 DOI: HTTP://DX.DOI.ORG/10.5216/PHI.V24I2.50330

BLOQUEANDO O ARGUMENTO DO TERCEIRO HOMEM[1]

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Resumo: Há um conhecido argumento contra o realismo acerca dos universais. De acordo com ele, tal realismo conduz a um regresso ao infinito. Este artigo visa a mostrar que é possível bloquear o regresso sem lançar mão de recursos argumentativos ad hoc. Algumas considerações sobre a forma lógica de frases relacionais contendo termos que se referem a propriedades e relações mostram como substituir a forma viciosa de regresso por uma menos problemática.

Palavras-chave: Ontologia; Realismo; Nominalismo; Argumento do Terceiro Homem; Exemplificação.

1 INTRODUCTION

In a nutshell, the problem of universals has to do with the issue of similarity: how are we supposed to explain attribute (or relation) agreement between individuals? Realists say that we need to posit some special kind of entities named universals in order to explain similarity. According to realists, universals are the referents of (all or at least some) n-place predicates. On the other hand, nominalists deny that universals are necessary for explaining attrib-

[1] Recebido: 20-11-2017 / Aceito: 17-05-2018 / Publicado on-line: 12/04/2020.
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ute/relation agreement, either because similarity is an unanalyzable relation or because some other things are to be posited (classes, for instance)3. Another way to put the same problem is semantic in character: how are we supposed to explain the truth of atomic sentences like 'a is F' or 'a is in the relation R to b', where a and b are names for individuals and F and R are predicates (one-place and two-place, respectively)? Again, realists will resort to universals, while nominalists will try to find another way out.

A well-known argument against realism asserts that it leads to an infinite regress. The argument, known in philosophical literature as the Third Man Argument, is a metaphysical problem since antiquity (see Plato (132a-b) and Aristotle (990b17-1079a13)). The argument was initially conceived as an objection to Plato's theory of forms and received its usual denomination from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, as the Estagirite used the predicate "being a man" to make his point (Plato had used "is large" instead). The argument goes as follows: given a group of men, we say that they all have something in common (they are all men). In the Platonic theory of forms, for every common feature, there is a form in virtue of which the members of the group are said to share that feature (one-over-many principle) and this

[3] "Following the tradition, I take realism about universals to be the view that different objects may have the very same, repeatable property. If both the bike and the car are black, then the realist says there is one and the same property, blackness, instantiated by both the bike and the car. Thus, according to realism about universals, a single property may be multiply instantiated in a given world. Nominalism denies this. If the bike and the car are black, then they do not literally speaking have the same property in common. The class nominalist, for example, considers being black as no more than being an element of a certain class of particulars. Instantiation of a property then reduces to membership in a certain class." (FREITAG 2008, 280). We shall use the expressions "exemplification" and "to exemplify" instead of "instantiation" and "to instantiate".

form is different from each of the particular men that partakes of it (non-identity principle). In this case, the form Man is what makes each of those men be a specific man without being any of them in particular. However, in Plato's theory, every form *F*-ness is itself *F* (principle of self-predication), so now we have to posit a second form, Man_2, in order to explain that in virtue of which the particular men and the form Man have in common, and so the argument proceeds *ad infinitum*. If we take those three principles together (one-over-many, non-identity and self-predication), for every common feature a group of things share we have to posit an infinite number of forms, so there is no genuine account of the initial datum.

A natural suspicion befalls the self-predication assumption. Not all properties have to be self-exemplifiable: while the property Immateriality certainly is itself immaterial, it is odd to say that the property Manhood is itself a man or that Redness is itself red. Therefore, a consistent realist theory of universals has to drop that assumption. Unfortunately, this is apparently not enough for preventing the regress. Even if the realist keeps only one-over-many and non-identity as assumptions (plus the relation of Exemplification), there is an argument that shows how the Third Man can still appear to haunt him. We present a modern version of the argument as can be found in Loux (2006, 32-33).

