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ON THE ELEMENTS OF BEING: I

DONALD C. WILLIAMS

FIRST PHILOSOPHY, according to the traditional schedule, is analytic ontology, examining the traits necessary to whatever is, in this or any other possible world. Its cardinal problem is that of substance and attribute, or at any rate something cognate with this in that family of ideas which contains also subsistence and inherence, subject and predicate, particular and universal, singular and general, individual and class, and matter and form. It is the question how a thing can be an instance of many properties while a property may inhere in many instances, the question how everything is a *case* of a *kind*, a this-such, an essence endowed with existence, an existent differentiated by essence, and so forth. Concerned with what it means to be a thing or a kind at all, it is in some wise prior to and independent of the other great branch of metaphysics, speculative cosmology: what kinds of things are there, what stuff are they made of, how are they strung together? Although "analytic ontology" is not much practiced as a unit under that name today, its problems, and especially the problem of subsistence and inherence, are as much alive in the latest manifestoes of the logical analysts, who pretend to believe neither in substances nor in universals, as they were in the counsels of Athens and of Paris. Nothing is clear until that topic is clear, and in this essay ¹ I hope to do something to clarify it in terms of a theory or schema which over a good many years I have found so serviceable that it may well be true.

Metaphysics is the thoroughly empirical science. Every item of experience must be evidence for or against any hypothesis of speculative cosmology, and every experienced object must be an exemplar and test case for the categories of analytic ontology. Technically, therefore, one example ought for our present theme to be as good as another. The more dignified examples, however,

¹ It overlaps one read to the Philosophical Club of Boston University on December 3, 1952.

are darkened with a patina of tradition and partisanship, while some frivolous ones are peculiarly perspicuous. Let us therefore imagine three lollipops, made by a candy man who buys sticks from a big supplier and molds candy knobs on them. Lollipop No. 1 has a red round peppermint head, No. 2 a brown round chocolate head, No. 3 a red square peppermint head. The circumstance here which mainly provokes theories of subsistence and inherence is similarity with difference: each lollipop is partially similar to each other and partially different from it. If we can give a good account of this circumstance in this affair we shall have the instrument to expose the anatomy of everything, from an electron or an apple to archangels and the World All.

My chief proposal to that end may be put, to begin with, as nothing more tremendous than that we admit literally and seriously that to say that *a* is partially similar to *b* is to say that a part of *a* is wholly or completely similar to a part of *b*. This is a truism when we construe it with respect to ordinary concrete parts, for example, the sticks in the lollipops. On physical grounds, to be sure, it is not likely that any three solid objects, not even three sticks turned out by mass industry, are exactly similar, but they often look as if they were, and we can intelligibly stipulate for our argument that our exemplary sticks do exactly resemble each other through and through. To say then that each of the lollipops is partially similar to each other, that is, with respect to stick, is to say that there is a stick in each which is perfectly similar to the stick in every other, even though each stick remains as particular and distinct an individual as the whole lollipop. We would seldom give a proper name to a lollipop, and still more seldom to the stick in one, but we might easily do so—"Heraplem" for lollipop No. 1, for example, "Paraplete" for its stick, "Boanerp" for No. 2 and "Merrinel" for its stick. Heraplem and Boanerp then are partially similar because Paraplete and Merrinel are perfectly similar.

But what now of the rest of each lollipop and what of their more subtle similarities, of color, shape, and flavor? My proposal is that we treat them in exactly the same way. Since we can not find more parts of the usual gross sort, like the stick, to be wholly similar from lollipop to lollipop, let us discriminate subtler and

