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—So why bother with the solid staticist word ‘object’? Why not fall back into a world—or vocabulary—of Russellian ‘events’ or Whiteheadian ‘occasions’?

Good question, but there’s no reason why one shouldn’t take the word ‘object’ with one into the processual outlook, realigning it to mean more clearly on its face what it really meant (referentially speaking) all along. I think there are also positive reasons for taking ‘object’ with one, rather than leaving it behind as a specious rallying point for bad intuitions.

It seems to me that these partly a posteriori, partly a priori points about the superficiality of the object/process distinction find a different, irresistible, and wholly a priori expression when we consider the object/property distinction.

### 6.15 Object and property, categorical and dispositional

Objects have properties, we say. There are, indisputably, objects, and, indisputably, they have properties. Our habit of thinking in terms of the object/property distinction is ineluctable. And it’s perfectly correct, in its everyday way. But ordinary language isn’t a good guide to metaphysical truth, and as soon as we repeat the observation portentously in philosophy—OBJECTS HAVE PROPERTIES—we risk error: the error of thinking that there’s a fundamental, categorical, metaphysical distinction between objects and their properties. (We compound the error, I believe, if we think that such a categorical distinction is fundamental to ordinary thought.) If millennia of vehement

philosophical disagreement about the object/property relation testify to anything, they testify to the fact that this is indeed an error. The debate can't stop until the error is recognized.

I think it's possible to express the truth about the object/property relation. The key is not to say too much (my profound ignorance of the traditional debate may give me a head start). In setting out the issue, I'll restrict attention to concrete phenomena, although the idea has general application. So my concern with properties will be only with concretely existing properties, concrete propertiedness, and only with intrinsic, natural, non-conventional properties of objects.<sup>63</sup> I'll use the word 'property' as it's used with no knowledge of philosophy—I offer this as a definition of my use—although I think this crucial use may have become inaccessible to some philosophers. (I could try to convey the point about being concerned only with concretely existing properties or propertiedness by saying that I'll be concerned only with 'property instantiations', but this term is already problematic inasmuch as it implies a contrast with properties considered as universals considered as abstract objects.)

What is at issue, then, is the relation between a particular concrete object and its properties, i.e. its whole actual qualitative being. The proposal is that one has already gone fatally wrong if one thinks that there's any sort of ontologically weighty distinction to be drawn between the object, on the one concrete ontological hand, and the properties of the object, on the other concrete ontological hand; between the existence or being of the object, at any given time, and its (overall) nature, at that time; between the concrete thatness of the object and the concrete whatness or howness of the object, at any given time. One of the principal agents of confusion in this matter is counterfactual thinking, which I'll consider in due course.

Plainly, objects without properties are impossible. There can no more be objects without properties than there can be closed plane rectilinear figures that have three angles without having three sides. 'Bare particulars'—objects thought of as concretely existing things that do of course *have* properties but are *in themselves* entirely independent of properties—are incoherent. To be, to be at all, is necessarily to be somehow or other, i.e. to be some way or other, to have some nature or other, i.e. to have (actual, concrete) properties.

Rebounding from the obvious incoherence of bare particulars, it may seem that the only other option is to conceive of objects as nothing but collections or 'bundles' of (concretely existing) properties. But this option seems no better. Mere bundles of properties seem as bad as bare particulars. Why accept properties without objects after having rejected objects without properties?

But this is not what we're asked to do, in the second case. The claim isn't that there can be concretely existing properties without objects. It is, rather, and to repeat, that objects are nothing over and above concretely existing properties. However strange this

<sup>63</sup> I'm taking the general propriety of such notions for granted. For some helpful discussion, see Lewis and Langton 1998 and the ensuing debate in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 63 (2001). Conventional properties include such properties as the property of meaning *dog*, or the property of being illegal.

claim sounds, it isn't the claim that there can be concretely existing properties without objects. That's no more true than it's true that there can be objects without concretely existing properties.

