accounts of so-called 'material entailments' (as from "*x* is red" to "*x* is coloured"). I think that a construal of determinable properties as exemplification types (ways of exemplifying determinate properties) not only gives us a more plausible theory, but also connects in illuminating ways to the important question of the status of response-dependent properties. In particular, it explains why the response-dependence of perceptual, aesthetic and moral properties is compatible with their being real and part of the furniture of the world.

Adverbialism: The accounts of intrinsic and determinable properties generalise naturally to a theory of *adverbial modification*, reinterpreting Davidson's arguments from adverbials to the existence of events (where "John's buttered the toast slowly at noon" becomes "there is a buttering of a toast by John taking place slowly and at noon") as arguments for an ontology of cases of the exemplification relation ("the buttering relation between John and the toast was exemplified slowly and at noon"). This theory inherits the explanatory potential of the event-theory, while avoiding its most important drawback: the event theory cannot, while the exemplification theory can, account for changes in changes, as eg. the increase in the velocity of John's buttering, Joan's becoming more and more impatient with its slowness etc.

Composition: A very popular argument inflating some philosopher's ontology is Leibniz's identity of indiscernibles: if *x* and *y* differ in some property, they must be distinct. In its most controversial applications, e.g. in favour of the non-identity of the statue and the lump of matter of which it is composed, the properties in question concern the modal and temporal persistence condition(s) of the object(s) involved. These arguments therefore presuppose the unavailability of an adverbial account of such modal and temporal characteristics: while nothing, it is held, can be both necessarily Goliath-shaped and possibly scattered, one and the same thing can slowly become red and quickly move south. I hope to show that there is no real contrast here, that the same account that explains the compatibility of the latter can be used to show the compatibility of the former.

Location: Despite much recent work in the ontology and metaphysics of space and time, the functioning of locational modifiers such as "during spring", "at *t*", "in Berne" are rather badly understood. While they are standardly interpreted as operators, properties 'abstracted' from them (such as *being red at t* and *being larger in Berne than elsewhere*) are nevertheless countenanced (i.e. accepted as substitution instances in identity-of-indiscernibles arguments). This, I think, is inconsistent: locational operators should be interpreted adverbially and distinguished from locational properties which show a quite different logical behaviour. Drawing a clear distinction allows for a new, and yet unexplored, solution to the problem of 'temporary intrinsics' (and related problems concerning essential extrinsics and accidental non-relational properties).

Essence and dependence: In recent work, Kit Fine discredited the long standard modal account of essence: for *x* to have some property essentially, it is not sufficient that *x* has it in all worlds where it exists. Successive work has made it plausible that an account of essence should be based on a more basic relation of dependence, between things and their properties. The metaphysics of dependence, however, remains largely unexplored. I hope to provide an account of dependence in terms of the relative strength of exemplification ties, thereby giving an account of "*a* is essentially *F*" that takes its surface form seriously, treating "essentially" as an adverbial modification of *a*'s being *F*.

Continuing my 'Australian' work on exemplification, I hope to address these and related questions from a more 'Austrian' perspective, inspired by work of some of the founding fathers of analytic philosophy, the Austrian philosophers Bolzano and Brentano. I think that their heterodox, largely neglected and highly innovative theories of the unity of the proposition might bring some of these traditional problems (closer) to their solution.