

# Armstrongian Particulars with Necessary Properties

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When I was a student at the International Academy of Philosophy in the Principality of Liechtenstein, I was helped to develop a desire to investigate in philosophy not the shadows of things but the 'things in themselves', independent of how we think and speak about them. Barry Smith drew my attention to the works of David Armstrong and of Roman Ingarden and also mentioned a professor in the north of Sweden, in Umeå. This way I came to read Armstrong's books, Ingarden's *Der Streit um die Existenz der Welt* and Ingvar Johansson's *Ontological Investigations*. This strengthened my commitment to study the things in themselves - and made it harder for me to make sense of much of contemporary analytic philosophy. It took me a long time to realise that I had been indulging a very special diet of philosophical literature and that most analytic metaphysics today still uses linguistic methods like the method of ontological commitment and investigates concepts rather than the things and thus, in my view, is looking at shadows only. When Ingvar and I were for a few months working together at IFOMIS in Leipzig, we hardly ever discussed the many political and religious issues about which we probably disagree, but instead were always drawn into ontology and metaphysics, where I find Ingvar's perceptiveness outstanding.

Ingvar, and much later I too, was greatly inspired by David Armstrong, especially by his book *Universals* from 1978. In this contribution I want to raise objections against a new view that Armstrong put forward much later. In his article 'Four Disputes about Properties' (2005), Armstrong has argued that the properties of a thing are parts of that thing and the predication of properties is necessary. In what follows, after a general remark about Armstrong's conception of ontology, I shall raise objections against this view and defend an alternative account of the connection between particulars and their properties, involving a kind of ontological dependence which is different from Armstrong's necessary connection between particulars and their properties.

According to Armstrong's ontology there are particulars and properties. Properties are universals: if  $F$  is a universal and  $a$  and  $b$  are

particulars that are F, then *a*'s F-ness is numerically identical with *b*'s F-ness. When Armstrong says 'There are universals' he does not make a claim about the meanings of predicates, he does not answer a question of semantics. Already in his early work on universals he fought against the mistake of confusing universals with meanings:

I believe that the identification of universals with meanings (connotations, intensions) [...] has been a disaster for the theory of universals. A thoroughgoing separation of the theory of universals from the theory of the semantics of general terms is in fact required. (Armstrong 1978: xiv)

Armstrong's reason for assuming universals is not that predicates cannot be replaced by, or defined in terms of, other types of expressions. It is not that we are 'ontologically committed' to universals. His aim is to describe what there is, and he holds that the resemblance between two things consists in there being a universal that both things instantiate. His aim is not to analyze concepts and statements but to describe the structure of reality independently of how we ordinarily think or speak about it. He wants to name not truth conditions but truthmakers. In contemporary philosophy, Armstrong is the forerunner of metaphysics that is independent of semantics, and not many have followed him. There is a great gulf between Armstrong and Ingvar on the one hand, and on the other hand philosophers who are used to doing metaphysics as a discipline more closely related to semantics. Those from the other side of the gulf are in danger to misunderstand some of Armstrong's claims as claims about statements although Armstrong intends them to be about their truthmakers.

Armstrong rejects bundle theories, according to which things are bundles of properties and hence consist just of properties. He holds that properties are borne by substrata, by property bearers. According to his new view, the link between particular and universal is partial identity. The properties of a thing are *parts* of that thing. He also says that the particular and its universal 'overlap'. This takes Armstrong to the view that predication is necessary. 'Once one has identity, even if only partial identity, there will be found necessity.' If a thing loses one of its properties it thereby ceases to exist, it becomes a different entity. Likewise the universal becomes a different entity. Every thing has all of its properties necessarily.

It is Armstrong's presupposition, I take it, that a thing has its parts necessarily. Given that the properties of a thing are parts of that thing it follows that a thing has all of its properties necessarily, in the sense that if it loses one it ceases to exist and becomes a different thing, and if it had had different properties it would have been a different thing.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, universals are necessarily instantiated as they are. 'Having just the instances it has is essential to the universal being what it is' (Armstrong 2005). I have four objections.

## 1. Overlap

Armstrong says that a particular and its universals 'overlap'. According to Armstrong's conception of universals (at least until his *A World of States of Affairs*), if *a* and *b* are *F*, then *a*'s *F*-ness and *b*'s *F*-ness are numerically identical. But then *F* is a part of *a*, and *F* has no parts that are not part of *a*. The particular and its universal overlap, but they do not properly overlap, they do not overlap in the ordinary sense. This does not affect Armstrong's claim that a thing has its properties necessarily. But why does Armstrong hold that a universal has its instances necessarily? The instances of a universal are not parts of the universal. If *b* ceases to instantiate *F*, then *F* is less often instantiated, but it does not lose a part. There is therefore no reason to assume that *F* ceases to be and becomes a different entity - unless Armstrong now gives up his view that *a*'s *F*-ness and *b*'s *F*-ness are numerically identical.