It still sounds intolerably peculiar, though, to say that objects are nothing but concretely existing properties. Peculiarity of expression can be a vehicle of insight, but it doesn't seem to help much here. What may be helpful (given, as always, the assumption that reference to objects has a place in metaphysics) is to take a longer route. First, compare the point (a) that there can no more be concretely existing properties without objects than there can be objects without concretely existing properties, with the point (b) that there can no more be dispositional (or power) properties without categorical properties than there can be categorical properties without dispositional (or power) properties (the two points are at bottom deeply related). Secondly, go on to consider the case for saying that (a) and (b) can be superseded by vastly stronger identity claims, viz.

[1] that an object is identical with its propertiedness

and

[2] that an object's dispositional propertiedness is identical with its categorical propertiedness.

I think that [1] and [2] are certainly true, properly understood, and that grasping the sense in which they're true sets one well on the way to a plausible metaphysics.

Consider triangularity and trilaterality in a closed plane rectilinear figure. There's obviously a *conceptual* distinction between them. Trilaterality isn't the same thing as triangularity. It's a matter of sides, not angles. But there is, to adapt and extend Descartes's terms, no *real* distinction between them (1644: 1.213–15). Neither, that is, can exist without the other also existing. They can't possibly exist apart. They can't exist apart 'outside our thought', as opposed to merely 'in our thought' (1645/6: 3.280–1). They can be genuinely distinguished or held apart in thought; they can't exist apart in concrete reality. A real distinction isn't a matter of what things actually do exist separately, in reality, at any given time. It's a matter of what things can exist separately, a matter of what is possible as a matter of objective fact. If there's no real distinction between A and B, not even an omnipotent being can get them apart. That's how it is for triangularity and trilaterality in a closed plane rectilinear figure.<sup>64</sup>

What's the ground of this impossibility, this inseparability in reality? I think the answer is simple: identity, identity in the concrete (there can be no better ground). Any actually existing case of triangularity is, I propose, literally identical to the case of trilaterality that it can't exist without; for that in which the real existence of the one wholly consists is the very same thing as that in which the real existence of the other wholly consists. Neither real existence exceeds the other in any way. The (concrete) being of the one is—identical to—the (concrete) being of the other. (Don't object that the sides could be thicker or thinner.)

<sup>64</sup> The restriction to rectilinear figures is not necessary if only angles generate sides—so that a closed 'U', for example, has two sides.

Some may think that the ground of the impossibility could be something other than identity. But what else could it be? The burden of argument lies heavily on those who wish to claim that something other than identity can make it absolutely impossible for two things to come apart. Identity does the trick, because the two things are only one thing, and a thing can't come apart from itself.

Inference to the best explanation looks smilingly upon this view, and I'm not going to argue for it now, although I can imagine objections. 'Look, there can be a one-way necessary metaphysical connection between two properties  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  that doesn't involve identity (if a brain state of type  $F$  exists, it may be metaphysically necessary that an experiential state of type  $G$  exists, etc.). Why couldn't there be a two-way, no-real-distinction necessary connection between two properties  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  that was the sum of two such one-way connections without involving their identity in the concrete?'<sup>65</sup>

The best reply to this is to ask for an explanation, in a particular case, of how this is possible without identity—an explanation that is furthermore better than the explanation provided by identity. The explanation provided by identity is distinguished by the fact that it leaves nothing 'brute' or unexplained.

I propose, then, and quite generally, that there's no difference 'outside our thought' (no real distinction) between the no-real-distinction inseparability of two things  $A$  and  $B$  and the identity of  $A$  and  $B$  (which are then not really two things at all). Plainly

(i)  $A = B$

entails

(ii) there is no real distinction between  $A$  and  $B$ .

I'm claiming that the converse is also true, that (ii) entails (i), and indeed that

(iii) there is no real distinction between the fact or state of affairs that  $A = B$  and the fact or state of affairs that there is no real distinction between  $A$  and  $B$ ,

and indeed that

(iv) the fact or state of affairs that  $A = B$  is *identical* to the fact or state of affairs that there is no real distinction between  $A$  and  $B$ .