thinner or more diffuse parts till we find some of these which *are* wholly similar. This odd-sounding assignment, of course, is no more than we are accustomed to do, easily and without noticing. Just as we can distinguish in the lollipops Heraplem and Boanerp the gross parts called "sticks," namely, Paraplete and Merrinel, so we can distinguish in each lollipop a finer part which we are used to call its "color" and another called its "shape"—not its kind of color or shape, mind you, but these particular cases, this reddening, this occurrence or occasion of roundness, each as uniquely itself as a man, an earthquake, or a yell. With only a little more hardihood than christened the lollipops and sticks we can christen our finer components: "Harlac" and "Bantic" for the respective color components, let us say, and "Hamis" and "Borcas" for the respective shape components. In these four new names the first and last letters are initials of "Heraplem" and "Boanerp," and of "color" and "shape," respectively, but this is a mnemonic device for us, irrelevant to their force as names. "Harlac," for example, is not to be taken as an abbreviation for the description, "the color component of Heraplem." In a real situation like the one we are imagining, "Harlac" is defined ostensively, as one baptizes a child or introduces a man, present in the flesh; the descriptive phrase is only a scaffolding, a temporary device to bring attention to bear on the particular entity being denoted, as a mother of twins might admonish the vicar, "Boadicea is the cross-looking one." Heraplem and Boanerp are partially similar, then, not merely because the respective gross parts Paraplete and Merrinel (their sticks) are wholly similar, but also because the respective fine parts, Hamis and Borcas (their "shapes"), are wholly similar—all this without prejudice to the fact that Hamis is numerically as distinct from Borcas, to which it is wholly similar, and from Harlac, with which it is conjoined in Heraplem, as Harlac is from Bantic to which it is neither similar nor conjoined, and as the stick Paraplete is from the stick Merrinel, and as the whole lollipop, Heraplem, is from the whole Boanerp. The sense in which Heraplem and Boanerp "have the same shape," and in which "the shape of one is identical with the shape of the other," is the sense in which two soldiers "wear the same uniform" or in which a son "has his father's nose" or our candy man might say "I use the same ident-

ical stick, Ledbetter's Triple-X, in all my lollipops." They do not "have the same shape" in the sense in which two children "have the same father," or two streets have the same manhole in the middle of their intersection, or two college boys "wear the same tuxedo" (and so can't go to dances together). But while similar in the indicated respects, Heraplem and Boanerp are partially dissimilar in as much as their knobs or heads are partially dissimilar, and these are partially dissimilar because some of their finer parts, for example, Harlac and Bantic, their colors, are dissimilar.

In like manner, to proceed, we note that Harlac, the color component of No. 1 (Heraplem), though numerically distinct from, is wholly similar to the color component of No. 3. But No. 1 has not only a color component which is perfectly similar to the color component of No. 3; it has also a flavor component perfectly similar to the flavor component of No. 3. (It does not matter whether we think of the flavor as a phenomenal quality or as a molecular structure in the stuff of the candy.) The flavor-plus-color of No. 1 (and likewise of No. 3) is a complex whose own constituents are the flavor and the color, and so on for innumerable selections and combinations of parts, both gross and fine, which are embedded in any one such object or any collection thereof.

Crucial here, of course, is the admission of a "fine" or "subtle" part, a "diffuse" or "permeant" one, such as a resident color or occurrent shape, to at least as good standing among the actual and individual items of the world's furniture as a "gross" part, such as a stick. The fact that one part is thus finer and more diffuse than another, and that it is more susceptible of similarity, no more militates against its individual actuality than the fact that mice are smaller and more numerous than elephants makes them any the less real. To borrow now an old but pretty appropriate term, a gross part, like the stick, is "concrete," as the whole lollipop is, while a fine or diffuse part, like the color component or shape component, is "abstract." The color-cum-shape is less abstract or more concrete or more nearly concrete than the color alone but it is more abstract or less concrete than color-plus-shape-plus-flavor, and so on up till we get to the total complex which is wholly concrete.

I propose now that entities like our fine parts or abstract components are the primary constituents of this or any possible world, the very alphabet of being. They not only are actual but are the only actualities, in just this sense, that whereas entities of all other categories are literally composed of them, they are not in general composed of any other sort of entity. That such a crucial category has no regular name is quite characteristic of first principles and is part of what makes the latter worth pursuing. A description of it in good old phraseology has a paradoxical ring: our thin parts are "abstract particulars."² We shall have occasion to use "parts" for concreta and "components" for our abstracta (and "constituent" for both), as some British philosophers use "component" for property and "constituent" for concrete part. Santayana, however, used "trope" to stand for the *essence* of an *occurrence*;³ and I shall divert the word, which is almost useless in either his or its dictionary sense, to stand for the abstract particular which is, so to speak, the *occurrence* of an *essence*. A trope then is a particular entity either abstract or consisting of one or more concreta in combination with an abstractum. Thus a cat and the cat's tail are not tropes, but a cat's smile is a trope, and so is the whole whose constituents are the cat's smile plus her ears and the aridity of the moon.