## 2. Mereological Essentialism

Armstrong assumes that a thing has its parts necessarily, i.e. if a whole loses one of its parts it thereby ceases to exist. This doctrine, sometimes called *mereological essentialism*, has its defenders, but it is neither uncontroversial nor without alternative. Contra mereological essentialism one may hold that some things can survive the loss or replacement of some of their parts. After all, we say that a car can have one its door replaced or I can lose a finger or I (or my body) can get a new kidney without ceasing to exist or becoming a different thing. Things which, contra mereological essentialism, can survive the replacement of parts are sometimes called *entia successiva* (van Inwagen 1991).

Roderick Chisholm (1976: Appendix B and ch. III) proposed an alternative to Armstrong's view that things do not survive the loss of parts. He says of *entia successiva* that they are 'constituted' by entities for which mereological essentialism is true. A tyre of my car was replaced means (roughly): There was one thing, T1, which ceased to exist when the tyre was replaced; there was another thing, T2, containing the parts of T1 except a different tyre. Before the replacement of the tyre my car was constituted by T1, after that by T2. My car survived the replacement of the tyre, but T1 did not. Chisholm thus provides a method to translate sentences apparently about cars that can change parts into sentences about cars that cease to exist when they lose parts. For him there are *entia successiva*, but they can be reduced to more basic entities for which mereological essentialism is true.

Roman Ingarden (1965: §43), on the other hand, argues that individual *things* (substances), for which mereological essentialism is not true, are more basic than *wholes*, for which mereological essentialism is true. A thing, e.g. a table, can also be taken as, or conceptualized, as a whole. The scheme of a whole is then 'thrown over' the thing (Ingarden 1965: 117). The whole ceases to exist if it loses a

part, but a thing can survive the loss of a property or a part (although strictly speaking only wholes but not things have parts).

My own view is that we can form the concepts of part and whole in different ways. We can stipulate that a whole that loses a part thereby ceases to exist. Ordinarily, however, if we ask questions about the diachronic identity of a thing with parts, we do so on the background of a certain sortal concept under which the thing is subsumed. The sortal concept provides the conditions of diachronic identity of the thing. Whether the loss of a certain part means the end of the thing depends on the sortal concept. A violin, for example, does not become a different violin and does not cease to exist if the fingerboard is renewed.

At any rate, if a theory entails that a violin ceases to exist if it loses a part, then that counts strongly against that theory, because that seems just false and there is no discovery that would convince us otherwise. Likewise, if a theory entails, as Armstrong's new view does, that a violin becomes a different violin if it loses a property, then that counts strongly against that theory.

### **3. Essential Properties**

My view that conditions of diachronic identity are provided by sortal concepts leads me to relativism about necessary (or 'essential') properties. Whether the loss of a certain property entails the end of the existence of the thing does not depend on the thing in itself but on the sortal concept under which the thing is subsumed. A traditional substance ontologist (e.g. Roman Ingarden) denies this because he holds that the property bearer of a thing is an exemplification of a kind universal. A thing continues to exist as long as its kinded property bearer continues to exist. What this kind is and on which properties the property bearer is dependent (the 'essential properties') does not depend on the sortal concept; rather, it is something to be discovered about the thing in itself.

It seems to me that Armstrong's ontology leads to relativism about essential properties too. He argues that all monadic universals are properties and that there are no kind universals (which he calls 'substantial universals') irreducible to conjunctions of properties (Armstrong 1978: 61-67). It seems to follow that it is nothing to be discovered about the thing in itself what the kind is which is relevant for the conditions of diachronic identity of the thing; that is, the kind K such that it is true to say that the thing ceased to exist if and only if it is not a K anymore. It seems to me that what the conditions of diachronic identity are then depends on under which sortal concept the thing is subsumed, and there are several sortal concepts under which the thing can be subsumed. The end of the existence of a thing with parts is ontologically just a change in which properties are instantiated where. It differs from other such changes only because through it a certain sortal concept does not apply anymore.

Armstrong, however, is not a relativist about essential properties (as he has confirmed in conversation). He holds that all 'predication of properties is necessary' in the sense that if a particular lacked a property which it actually has, then it would have been a different particular. So my objection here is that Armstrong's ontology leads to relativism about necessary properties and that he therefore should not hold that any, let alone all, predication of properties is necessary. There is no ontological fact of the matter whether the loss of a certain property entails the end of the existence of the thing.