I register this claim about the identity of identity and no-real-distinctionhood as an assumption (physics may be thought to provide counterexamples). There is, to be sure, a conceptual distinction between identity and no-real-distinctionhood, and metaphysicians can produce conceptual distinctions without end; but there is, I propose, no real distinction between them.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Thanks to Philip Goff.

<sup>66</sup> I'm concerned with concrete particulars: supposed counterexamples that cite abstract objects (e.g. the case of David Lewis and the singleton set—considered as an abstract object—whose only member is David Lewis) are not to the point. So too I'm concerned with concrete particulars considered independently of human intentions and conventions (this is designed to deflect cases of the kind found in Johnston 2003). 'What about a ball and its surface?' Well, either its surface isn't a concrete object and is irrelevant, or it is a concrete object, a collection of ultimate physical constituents that can possibly exist independently of the ball. And so on.

There is perhaps no more valuable tool in metaphysics than the distinction between a real and a conceptual distinction, although it's valuable (needed) only given the weakness—which is perhaps the necessary structure—of our thought.<sup>67</sup> Two important (if ultimately trivial) theses can be formulated in its terms, both of which make use of the term 'property', at least in their initial versions. In formulating them I'll make use of the proposed equivalence of (i) and (ii), and I'll restrict my attention as before to intrinsic, natural, non-conventional properties, although this isn't strictly necessary.

The word 'property', used as a count noun, is harmless enough in some areas of philosophy, but extraordinarily dangerous in others, where it harbours almost irresistible incentives to metaphysical misunderstanding and is to be avoided as far as possible. Whitehead may exaggerate when he says that 'all modern philosophy hinges round the difficulty of describing the world in terms of subject and predicate, substance and quality, particular and universal' (1927–8: 49), or indeed object and property, but I don't think he's far wrong. I think one can avert some of the problems by using the term 'propertiedness', and others by using a categorially neutral term like 'being', in ways I'll illustrate.

With this caveat, the first thesis is that

[1] there is no real distinction between an object considered at any given particular time  $t$  and its propertiedness at  $t$ .

The (concrete) being of an object at any given time is the (concrete) being of its properties or propertiedness at that time. Neither exceeds the other in any way.

The second thesis is that

[2] there is no real distinction between an object's categorial properties and its dispositional properties or power properties.

There's a perfectly respectable conceptual distinction (it's respectable even if ultimately metaphysically superficial) between an actually existing object  $O$  at a time and its propertiedness; using ' $C$ ' for 'conceptually', and ' $P_O$ ' for ' $O$ 's propertiedness', one may symbolize this as

[3]  $C[O \neq P_O]$ .

There's also a seemingly respectable conceptual (if ultimately metaphysically superficial) distinction between an object's categorial and dispositional properties; using ' $C$ ' for 'categorial', ' $D$ ' for 'dispositional', one may symbolize this as

[4]  $C[C_O \neq D_O]$ .

There is for all that no real distinction between  $O$  and  $P_O$ : using ' $R$ ' for 'in reality' or 'outside our thought', and invoking the assumed equivalence of (i) and (ii), one may symbolize [1] as

[1]  $R[O \text{ at } t = P_O \text{ at } t]$ ,

<sup>67</sup> I don't think the weakness is wholly inevitable.

or, taking the time index as read (or inessential), simply as

[1]  $R[O = P_O]$ .

The whole being of the one,  $O$ , is the whole being of the other,  $P_O$ . The whole being of  $O$ , whatever it actually is, cannot possibly exist apart from (is) the whole being of  $P_O$ , whatever it actually is. There's no residue on either side. What—what exactly—is the referent of ' $P_O$ '? It's everything in which the existence of  $O$ 's being propertyed as it is consists.

Nor is there any real distinction between  $O$ 's categorical and dispositional properties, on the present view, and [2] can be represented as

[2]  $R[C_O = D_O]$ .

Again, the being of the one is the being of the other. Suppose I want you to be here. All I have to do is to make it the case that you turn up with all your categorical properties. I don't have to do something else—something ontologically extra—to ensure that your dispositional properties are also in place, because that in which the existence of your dispositional properties consists is nothing other than that in which the existence of your categorical properties consists. One can give the fundamental metaphysical point full weight without disturbing the fact that there is a (natural, human) conceptual distinction between the categorical and the dispositional.