Turning now briefly from the alphabet of being to a glimpse of its syllabary, we observe two fundamental ways in which tropes may be connected with one another: the way of location and the way of similarity. These are categorially different, and indeed systematic counterparts of one another—mirror images, as it were. Location is external in the sense that a trope *per se* does not entail or necessitate or determine its location with respect to any other trope, while similarity is internal in the sense that, given any two tropes, there are entailed or necessitated or determined whether and how they are similar. (What further this *prima facie* difference amounts to we cannot pursue here.) Location is easiest thought of as position in physical space-time, but I intend the notion to include also all the analogous spreads and

² I argued the general legitimacy of such a category in "The Nature of Universals and of Abstractions," *The Monist*, XLI (1931), pp. 583-93.

³ *The Realm of Matter*, Chapter VI.

arrangements which we find in different conscious fields and indeed in any realm of existence which we can conceive—the whole interior stretch and structure of a Leibnizian monad, for example. Both modes of connection are describable in terms of “distance” and “direction.” We are very familiar in a general way with the numberless distances and directions which compose locations in space and time, somewhat less familiar with the idea of what I suggest is the limiting value of such location (though very familiar with the phenomenon itself): the collocation, or peculiar interpenetration, the unique congress in the same volume, which we call “belonging to (or inhering in, or characterizing) the same thing.” With various interests and intentions, this nexus has been mentioned by Russell as “compresence,” by Mill as “co-inherence,” by G. F. Stout as “concesence,” by Professor Goodman as “togetherness,” and by Whitehead, Keynes, and Mill again as “concurrence.”⁴ With respect to similarity, on the other hand, we are comparatively familiar with the notion of its limiting value, the precise, or almost precise, similarity such as obtained between the colors of our first and third lollipops, less familiar with the idea of the lesser similarity which obtains between a red and a purple, and rather uncertain, unless we are psychologists or phenomenologists, about such elaborate similarity distances and directions as are mapped on the color cone.

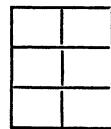
Any possible world, and hence, of course, this one, is completely constituted by its tropes and their connections of location and similarity, and any others there may be. (I think there are no others, but that is not necessary to the theory of tropes.) Location and similarity (or whatever else there is) provide all the relations, as the tropes provide the terms, but the total of the relations is not something over and above the total of the terms, for a relation R between tropes a and b is a constitutive trope of the complex $r' (a, b)$, while conversely the terms a and b will be in general composed of constituents in relation—though perhaps

⁴ See Russell, *Human Knowledge*, pp. 294, 297, 304, etc.; Stout, “The Nature of Universals and Propositions” (note 8 below); Nelson Goodman, *The Structure of Appearance*, p. 178; Whitehead, *Concept of Nature*, pp. 157-58; J. M. Keynes, *Treatise on Probability*, p. 385; J. S. Mill, *A System of Logic* (Longmans, 1930), p. 67. Mill is quoting Bain.

no more than the spread of a smooth or "homoeomerous" quale such as a color.

Any trope belongs to as many sets or sums of tropes as there are ways of combining it with other tropes in the world. Of special interest however are (1) the set or sum of tropes which have to it the relation of *concurrency* (the limiting value of location), and (2) the set or sum of those which have to it the relation of *precise similarity* (the limiting value of similarity, sometimes mischievously called "identity"). For a given trope, of course, one or both of these sets or sums might contain nothing except the trope itself, but it is hard to imagine a world in which there would not be many tropes that belong to well populated sets or sums of both sorts, and in our world such sets or sums are very conspicuous. Speaking roughly, now, the set or sum of tropes concurrent with a trope, such as our color component Harlac, is the concrete particular or "thing" which it may be said to "characterize," in our example the lollipop Heraplem, or, to simplify the affair, the knob of the lollilop at a moment. Speaking roughly, again, the set or sum of tropes precisely similar to a given trope, say Harlac again, is the abstract universal or "essence" which it may be said to exemplify, in our illustration a definite shade of Redness. (The tropes approximately similar to the given one compose a less definite universal.)