2 THE REGRESS (AGAIN)

For simplification purposes, we shall present our analysis according to the semantic characterization. The realist has to give an account of the true of the following sentence:

(1) *a* is *F*

He does that by positing the universal *F*-ness, which *a* exemplifies. So (1) is accounted for by the following sentence:

(2) *a* exemplifies *F*-ness

But (2), on its turn, appears to introduce a second universal (the exemplification of *F*-ness), and so needs an account on its own. (3) seems to do the job:

(3) *a* exemplifies the exemplification of *F*-ness,

which introduces a third universal (the exemplification of the exemplification of *F-ness*), and so on. For any theory, such a regression means that the theory is not able to give a rock-bottom account for the phenomenon it intends to explain. A further account is always needed, and so the theory explains nothing at all.

Realists usually try to block the regress by saying that (2) does not need to be explained, for exemplification is itself a primitive, unanalyzable notion. In this sense, exemplification is not to be understood as an ordinary relation like parenthood. While a sentence like

(4) *a* is a parent of *b*

is explained by

(5) *a* exemplifies Parenthood of *b* ,

the latter is not true in virtue of some further exemplification. Exemplification cannot be analyzed in terms of itself.

We think that this attempt to avoid the regress is plainly *ad hoc*. We intend to show that there is a way to block it and yet deal with exemplification as a well-behaving universal. In other words, we want to show that (2) has the form of (4).

3 BLOCKING THE REGRESS

Our argument begins with blocking the inference from (4) to (5). A realist is not necessarily committed to an inference like the following:

______John is a parent of Peter______
John exemplifies Parenthood of Peter

Why should a realist, when giving an account of the truth of 'John is a parent of Peter', posit an impure universal[4] like 'Parenthood of Peter'? He is absolutely entitled to deny the inference above and support the following:

______John is a parent of Peter______
John exemplifies Parenthood

Now, Parenthood, unlike Parenthood of *a*, is a pure

[4] We draw a distinction between pure universals and impure ones. While the linguistic expression of the former does not refer to individuals or other universals, the predicates to which the latter correspond do. For instance, while Parenthood is a pure universal, Parenthood of Peter is an impure one, since Peter is an individual. In this sense, Exemplification of Wisdom is an impure universal, since Wisdom is a (pure) universal different from Exemplification.

universal. So a realist can be committed only to the existence of universals not built out of other entities. To put it in a more general way, he does not need to be committed to the following schema

_____t_1 is in relation *R* to t_2_____
t_1 exemplifies *R*-ness to t_2

only to this one

______t_1 is in relation R to t_2______
t_1 exemplifies R-ness[5]

With the latter schema, the inference from (2) to (3) is immediately blocked (and so from (3) onwards). All we have is the following:

______t_1 exemplifies F-ness_____
t_1 exemplifies Exemplification

For Exemplification of F-ness is an impure universal, and the realist can do without them all! So the argument according to which realism leads to an infinite regress illicitly assigns to it a commitment to the existence of impure universals. Since such a commitment is dispensable, and since it is what triggers the vicious circle for the realist, we can conclude that realism concerning universals does not necessarily lead to an infinite regress. From the latter conclusion

[5] In this schema, t_1 and t_2 can be either individuals or universals.

(6) t_1 exemplifies Exemplification ,

it is only possible to infer iterations of it. Therefore, we have blocked the third man argument.

One could argue for impure universals because of their greater explanatory power. The fact that John is a parent is not sufficient for giving an account of his being a parent *of Peter*. In philosophical parlance: 'John exemplifies Parenthood' is not a sufficient condition – and therefore not an explanation – for 'John is a parent of Peter'. We agree that a full account of the latter sentence demands more than linking John to Parenthood by means of Exemplification. Maybe realism, when giving an account of sentences of the form 't_1 is in the relation R to t_2', can stop short at the second *relatum*, and only explain why t_1 occupies the position it does in the context. The interest for an ontological theory, given the truth of the latter sentence, would be in t_1's relation to R-ness, not in its relation to t_2.