I think the truth of [1] and [2] becomes obvious after reflection, although grasping [1] disrupts the standard philosophical understanding of what a property is (the Whitehead point). At bottom they're trivial—and deeply related. [1] is endorsed outright by philosophers like Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Kant, and Nietzsche, and is certainly not undermined by the way in which we speculate counterfactually about objects. Locke, I take it, is, all things considered, a clear and well-known proponent of [2].<sup>68</sup>

I'll take [2] first—the claim that there is no real distinction between an object's categorical properties and its dispositional properties. I'll continue to speak in the traditional way of dispositional properties, rather than of power properties, although I think the second term is better. Actually, 'potential' is the best term, in its old meaning—'potent', 'possessing potency or power'—but this, the first *OED* meaning, has been drowned out by the second meaning, 'possible as opposed to actual', and this is unhelpful, because potential properties in the first meaning are of course actual properties.

Most philosophers agree that

[5] there can no more be dispositional properties without categorical properties than there can be categorical properties without dispositional properties

or, in my preferred terms, that

[5] there can no more be dispositional being without categorical being than there can be categorical being without dispositional being.

<sup>68</sup> Other recent defenders of (2) or similar views include C. B. Martin (1997), Mumford (1998), and Heil (2005).

Some reject the first half of [5], claiming that

[6] there are no categorical properties (there is no categorical being), only dispositional properties (dispositional being),

or, more simply, that

[6] all being is dispositional being,

and I'll consider this strange claim later. First, though, consider the addition to [5] of

[7] nothing can possibly have the (total) categorical being that it has and not have the (total) dispositional being that it has, and nothing can possibly have the (total) dispositional being that it has and not have the (total) categorical being that it has.

I think, as remarked, that this is obvious on reflection, even if it needs argument in the current climate of philosophical discussion.

Before I give an argument, note that it's a very short step, if it's a step at all, from [7] to the seemingly stronger claim that

[8] there is no real distinction between an object's categorical being (properties) and its dispositional being (properties),

and from there to the seemingly stronger claim that

[9] an object's categorical being (properties) and its dispositional being (properties) are really (in the Cartesian sense of 'real') identical.

I say 'seemingly stronger' because I don't think [9] is really stronger than [8], any more than [8] is really stronger than [7], for reasons already given. I've already identified [8] and [9], in fact, in ruling that [8] can be written as

[2]  $R[C_O = D_O]$ ,

for [2] is just a different representation of [9].

Routine thoughts about the 'multiple realizability' of certain functional properties may prompt the idea that

[10] two things can be dispositionally identical without being categorically identical, contrary to the second half of [7]; and this may lead to the idea that

[11] a thing could be changed in respect of its categorical properties without being changed in respect of its dispositional properties.

So too, thoughts about 'possible worlds' (say) may prompt the idea that

[12] a thing could be changed in respect of its dispositional properties without being changed in respect of its categorical properties,

contrary to the first half of [7], and so also that

[13] two things can be categorically identical without being dispositionally identical.

In fact, though, none of these things can be so. As regards [12], many recent philosophical thought-experiments are premised on the assumption that a material thing, say O, can be thought to retain its intrinsic nature or basic categorical being unchanged across different nomic environments while changing its dispositional being on account of

its different nomic environment. I doubt that the idea that O can retain its intrinsic nature or basic categorical being unchanged across different nomic environments is even coherent, if laws are understood not as human linguistic or conceptual creations, but as non-linguistic objective principles of working. For I doubt that laws so understood can be properly thought to be in any way independent of, rather than essentially constitutive of, or part of, the (categorical, intrinsic) nature of matter—leptons, quarks, chairs, whatever. Only a bad ‘separatist’ habit of thought can make this seem initially plausible, and so make it seem that O can retain its nature unchanged across different nomic environments.<sup>69</sup> We can put this point aside, though, and allow for purposes of argument that the assumption is coherent. For even if it is coherent, it doesn’t give us any reason (rather the contrary) to think that O’s fundamental dispositions will change on change of nomic environment. For these fundamental dispositions include the disposition to behave in way F in nomic environment 1, the disposition to behave in way G in nomic environment 2, and so on. Some students of dispositions will say that this isn’t what they have in mind, but the point about fundamental dispositions stands as it is. The same points apply *mutatis mutandis* to [13], where we’d be considering two qualitatively (categorically) identical things X and Y in different environments.