The phrase "set or sum" above is a deliberate hedge. A set is a *class* of which the terms are members; a sum is a whole of which the terms are parts, in the very primitive sense of "part" dealt with by recent calculi of individuals.⁵ In the accompanying figure, for instance, the class of six squares, the class of three rows, and the class of two columns are different from each other and from the one figure; but the sum of squares, the sum of rows, and the sum of columns are identical with one another and with the whole. What a difference of logical "type" amounts to, particularly in the philosophy of tropes, is far from clear, but



⁵ Nelson Goodman and Henry Leonard, "The Calculus of Individuals and Its Uses," *Journal of Symbolic Logic*, V (1940), pp. 45-55; Goodman, *The Structure of Appearance*, pp. 42 ff.; Appendix E, by Alfred Tarski, in J. H. Woodger, *The Axiomatic Method in Biology*, pp. 161-72.

everybody agrees that a sum is of the same type with its terms, as a whole is of the same type with its parts, a man of the same type with his arms and legs. The concept of a class or set, on the other hand, is notably more complex and questionable. A class is surely not, in any clear sense, what it is too often called,⁶ "an abstract entity," but there is some excuse for considering it of a different "type" from its members. Convinced that tropes compose a concretum in a manner logically no different from that in which any other exhaustive batch of parts compose it, we have every incentive to say that the concretum is not the set but the sum of the tropes; and let us so describe it. Whether the counterpart concept of the universal can be defined as the sum of similars—all merely grammatical difficulties aside—is not so clear. There is little doubt that the set or class will do the job. For all the paradoxes which attend the fashionable effort to equate the universal Humanity, for example, with the class of concrete men (including such absurdities as that being a featherless biped is then the same as having a sense of humor) disappear when we equate it rather with our new set, the class of abstract humanities—the class whose members are not Socrates, Napoleon, and so forth, but the human trope in Socrates, the one in Napoleon, and so forth. Still wilder paradoxes resulted from the more radical nominalistic device of substituting the *sum* of concrete men for their class,⁷ and most even of these are obviated by taking our sum of similar tropes instead. I suspect, however, that some remain, and because concurrence and similarity are such symmetrical counterparts, I shall not be surprised if it turns out that while the concurrence complex must be a sum the similarity complex must be a set.

In suggesting how both concrete particulars and abstract universals are composed of tropes, I aver that those two categories do not divide the world between them. It does not consist of concrete particulars in addition to abstract universals, as the old scheme had it, nor need we admit that it must be "constructible" *either* from concrete particulars *or* from abstract universals, as

⁶ Goodman, *op. cit.*, p. 150; W. V. Quine, *Methods of Logic*, p. 204.

⁷ Witness the doughty struggle of Quine and Goodman in "Steps Toward a Constructive Nominalism," *Journal of Symbolic Logic*, XII (1947), pp. 105-22.

recent innovators argue (Carnap and Goodman, respectively, for example). The notions of the abstract and the universal (and hence of the concrete and the particular) are so far independent that their combinations box the logical compass. Socrates is a concrete particular; the component of him which is his wisdom is an abstract particular or "trope"; the total Wisdom of which all such wisdoms are components or members is an abstract universal; and the total Socratesity of which all creatures exactly like him are parts or members is a "concrete universal," not in the idealistic but in a strictly accurate sense. It was because of the unfortunate limitation of ordinary philosophic discourse to the two combinations, concrete particular and abstract universal, that in order to call attention to our tropes we had to divert such phrases as "the humanity of Socrates" or "the redness of the lollipop," which normally would stand for kinds or degrees of humanity and redness, to stand for their particular cases of Humanity and Redness, respectively, and so we have been driven in turn to using the capital letters in "Humanity" and "Redness" to restore the "abstract nouns" to their normal duty of naming the respective universals. A similar explanation, but a longer one, would have to be given of our less definite phrases like "the shape of Boanerp" or "the color of it."

Having thus sorted out the rubrics, we can almost automatically do much to dispel the ancient mystery of predication, so influential in the idea of logical types. The prevalent theory has been that if y can be "predicated" of x , or "inheres in" or "characterizes" x , or if x is an "instance" of y , then x and y must be sundered by a unique logical and ontological abyss. Most of the horror of this, however, which has recently impelled some logicians to graceless verbalistic contortions, is due to taking predication as one indissoluble and inscrutable operation, and vanishes when our principles reveal predication to be composed of two distinct but intelligible phases. "Socrates is wise," or generically " a is φ ," means that the concurrence sum (Socrates) includes a trope which is a member of the similarity set (Wisdom). When we contrast a thing with a property or "characteristic" of it, a "substantive" with an "adjective," we may intend either or both of these connections. The particular wisdom in Socrates is in

one sense a "characteristic," i.e., it is a component, of him—this is the sense in which Stout held, quite properly to my way of thinking, that "characters are abstract particulars which are predicable of concrete particulars." ⁸ The universal Wisdom is in the second sense the "characteristic" of each such wisdom—this is the sense in which Moore could hold plausibly that even an event, such as a sneeze, *has* characteristics and is not one.⁹ In the third or ordinary sense, however, the universal Wisdom "characterizes" the whole Socrates. From this imbroglio emerge at least two senses of "instance," the sense in which Socrates is a (concrete) "instance" of Wisdom and that in which his wisdom component is an (abstract) "instance" of it, and the two notions of class, the ordinary concreta class consisting of Socrates, Plato, and all other whole wise creatures, and the abstracta class of their wisdoms, our similarity set.