However, a nominalist or a defender of impure universals might have the right to demand precise truth-conditions for relational sentences. They could ask the realist who does not accept impure universals what (even if he does not think it is so important) are the truth-conditions for sentences like 't_1 is in the relation R to t_2' in terms of his own ontological theory. We argue that he can do this without either rejecting realism *tout court* or positing impure universals.

Getting back to relational sentences, our realist could state the following equivalence:

t_1 is in the relation *R* to $t_{2,\ldots}$ and t_n *if and only if* the ordered tuple < t_1, t_2,..., t_n> exemplifies *R*-ness.

In this account, what exemplifies *R*-ness is not t_1, but t_1 taken together with t_2 in a precise order[6]. By doing that, he posits no impure universals, only a certain kind of abstract particulars (tuples). Now we can use the equivalence to state the precise truth-conditions for '*a* is *F*' without positing an infinity of impure universals:

a is *F*[7]

a exemplifies *F*-ness[8]

<*a*, *F*-ness> exemplifies Exemplification[9]

<*a*, *F*-ness, Exemplification> exemplifies Exemplification[10]

<*a*, *F*-ness , Exemplification, Exemplification> exemplifies Exemplification[11]

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n. <*a*, *F*-ness, Exemplification, Exemplification, ..., Exemplification> exemplifies Exemplification[12]

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[6] "There appear to be at least two basic kinds of universals: *properties* and *relations*. So, if there are three cubes at some time, then each of these cubes exemplifies or instantiates the property of Cubicalness at that time. Another sort of example is provided by the instantiation of the relation of Betweenness. In this example a trio or ordered triple of items instantiates this relation". (HOFFMAN; ROSENKRANTZ, 53, 2010).

[7] Premise

[8] From 1 and Realism

[9] From 2 and Equivalence

[10] From 3 and Equivalence

[11] From 4 and Equivalence

[12] From *n*-1 and Equivalence

With such an account, we have not blocked all regress. Each new step generates a different tuple, and this process goes *ad infinitum*[13]. But we can safely say that we have blocked the Third Man Argument, since the number of universals remains the same throughout the deduction. And we dare to say that an infinite number of abstract particulars is much less troublesome than an infinite number of universals: after all, the former were there since the beginning (even for some nominalists!).

However, ruling out impure universals may seem to take its toll on this sort of realism. In some systems of logic, given a propositional function, it is possible to bind any variables by means of an abstraction operator λ, thus generating another function, which behaves like a singular term. We will not go into the details of the Lambda Calculus, for an informal presentation of how the λ-operator works fits our purposes. Let us consider the following propositional function:

x is wise

Applying the λ-operator to it, we get

λ*x*(*x* is wise) ,

which reads as "the property of being wise" or simply

[13] Throughout the latter argument we made implicit use of the set-theoretical equivalence $<t_1,\ldots, t_{n+1}> =_{def.} <<t_1,\ldots, t_n>, t_{n+1}>$.

"Wisdom". Using E for the relation of Exemplification, we can form sentences like

(7) E(Socrates, λx(x is wise)) ,

which reads as "Socrates exemplifies Wisdom" (equivalent to "Socrates is wise", obtained by substituting 'Socrates' for the variable x in the propositional function above). So far so good. But what about the following propositional function?

x is a parent of Peter

Nothing prevents us from binding its variable with the λ-operator, thus generating

λx(x is a parent of Peter) ,

which, informally read, means "the property of being a parent of John" or simply "Parenthood of John". But these are the impure universals we were trying to avoid in our ontology! From a logical point of view, there is nothing wrong with those constructions. The difference between pure universals and impure ones would simply arise from the objective difference between propositional functions. For instance, there is a difference between x is a parent of John and the following:

x is a parent of y

The latter is a two-argument propositional function, so we must apply the λ-operator twice in order to abstract it:

$\lambda x \lambda y$(x is a parent of y) ,

which corresponds to the universal Parenthood. Therefore, we can state the difference between "John exemplifies Parenthood" and "John exemplifies Parenthood of Peter":

(8) E(John, $\lambda x \lambda y$(x is a parent of y))

(9) E(John, λx(x is a parent of Peter))

"John is someone's parent" entails the former, while "John is a parent of Peter" entails the both the former and the latter. We should see now how the regress appears in this notation.