Turning to [10] and [11]: the objection to [7] based on the fact that certain properties may be said to be ‘multiply realizable’ doesn’t deserve serious consideration. Obviously two differently constructed pocket calculators can be functionally identical (mathematically speaking). Equally obviously, their total dispositional being will be different if they’re differently constructed (they melt differently, float differently, smell different, etc.). It is in the end a trivial point that if they’re in any way categorically different, they’ll necessarily be dispositionally different: one atom’s difference between them makes a difference between their total dispositions. So too, no less trivially, if you change the categorical being of one of them in any way, you *eo ipso* change its total dispositional being in so doing.<sup>70</sup>

To say more is almost certainly a mistake, but I undertook to consider those who reject the second half of [7] for a different reason, claiming that there are only dispositional properties, or in other words that

[6] all being is dispositional being.

[6] is refreshingly incoherent on my terms, if ‘dispositional’ is supposed to exclude ‘categorical’, for all actual concretely existing being is *ipso facto* categorical being—

[14] all being is categorical being

—whatever else it is or isn’t; even if (for example) it’s correctly said to be nothing but energy in various forms, energy whose nature can be positively characterized by us only in terms of what effects it has. All being is categorical being because that’s what it is to be! That’s what being is!

<sup>69</sup> I criticize separatism in G. Strawson 1987: 393–5.

<sup>70</sup> Many standard moves can be made in protest. Heil (2005: chs. 8–11) deals with them in a tolerant manner.

—This begs the question against [6]—with numbing grossness!

True, but I'm afraid that that's [6]'s own fault. Perhaps we can achieve some reconciliation, though, moving in a very small space, through the cluster [7]/[8]/[9].

[6] raises the question 'What does the real concrete existence—call it "E"—of this dispositional being consist in, metaphysically speaking?' A serious answer to this question exhibits Russell's 'robust sense of reality' (1919: 325). It doesn't for a moment confuse metaphysics with epistemology, and the very least that it can be is 'E can't be nothing (for we are robust)'. But then whatever this non-nothing (something) E is said to be, it is already categorical being—even if it's been somehow forcefully theorized as ('merely') dispositional (or power) being—simply because it's real being: *being!*

—Mere repetition, the same begging of the same question.

The small, supposedly reconciling thought is that when the distinction between categorical and dispositional disappears as a real distinction, as it does if the cluster [7]/[8]/[9] (= [2]) is true, there's no bar to saying [6] that all being is dispositional being, although one is highly likely to be misunderstood, because to say this isn't at all to deny that there's categorical being (identity is a very egalitarian relation) or indeed [14] that all actual being is categorical being. The word 'dispositional' resists the point, and perhaps the best way to weaken its confusing associations is to rephrase [6] as the claim that all being is 'potential' being in the original sense: potent being, power-involving being. Power being is categorical being, like all being. Potency entails actuality, reality. And conversely—for it's not possible to exist without making a difference to reality. It's important to see how undramatic (how boring, as it were) the point is.

So much for

[2]  $R[C_O = D_O]$ .

Now for

[1]  $R[O = P_O]$

—or, in its outwardly milder form, the claim that

[1] there is no real distinction between an object and its properties or propertiedness, although there is no doubt a useful and workable conceptual distinction between them.

—I accept [2], the thesis of the identity of the categorical and the dispositional, but [1] is off the map. Start from the simple fact that we find it extremely natural to engage in counterfactual thought. We're constantly thinking or hoping or fearing that actual objects may be or could be other than they are, or that they might or could have been other than they were. This way of thinking is clearly legitimate—it's essential to life—and it's equally clear that it depends essentially on the idea that there is after all a real distinction between an object and its properties. Ordinary thought certainly does incorporate this idea, and—equally certainly—it isn't wrong in doing so.