Raying out around the problem of predication is many another half magical notion about essence and existence which we now can prosily clarify. Thus Mr. Broad and Mr. Dawes Hicks, while believing in "Abstracta," have described them in the same fantastic terms in which Santayana described his essences, as placeless and timeless, and hence "real but non-existent."¹⁰ This remarkable but not unusual proposition might for a Platonist be grounded in a whole theory of universals *ante rem*, but mostly it results from not distinguishing between its two principal sources: the specious eternity a *universal* has because, as Stout put it, it

⁸ "Are the Characteristics of Particular Things Universal or Particular?" a symposium by G. E. Moore, G. F. Stout, and G. Dawes Hicks, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supplementary Volume III (1923), pp. 95-128 (p. 114). His theory of abstract particulars, here and in "The Nature of Universals and Propositions" (Hertz Lecture, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Vol. X, 1922-23), is almost identical with the one I am defending; if there is a difference it is in his obscure idea of the class as a unique form of unity not reducible to similarity.

⁹ *Loc. cit.*, p. 98. Mr. Moore, I cannot help thinking, already a very uncommonplace minion of the commonplace, almost fiercely resists understanding the Stout theory.

¹⁰ Broad, *Mind and Its Place in Nature*, p. 19; Dawes Hicks, *Critical Realism*, pp.76-78. Broad can justly marvel that we can cognize what is mental or physical only by "cognising objects which are neither" (*op. cit.*, p. 5).

“spreads undivided, operates unspent,”¹¹ which for us is just the fact that similarity is a “saltatory” relation, overleaping spatial and temporal distances undiminished and without cost in stuff or energy; and the specious eternity an *abstractum* has because in attending to it we normally “abstract from” its spatiotemporal location (which nevertheless it has and keeps). As the obscurity of Essence is thus mostly resolved by looking at it stereoscopically, to distinguish the dimensions of the universal and of the abstract, so too that dark mingling of glory and degradation which haunts Existence and the individual is mostly resolved by the ideas of concreteness and particularity. The Individual is hallowed both by the utter self-identity and self-existence of the particular occurrent and by the inexhaustible richness and the inimitability of the concrete. At the same time, however, it is debased by the very same factors. It seems ignobly arbitrary and accidental, *qua* particular, with respect to its mere self in its external relations, because it thus lacks the similarity, classification, and generalization which could interpret it; and it has the confusion and unfathomability of the concrete, wherein every form struggles in a melee of forms so stupendous that the Aristotelians mistook it for formless matter.

A philosophy of tropes calls for completion in a dozen directions at once. Some of these I must ignore for the present because the questions would take us too far, some because I do not know the answers. Of the first sort would be a refinement and completion of our account of substances and of the similarity manifold. Of the second sort would be an assimilation of the very categories of our theory—concurrence, similarity, abstractness, and so forth—to the theory itself, as tropes like the rest, instead of relegating them to the anomalous immunities of “transcendentals” (as the old Scholastics said) and “metalanguage” (as the new scholastics say). What in fact I shall do here is to defend the fundamental notion that there are entities at once abstract, particular, and actual, and this in two ways: the affirmative way of showing how experience and nature evince them over and over,

¹¹ “Are the Characteristics, etc.,” p. 116.

and the negative way of settling accounts with old dialectical objections to them.