(2') $E(a, \lambda x(Fx))$

(3') $E(a, \lambda y(E(y, \lambda x(Fx)))$

From (3'), we can deduce the following sentence:

(10) $E(a, \lambda z(E(z, \lambda y(E(\mathrm{y}, \lambda x(Fx))))$,

which reads informally as "*a* exemplifies the exemplification of the exemplification of *F*-ness. Therefore, the first regress shows up clearly in the symbolism of the λ-operator. As giving up this notation is too high a price to pay, we could ask if impure universals should not be posited after all. Our answer is no.

The latter version of realism presented above posited two categories of entities:

a. Particulars represented by individual constants of the form a, b, c, ... , a_1, b_1, c_1, ...;

b. Particulars represented by tuples of the form $<t_1, ..., t_n>$

Pure universals, represented by functions of the form $\lambda v_1 ... \lambda v_n(P(v_1,...,v_n))$.

Our aim is to give definitions for sentences that contain impure universals using only pure universals and tuples[14]. Thus, (3') reduces to

(3'') $E(<a, \lambda x(Fx)>, \lambda x\lambda y(E(y, x)))$,

which contains only an ordered-triple and the pure universal Exemplification – $\lambda y\lambda x(E(y, x))$. (10) is defined as

(10') $E(<a, \lambda x(Fx), \lambda y\lambda x(E(y, x))>, \lambda x\lambda y(E(x, y)))$,

which, again, does not contain any impure universals. Therefore, our only-pure-universals-realism has no need to throw away the elegant notation of the λ-operator. Sentenc-

[14] This is a usual procedure in the contemporary metaphysical debate. The proponent of some stronger form of realism throws sentences that seem to refer to a certain kind of entities. The nominalist (or a moderate realist) attempts to translate such sentences without referring to those entities (HOFFMAN; ROSENKRANTZ, 57, 2010).

es like (3'), (8) and (9) can be dealt with as mere *abbreviations*:

E(John, λx(x is a parent of Peter)) ≡ E(<John, Peter>, $\lambda x \lambda y$(x is a parent of y))

More generally, a sentence of the form $E(t_1, \lambda v_1 \ldots \lambda v_n(P(\ldots, t_2, \ldots, t_n, \ldots)))$ can be defined as follows:

$E(<t_1, t_2, \ldots, t_n>, \lambda v_1 \ldots \lambda v_{n-1} \lambda v_n \lambda v_{n+1} \lambda v_{n+2} \ldots \lambda v_m(P(\ldots, v_{n+1}, \ldots, v_{n+2}, \ldots, v_m, \ldots)))$[15]

Other equivalences, of course, should be put forth in order to reduce sentences containing them, but as our aim is to examine realism about universals, the latter definition seems good enough, for it shows how to reduce the leading relational sentences in a realist ontology to sentences that contain as *relata* nothing more than a tuple and a function that stands for a pure universal.

4 Bradley's regress

Another modern version of the Third Man Argument is Bradley's regress, named after F.H. Bradley, whose intention was to show that all relations lead to a regress *ad infinitum*. Rodriguez-Pereyra presents it as follows:

[15] In this schema, all terms in $P(\ldots, t_2, \ldots, t_n, \ldots)$ were abstracted by the λ-operator and put in a tuple with t_1.

> Suppose there are universals, both monadic and relational, and that when an entity instantiates a universal, or a group of entities instantiate a relational universal, they are linked by an instantiation relation. Suppose now that a instantiates the universal F. Since there are many things that instantiate many universals, it is plausible to suppose that instantiation is a relational universal. But if instantiation is a relational universal, when a instantiates F, a, F and the instantiation relation are linked by an instantiation relation. Call this instantiation relation i2 (and suppose it, as is plausible, to be distinct from the instantiation relation (i1) that links a and F). Then since i2 is also a universal, it looks as if a, F, i1 and i2 will have to be linked by another instantiation relation i3, and so on ad infinitum. (RODRIGUEZ-PEREYRA 2008)

We can identity four assumptions within the argument: 1) If a universal is exemplified by an entity, then there is an Exemplification relation different from the universal and the other entity linking them; 2) Exemplification is a universal; 3) Exemplification is exemplified by the entities it links; 4) The Exemplification (E_{n+1}) linking E_n to t_1 ,... and t_n is different from the Exemplification (E_n) that links t_1 ,... and t_n.