I agree with the first of your claims, but not the second or third. I agree about the legitimacy of counterfactual speculation, but its legitimacy doesn't depend on there

being a real distinction between an object and its propertiedness, and ordinary thought isn't in its counterfactual thinking committed to belief in any such thing.

I'll argue for this shortly. First, what's the best way to express the object/property relation? When Kant says that 'in their relation to substance, accidents [or properties] are not really subordinated to it, but are the mode of existing of the substance itself', I think he gets the matter exactly right.<sup>71</sup> Nothing more needs to be said. Put aside philosophy (including Kant's metaphysical framework) and consider an object in front of you in the fullness of its reality. There's no ontological subordination of the object's properties to the object itself. There's no existential inequality or priority of any sort, no ontological dependence of either on the other, no independence of either from the other. (The counterfactuals are coming.) There is, in other terms, no ontological subordination of the total *qualitative* being of the object to the object *an sich*, 'in itself', no ontological subordination of its nature to its existence. It seems just right to put the point by saying again that the distinction between the actual being of a thing or object or particular, considered at any given time, and its overall propertiedness, at that time, is a merely conceptual distinction (like the distinction between triangularity and trilaterality) rather than a real (ontological) distinction. We can, as Armstrong says, 'distinguish the particularity of a particular from its properties', but 'the two "factors" are too intimately together to speak of a *relation* between them. The thisness and the nature are incapable of existing apart from each other. Bare particulars are vicious abstractions ... from what may be called states of affairs: this-of-a-certain-nature.'<sup>72</sup> This seems to me entirely Cartesian (a term of high commendation). We can 'distinguish the particularity of a particular from its properties', we can make this *conceptual* distinction, but we can't really 'speak of a relation', a *real* distinction, 'between them'. Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Kant agree, and doubtless many others. Nāgārjuna talks in the same vein of the complete codependence of things and their attributes;<sup>73</sup> Nietzsche is admirably brief—'a thing = its qualities' (1885–8: 73); and P. F. Strawson's use of the suggestive phrase 'non-relational tie' can profitably be extended from a logico-linguistic application (to grammatical subject terms and predicate terms) to a straightforwardly metaphysical application (to objects and their properties).<sup>74</sup>

I believe it should be. One should—must—accept the 'non-relational' conception of the relation (!) between an object and its intrinsic properties, if one is going to retain words like 'object' and 'property' in one's metaphysics at all. This is entirely compatible with claiming that an object's properties—including its intrinsic or non-relational properties—may and do change through time, while it remains the same object.

<sup>71</sup> A414/B441. Note that 'mode of existing' can't just mean 'the particular way a substance is', where the substance is thought to be somehow independently existent relative to its mode of existing; for that would be to take accidents or properties to be somehow 'subordinate' after all. (I'm assuming that here 'accident' means effectively the same as 'property-instance'.)

<sup>72</sup> 1980: 109–10. Armstrong puts things this way for well-known dialectical reasons to do with stopping 'Bradley's regress', but I take it that there are completely independent metaphysical reasons for saying it.

<sup>73</sup> c.150 CE: ch. V, 1995: 14–15 (see commentary on pp. 149–52).

<sup>74</sup> 1959: 167–78. 'Tie', though, is not the best word for this non-relational mutual metaphysical involvement.

—You haven't answered the counterfactual objection. To hold that objects are identical with their properties is to hold that

[15] objects necessarily have all the properties they have

but we naturally say that O, for example, would still have been the object it is, at time *t*, even if its properties had been different, at *t*. We naturally say it would still be the object it is even if (some at least of) its properties were other than they are in fact.

True, but nothing here forbids this way of talking about the non-actual. [1], in particular, allows it. The fact that there are contexts in which we find it natural to say that

[16] O's properties might have been different from what they are while it remained the same object

doesn't provide any support for the mistaken idea that

[17] an object has—must have—some form or mode of being independently of its having the properties it does have.