I deliberately did not use the word "abstract" to describe our tropes till we had done our best to identify them in other ways, lest the generally derogatory connotation of the word blind us to the reality of objects as plain as the sunlight (for indeed the sunlight is an abstract existent). The many meanings of "abstract" which make it repulsive to the empirical temper of our age suggest that an abstractum is the product of some magical feat of mind, or the denizen of some remote immaterial eternity. Dictionaries, journalists, and philosophical writers are almost equally vague and various about it. Santayana has it that "abstract" means imprecise, but also "verbal, unrealizable, or cognitively secondary."¹² The abstract is equated with the abstruse, the ethereal, the mental, the rational, the incorporeal, the ideally perfect, the non-temporal, the primordial or ultimate, the purely theoretical, the precariously speculative and visionary; or again with the empty, the deficient, the non-actual or merely potential, the downright imaginary, and the unreal. In some quarters "abstract" means symbolical, figurative, or merely representative, in contrast with what is real in its own right. On the same page the word may connote alternately the two extremes of precious precision and the vague, confused, or indefinite. Mathematics or logic is called "abstract" partly because it is about formal structures, partly because it treats them only hypothetically;¹³ but a symbolic calculus is called "abstract" because it isn't about anything. Semanticists and professors of composition shudder away from statements on such "high levels of abstraction" as "Herbivory is conducive to bovine complacency" in contrast with the "concrete" virility of "Cows like grass," though the two sentences describe exactly the same state of affairs. Logical philosophers proclaim their "renunciation of abstract entities" without making clear either what makes an entity "abstract" or how one goes about "renouncing" an entity.

One wonders, in view of this catalog, if there is anything which would not on occasion be called "abstract." Most people

¹² *Realms of Being*, p. 32.

¹³ C. I. Lewis, *Mind and the World-Order*, pp. 242, 249.

would deny that a cat is abstract, but an idealist would say she is. Yet it would be a mistake to infer that "abstract" has been a wholly indiscriminate epithet. All the uses we have observed, and doubtless others, have stemmed from two roots which in turn are related in a very intimate way. They represent what various persons believed, often mistakenly, is implied by those root ideas. One of them is the use of "abstract" to mean *transcending individual existence*, as a universal, essence, or Platonic idea is supposed to transcend it. But even though this use of "abstract" is probably as old as the word itself, I think it was in fact derived, by the natural mistake which we earlier noted, from the other aboriginal use, more literally in accord with the word's Latin construction, which is virtually identical with our own. At its broadest the "true" meaning of "abstract" is *partial, incomplete, or fragmentary*, the trait of what is less than its including whole. Since there must be, for everything but the World All, at least something, and indeed many things, of which it is a proper part, everything but the World All is "abstract" in this broad sense. It is thus that the idealist can denounce the cat as "abstract." The more usual practice of philosophers, however, has been to require for "abstractness" the more special sort of incompleteness which pertains to what we have called the "thin" or "fine" or "diffuse" sort of constituent, like the color or shape of our lollipop, in contrast with the "thick," "gross," or chunky sort of constituent, like the stick in it.¹⁴

If now one looks at things without traditional prepossessions, the existence of abstracta seems as plain as any fact could be. There is something ironically archaic in the piety with which the new nominalists abhor abstract entities in favor of that "common-sense prejudice pedantically expressed,"¹⁵ the dogma of Aristotle that there can be no real beings except "primary substances,"

¹⁴ Although this has been for centuries the root meaning of "abstract," the nearest to a straight-forward statement of it which I have found is by Professor Ledger Wood in the *Runes Dictionary of Philosophy*, 1942, p. 2: "a designation applied to a partial aspect or quality considered in isolation from a total object, which is, in contrast, designated concrete." Even here the word "isolation," as we shall see, is delusive.

¹⁵ Russell. *History of Western Philosophy*, p. 163.

concrete individuals, as absolute and “essential” units, and thus turn their backs on one of the greatest insights of the Renaissance, that the apparent primacy of such chunky middle-sized objects is only a function of our own middle size and practical motivation. The great modern philosophies have rather sought the real in putative “simple natures” at one end of the scale and the one great ocean of action at the other end. I have no doubt that whole things like lollipops, trees, and the moon, do exist in full-blooded concreteness, but it is not they which are “present to the senses,”¹⁶ and it is not awareness of abstracta which is “difficult, . . . not to be attained without pains and study.”¹⁷ To claim primacy for our knowledge of concreta is “mysticism” in the strict sense, that is, a claim to such acquaintance with a plethoric being as no conceivable stroke of psychophysics could account for. What we primarily *see* of the moon, for example, is its shape and color and not at all its whole concrete bulk—generations lived and died without suspecting it had a concrete bulk; and if now we impute to it a solidity and an aridity, we do it item by item quite as we impute wheels to a clock or a stomach to a worm. Evaluation is similarly focussed on abstracta. What most men value the moon for is its brightness; what a child wants of a lollipop is a certain flavor and endurance. He would much rather have these abstracta without the rest of the bulk than the bulk without the qualities. Integral to the debate between the metaphysical champions of the concrete particular and of the abstract universal has been a discussion whether the baby’s first experiences are of whole concrete particulars (his ball, his mother, and so forth) or of abstract universals (Redness, Roundness, and so forth). For what it may be worth, perhaps not much, a little observation of