#### **4. Ontological Glue**

Armstrong's main argument against bundle theories is that 'they have great difficulty with the metaphysics of the uniting principle or principles of bundling' (Armstrong 2005). They fail to provide the ontological glue holding the bundle together. Armstrong's alternative is that the link between particular and universal is partial identity. I shall now raise an objection against Armstrong's view and, in the light of this objection, defend a solution of the gluing problem that is also available to the bundle theorist.

Armstrong wants to solve the gluing problem with his new view. The properties of a thing are parts of it, and if it loses a property it thereby ceases to exist. The thing has its properties necessarily. Therefore the thing cannot lose properties and has in this sense unity, the gluing problem is thus solved. The link between particular and universal is partial identity and not a genuine relation of com-  
presence or instantiation, the acceptance of which would lead to a regress.

I have two objections against this solution. First, according to classical extensional mereology, a whole, or mereological sum, continues to exist as long as all its parts continue to exist. Consider a thing which, according to Armstrong's new view, is a whole of which the properties of the thing are parts. According to Armstrong's theory of universals (Armstrong 1978 and 1997), if a thing loses a property the property does not thereby cease to exist (at least as long as it is instantiated by other things). So the whole consisting of the properties of a thing is not destroyed by the thing losing a property. It continues to exist even if the properties that are parts of it are not all instantiated by the thing anymore. According to Armstrong's new view the link between a particular and its universals is the same as, and nothing more than, the link between a whole and its parts. But the link between a particular and one of its universals can be broken up whilst the link between the whole and its parts, one of which is the universal, continues to hold. With tropes the situation would be different, but with universals as parts of things Armstrong's solution does not seem to work.

Of course, intuitively we would say that if a violin is taken apart then the whole ceases to exist, or that if a leg is cut off a table the

table loses a part and the leg is no longer a part of the table. That is so because, against classical extensional mereology, we often mean by a whole something whose parts are somehow connected. We usually use a concept of a whole according to which the whole loses a part if a certain relation between the part and the rest of the whole ceases to hold; e.g. if the part ceases to be physically connected to the rest of the whole, i.e. if it is cut off. But such a concept of a whole would not help Armstrong because it would require an additional relation connecting the parts. Armstrong would have to use a concept of a whole according to which a thing is a whole that has the properties of the thing as parts and that loses a property as part if the thing ceases to instantiate the property. But accepting a relation of instantiation besides the relation of being a part is exactly what Armstrong wants to avoid.

Secondly, I suggest that necessary predication does not glue a universal to a particular in the required way. The trouble is that the dependence relation that Armstrong uses is no glue. Let me explain by sketching Edmund Husserl's and Roman Ingarden's account of the unity of a thing, which I think succeeds where Armstrong's new view does not succeed. Husserl and Ingarden, like Armstrong, using the concept of a part in a wide sense, take the properties of a thing to be parts of the thing. Husserl and Ingarden, however, take properties to be particulars ('Momente'), 'tropes' as they are called today. (They believe that there are universals as well as tropes, tropes being exemplifications of universals.) However, unlike some modern defenders of tropes (e.g. Campbell 1990), they do not take them to be independent entities. They are not little nuggets. Husserl says that the properties of a thing are intimately united, they penetrate each other, such that it is impossible (which for Husserl and Ingarden means synthetically impossible, not analytically or logically impossible) that one exists without being together with other properties in the unity of a thing. Husserl and Ingarden call properties "seinsunselbständig", i.e. self-insufficient entities. Tropes cannot exist on their own. Self-insufficiency is a kind of ontological dependence, which Ingvar develops carefully in chapter 8 of his *Ontological Investigations*. Husserl distinguishes in this sense 'concrete parts' of a thing, which can be chopped off, from 'abstract parts' of a thing, e.g. a thing's properties, which cannot be chopped off. The properties of a thing are mutually dependent on each other so that they cannot be chopped off (although some can be replaced by new properties).

Now this kind of ontological dependence functions as ontological glue because it prevents a thing from falling apart. In Armstrong's new view, however, there is nothing that prevents a thing from falling apart. It says that if a thing falls apart it becomes a different thing, but it leaves open the possibility of the thing falling apart. I therefore

suggest that bundle theories can be defended against Armstrong's criticism that they cannot explain the unity of a thing, and that Armstrong's own explanation of the unity of a thing is objectionable.

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