To think that it does is to build a whole metaphysics of object and property into counterfactual thought, a metaphysics that it doesn't contain or license as it stands, and that is simply incorrect, on the present view.

Putting this aside, one might say that the word 'necessarily' makes [15] ambiguous. In one sense [15] follows directly from [1], because [1] states that an object is identical with its propertiedness, and everything is necessarily identical with itself. But [1] is also compatible with a sense in which [15] is false. We can perfectly well say that

[18] O might not have had the properties it does now have

when supposing that determinism is false, say, for this doesn't put [1] in question. It doesn't challenge the view that whatever happens, everything in which the being of O consists at any time is identical to everything in which the being of O's propertiedness consists at that time. It's possible to read [1] in such a way that it's challenged by [18]; but if one does, one simply misses—chooses to ignore—the fundamental metaphysical truth expressed by [1]. Some philosophers like to distinguish 'compositional' or 'constitutive' identity, on the one hand, from plain identity on the other. This is a well-equipped philosophical playground. But the truth and problem-dissolving power of [1] remain untouched. How can a trivial truth have problem-dissolving power? It can't solve any 'objective' problem, so to speak, but it can solve problems that philosophers make for themselves.

—Look, I'm bald, but my propertiedness is not bald, so I'm not identical to my propertiedness.

Language, not metaphysics (those who wish to invoke 'Leibniz's Law' in this way will have to square it with Whitehead above and Nietzsche and Ramsey below). To understand the present claim, to accept the sense in which it's true that the being of O is identical with the being of the propertiedness of O (that there is such a sense is not in question), is to see that this style of objection has no force. It simply bounces off [1]. It depends on what has been discarded—the standard, language-enshrined

object/property distinction that drives the interminable debate. (Discarded, not refuted: it can't be refuted on its own ground, and if it's taken off its own ground, it can protest that the question has been begged.)

—On your view  $O = P_{O1}$  at time  $t_1$  and  $O = P_{O2}$  at a later time  $t_2$ , so  $P_{O1} = P_{O2}$  by the transitivity of identity; but  $O$  changes from  $t_1$  to  $t_2$ , so  $P_{O1} \neq P_{O2}$ . ...

This is really more of the same. One response invokes the four-dimensionalist 'block universe' account of reality and finds a single object and a single propertiedness (no need to speak about 'temporal parts'). A second brackets the block universe and invokes the ancient idea that *strict* identity through time rules out any change at all (or at least any change of parts), so that  $O$  at  $t_1$  is not *strictly* identical to  $O$  at  $t_2$ . On this view, the assumption of the continuing identity of objects under change is a human convenience.

There are contexts in which this last idea is important, but I prefer a third response: to grow familiar with the idea behind [1] is to see that one can retain the ordinary, change-permitting conception of diachronic identity without wavering in one's view that the being of an object is literally identical with the being of its propertiedness, at any given time, and so always. (The two things change together, for they're one thing!) The objection depends on the discarded framework—on linguistic habits and games of discursive thought that can be put aside in order to register the truth in question.

It can take time to acclimatize. There are philosophically habitual ways of understanding the terms 'object' and 'property' that can't survive a proper appreciation of [1]. To object that [1] is just the old 'bundle theory', and has the well-known defects of that theory, is to show that one hasn't understood the point, or (equivalently) is still stuck in an inadequate understanding of 'object' and 'property'. When one sees the sense in which [1] is plainly true, vast regions of the ancient debate about particulars and universals crumble away.

—Whatever the metaphysical facts, it's clear that ordinary thought does incorporate a commitment to [17], i.e. to the negation of [1], in accepting [16] or [18].