¹⁶ I have in mind Willard Quine’s epistemological ballad about *Homo javanensis*, whose simple faculties “could only treat of things concrete and present to the senses.” “Identity, Ostension, and Hypothesis,” *Journal of Philosophy*, XLVII (1950), pp. 621-33 (p. 631 n.).

¹⁷ This is Berkeley on abstract ideas, *Principles*, Introd., Sect. 10. It is cited at length by James, *Psychology*, Vol. 1, p. 469, who argues, correctly I think, that what is difficult is not the recognition of abstracta but the recognition that they are abstract, and the conception of the universal, and that these are at worst no more laborious than the counterpart conception of the concretum.

a baby, or of oneself in a babyish mood, will convince the candid and qualified that the object of such absorption is not the abstract universal (the infant does not "fall from the clouds upon the top-most twig of the tree of Porphyry")¹⁸ and certainly not the concrete particular (that "foreign thing and a marvel to the spirit"¹⁹ which a lifetime of observation and twenty centuries of research hardly begin to penetrate), but is in sooth the abstract particular or trope, *this* redness, *this* roundness, and so forth.

Though the uses of the trope to account for substances and universals are of special technical interest, the impact of the idea is perhaps greater in those many regions not so staled and obscured by long wont and old opinion and not so well supplied with alternative devices. While substances and universals can be "constructed" out of tropes, or apostrophized *in toto* for sundry purposes, the trope cannot well be "constructed" out of them and provides the one rubric which is hospitable to a hundred sorts of entity which neither philosophy, science, nor common sense can forego. This is most obvious in any attempt to treat of the mind, just because the mind's forte is the tuning, focussing, or spotlighting which brings abstracta into relief against a void or nondescript background. A pain is a trope *par excellence*, a mysterious bright pain in the night, for example, without conscious context or classification, yet as absolutely and implacably its particular self as the Great Pyramid. But all other distinguishable contents are of essentially the same order: a love, or a sorrow, or "a single individual pleasure."²⁰

The notion, however, gets its best use in the theory of knowledge. The "sensible species" of the Scholastics, the "ideas" of Locke and Berkeley, the ideas and impressions of Hume, the sense data of recent epistemology—once they are understood as tropes, and as neither things nor essences, a hundred riddles about them dissolve, and philistine attacks on theory of knowledge itself lose most of their point. We need not propose that a red sensum, for

¹⁸ Brand Blanshard, *The Nature of Thought*, Vol. I, p. 569.

¹⁹ Santayana, *The Unknowable* (Herbert Spencer Lecture), p. 29.

²⁰ C. S. Peirce, without the notion of trope, denounces this perfectly intelligible phrase as "words without meaning," *Collected Papers*, Vol. I, p. 172.

example, is perfectly abstract (whatever that might be). But even though it have such distinguishable components as a shape and a size as well as a color, and though the color itself involve the "attributes" of hue, brightness, and saturation, still it is abstract in comparison with a whole colored solid. According to reputable psychologists, furthermore, there can be data much more abstract, professed "empiricists" to the contrary notwithstanding: data which have color and no other character, or even hue and no other "attribute." The person who uses the theory of tropes to sharpen his sight of what really is present and what is not may not credit such still more delicate components, attributed to the mind, as the imageless thought of the old German schools, or the non-imaginal ideas of Descartes, or the pure concepts of the Scholastics, or the ethereal Gestalten of more recent German evangelists; but if any of these do exist, they exist as tropes. The same is to be said, I suppose, of the still darker categories of pure mental act, intentionalities, dispositions, and powers. Such actual but relatively complex mental processes as trains of thought, moral decisions, beliefs, and so forth, taken as particular occurrents, whether comparatively brief or lifelong, and not (as nearly all phrases in this department at least equally suggest) as recurrent kinds, are tropes and compounded of tropes—and the kinds too, of course, are compounds of tropes in their own way. A whole soul or mind, if it is not a unique immaterial substance on its own, is a trope.

(To be concluded)

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