

PHIL 4603: Metaphysics

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Lewis, "New Work for a Theory of Universals"

* Lewis is considering whether he should add universals to his ontology. His ontology already includes *possibilia* and classes of *possibilia*. Though not won over to universals, Lewis will discuss the many theoretical benefits that he attributes to them.

Universals and Properties

* Lewis stipulates some terminology. *Universal* is understood, in Aristotle and Armstrong's sense, to refer to something that can be wholly present in multiple locations. His definition of *property* is a bit nonstandard, though.

"And let me reserve the word 'property' for classes – any classes, but I have foremost in mind classes of things. To have a property is to be a member of the class."

Such properties are not wholly present wherever they are instantiated. Also, many properties are collections of non-resembling things, though universals must pick out an objective resemblance. These classes include merely possible, as well as actual, things. Properties are *abundant*, universals (on Armstrong's account, at least) are *sparse*.

* We can use universals to account for naturalness. The *perfectly natural properties* are those properties that uniquely correspond to universals. Alternatively, it could be a primitive fact that some properties are natural and others are not. And some Nominalists go this route.

* Properties are needed to serve as meanings and the content of our intentional attitudes. (And Armstrong stresses that there is not a universal for every predicate.)

One Over Many

* Armstrong's main reason for Realism about universals is the One Over Many argument. But universals are not the only answer to the One over Many problem. One could also take resemblance as primitive, and this is what Nominalists do. Lewis notes that Armstrong himself leaves the concept of instantiation unexplained. (Also note Lewis' comparison of the Nominalist, Platonist, and Armstrong on the issue of primitives.)

Duplication, Supervenience, and Divergent Worlds

* Lewis next considers the applications of a theory of universals, or a theory of perfectly natural properties.

Intrinsic properties: "Property *P* is intrinsic iff, for any two duplicate things, not necessarily from the same world, either both have *P* or neither does." All other properties are extrinsic.

Lewis' hypothesis: "Two things are qualitative duplicates if they have exactly the same perfectly natural properties." (The believer in universals could substitute them in for perfectly natural properties.)

The concept of duplication is then applied to 2 metaphysical topics: supervenience and divergent worlds.

* Supervenience claims have the following form: Worlds that are duplicates in one regard are also duplicates in another regard. E.g., worlds that are physical duplicates are also mental duplicates. So, we see the role duplication plays in supervenience claims.

"Suppose that two possible worlds are perfect qualitative duplicates – must they then also have exactly the same distributions of objective probability, the same laws of nature, the same counterfactuals and causal relations? Must their inhabitants have the same *de re* modal properties? If so, it makes sense to pursue such projects as a frequency analysis of laws of nature, or a comparative similarity analysis of causal counterfactuals and *de re* modality. If not, such projects are doomed from the start, and we needn't look at the details of the attempts. But we cannot even raise these questions of supervenience unless we can speak of duplicate worlds. And to do that, I have suggested, we need natural properties."

* Divergent worlds are to be understood as worlds that are duplicates over some earlier temporal span, but are not duplicates over some later span. This concept can then be used to characterize determinism.

Minimal Materialism

* We might formulate Materialism in terms of supervenience and duplication. Proposal: If Materialism holds in our world, then any world that is a duplicate of our world as far as physics is concerned is a duplicate of our world *simpliciter*. But, there are worries about additional things – e.g., spirits – being added to a world that is a physical duplicate of our world.

Laws and Causation

* Laws of nature should be formulated in terms that refer to natural properties or universals. Lewis favors a best system, regularity theory of laws.

"If we adopt the remedy proposed, it will have the consequence that laws will tend to be regularities involving natural properties. Fundamental laws, those that the ideal system takes as axiomatic, must concern perfectly natural properties. Derived laws that follow fairly straightforwardly also will tend to concern fairly natural properties."

* There are various reasons why an account of causation needs to make recourse to natural properties or universals. Among other things, the analysis of a causal relation will need to make recourse to laws of nature.

The Content of Language and Thought

* Natural properties also help to constrain and determine the reference of our terms.

“Reference consists in part of what we do in language or thought when we refer, but in part it consists in eligibility of the referent. And this eligibility to be referred to is a matter of natural properties.”

The idea is that the reference of our terms is often underdetermined by our usage. But, if one of the candidate referents is much more natural than the other candidates, then it is the referent of the term.

* This same point arises when specifying the propositional content of thought.

“It is here that we need natural properties. The principles of charity will impute a bias toward believing that things are green rather than grue, toward having a basic desire for long life rather than for long-life-unless-one-was-born-on-Monday-and-in-that-case-life-for-an-even-number-of-weeks. In short, they will impute eligible content, where ineligibility consists in severe unnaturalness of the properties the subject supposedly believes or desires or intends himself to have.”