If so, so be it. I disagree, but ordinary thought's claim to represent reality correctly is already in the dock in many philosophical courts and already stands condemned on many counts. Some think that conflict with ordinary ways of thinking is always an objection to a philosophical theory, but this is certainly untrue if it's anything more than a recommendation to keep in touch with common-sense conceptions. Philosophy, like science, aims to say how things are in reality, and conflict with ordinary thought and language is no more an objection to a philosophical theory than a scientific one. There are many areas in which we can see clearly that our ordinary concepts and ways of thinking can't be fully adequate to the reality they purport to represent (our ordinary concepts of space, time, and matter). When it comes to [17] in particular, I don't think that ordinary thought makes any error, but ordinary thought's commitment to the general object/process/property/state/event

cluster of distinctions may indeed incorporate assumptions about the existence in reality of certain fundamental categorial differences that scientifically informed metaphysics can't underwrite. The object/process/property/state/event cluster, unexceptionable in everyday life, is utterly superficial from the point of view of science and metaphysics.

One of the problems we face is that assumptions of this kind can be active and indeed useful in many parts of philosophy without causing any particular problems (the same is true of the use of Newtonian mechanics in physics). There are, however, areas in metaphysics where their inadequacy to reality is part of the problem at issue, explicitly or not, and then reliance on them in any robust form wreaks havoc, havoc greatly aggravated by their usefulness and unproblematic nature in other areas, which understandably misleads us into thinking that they must be generally viable. I don't think that our ordinary understanding of counterfactuals incorporates the metaphysical error in [17], but there's a related claim that does seem to be true: that when human beings *philosophize* about the object/property relation, certain features of language naturally lead them to think that [17] is true.<sup>75</sup> I don't think Ramsey exaggerates when he says that 'the whole theory of universals is due to mistaking ... a characteristic of language ... for a fundamental characteristic of reality' (1925: 60), agreeing in this with Nietzsche, who writes that

language is built in terms of the most naïve prejudices ... we read disharmonies and problems into things because we *think only* in the form of language—thus believing in the 'eternal truth' of 'reason' (e.g. subject, predicate, etc.)

That we have a right to *distinguish* between subject and predicate—... that is our strongest belief; in fact, at bottom, even the belief in cause and effect itself, in *conditio* and *conditionatum*, is merely an individual case of the first and general belief, our primeval belief in subject and predicate. ... Might not this belief in the concept of subject and predicate be a great stupidity?

The separation of 'doing' from the 'doer', of what happens from a something that makes it happen, of process from something that is not process but is enduring, substance, thing, body, soul, etc.—the attempt to grasp what happens as a kind of displacement and repositioning of what 'is', of what persists: that ancient mythology set down the belief in 'cause and effect' once this belief had found a fixed form in the grammatical functions of language.<sup>76</sup>

These are powerful and dramatic ways to put the point, but perhaps the best thing to do is simply to keep in mind Kant's point that 'in their relation to the object, the properties are not in fact subordinated to it, but are the mode of existing of the object

<sup>75</sup> Whether or not they're also led to its converse, the idea that properties have—must have—some form or mode of being independent of the being of the objects that have them.

<sup>76</sup> 1885–8: 110, 104–5, 88. Given that Nietzsche's stress is on causation, it's worth noting that he firmly believes in causation in the sense of natural necessity; what he's objecting to in the last two quotations is the substantialist separatism of talk of individual causes and effects: 'The unalterable sequence of certain phenomena does not prove a "law" but a power relation between two or several forces. To say: "But precisely this relation remains the same!" means nothing more than: "One and the same force cannot be a different force as well"' (1885–8: 88). Is Nietzsche claiming that metaphysical error is indeed endemic in ordinary thought? It's at least equally plausible that he's simply pointing to the innocent grounds in ordinary thought of the distinctively philosophical error.

itself' (A414/B441, substituting 'object' and 'property' for 'substance' and 'accident'). This is another of those points at which philosophy requires a form of contemplation, something more than theoretical assent, cultivation of a shift in intuitions, acquisition of the ability to sustain a different *continuo* in place in the background of thought at least for a time.

There is in any case no real problem of universals and particulars, as traditionally understood, although there are a number of philosophically habitual ways of understanding the terms 'object' and 'property' that can't survive a proper appreciation of the point. The realization that this is so can be uncomfortable if one has been exposed to the philosophical debate, but it settles out and matures powerfully in time. One looks at any ordinary object, and it is deeply mysterious how there can be thought to be a problem. Its *Sosein* (its being the way it is) is identical to its *Sein* (its being).