Rejecting the first three assumptions entails some sort of nominalist position[16] or at least an *ad hoc* version of realism that is not committed to the existence of Exemplification because it seems to generate the regress. Therefore, we shall attempt to keep them while rejecting the fourth principle

According to the forth assumption in the argument, the

[16]" We may say, for example, that some dogs are white and not thereby commit ourselves to recognizing either doghood or whiteness as entities." (QUINE 1949, 32). Armstrong (2006, 242) holds that to stop the regress we must make Exemplification a necessary relation. We think that this is too heavy an ontological burden to bear.

Exemplification relation that links Exemplification, *a* and *F*-ness is different from the one that only links *a* and *F*-ness. But why is that so? Why should we posit a new relation of Exemplification every time a new group of related entities shows up? We give a response to Bradley's argument along the same lines in which we presented the latter solution to the regress.

Instead of saying that, given an Exemplification relation linking *a* and *F*-ness, we have to posit a new relation (Exemplification$_2$) to explain the connection between the former three entities, we can simply say that the very same relation is able to connect itself with them.

Thus, we generate again a less troublesome form of regress:

1. *a* is *F*
2. *a* and *F*-ness are linked by the Exemplification relation
3. *a*, *F*-ness and Exemplification are linked by the Exemplification relation
4. *a*, *F*-ness, Exemplification and Exemplification are linked by the Exemplification relation

and so on.

Couched in our language of tuples and functions, we can present the solution as follows:

1. Fa
2. $E(a, \lambda x(Fx))$

3. $E(<a, \lambda x(Fx)> , \lambda x\lambda y(E(x, y)))$
4. $E(<a, \lambda x(Fx), \lambda x\lambda y(E(x, y))>, \lambda x\lambda y(E(x, y)))$

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and so on.

Again, what appears is an infinity of tuples, not of universals. Nevertheless, the question remains: does that not prevent *a*'s linkage to *F*-ness? Not if we think that those tuples exist necessarily. The problem with an infinite number of Exemplification relations was that we were not sure of their existence, so we could not resort to them. However, tuples are not problematic as seemingly superfluous universals. Therefore, a regress like the latter is not vicious.

Of course, one is always allowed to doubt the existence of any abstract entity whatsoever and posit only *concreta* in his ontology. In this case, we have to be honest: realism about universals is either regressive or arbitrary when avoiding all sorts of regress. To these nominalists, however, we can say: good luck trying to reduce tuples to *concreta*.

5 Conclusion

One might raise an objection against ruling out impure universals: after all, why should Parenthood be accepted, and not Parenthood of *a*? The answer is not ontological economy (even though simplicity may be an attractive feature in a theory). As the majority of realists would deny commitment to the existence of a universal corresponding to the predicate "does not exemplify itself" because such a commitment would lead to contradictions, they are entitled to reject the existence of impure universals because accepting them leads to a vicious regress. And since restricting commitment to all impure universals but those that involve Exemplification is blatantly arbitrary, it is more reasonable to deny them all, dealing with Exemplification as the ordinary relation it appears to be in the sentences so far considered.

Abstract: There is a well-known argument against realism about universals. According to this argument, realism leads to an infinite regress. This paper aims to show that it is possible to block the regress without resorting to ad hoc argumentative steps. Some remarks on the logical form of relational sentences containing terms that stand for properties and relations show how to substitute a less troublesome form of regress for the one that idly generates an infinite number of universals.

Keywords: Ontology; Realism; Nominalism; Third Man Argument; Exemplification.

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