

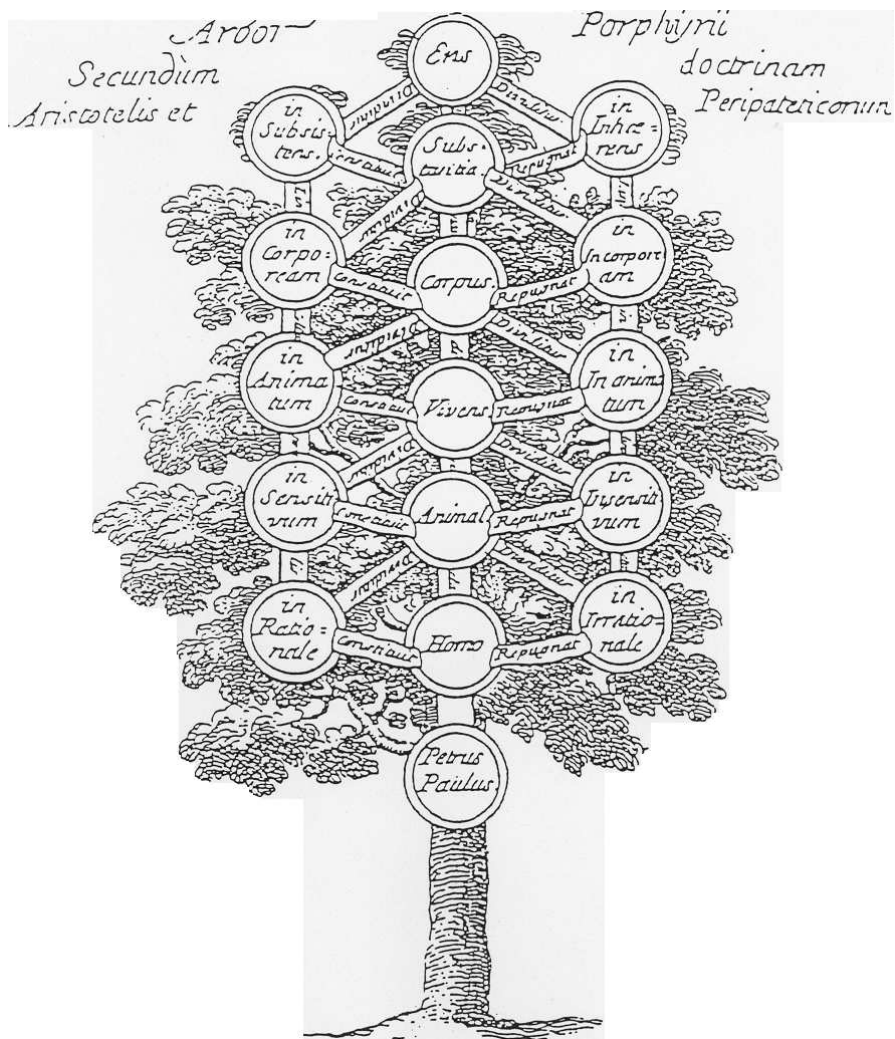
How to tell universals from particulars

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Ramsey's challenge

“the whole theory of particulars and universals is due to mistaking for a fundamental characteristic of reality what is merely a characteristic of language” (Ramsey 1925)

(1) Socrates is wise.

and

(2) Wisdom is a characteristic of Socrates.

“assert the same fact and express the same proposition”

Two quick rejoinders:

- (1) and (2) incur different ontological commitments
- the subject term of (1) is not the predicate in (2)

Their common problem:

- they beg the question
- Ramsey's worry:

On what grounds do we read (1) (or (2) for that matter) as “... is wise(Socrates)” rather than as “... is a characteristic of Socrates (Wisdom)”?

The worry generalised

Ramsey's worry:

How can $(\lambda x(xRa))b$, $(\lambda y(aRy))b$ and $(\lambda x, y(xRy))(a, b)$ be (logical forms of) the same proposition, if that they have different components?

A worry for Russell:

What is the 'logical subject' of a phrase?

A worry for Frege:

How can we identify unsaturated parts of thoughts if these can be carved up in different ways?

A worry for Quine:

What is the independent motivation to say that predicates (and not proper terms) refer 'dividedly' and do not stand for entities?

Metaphysics to the rescue?

Has Ramsey neglected metaphysical resources to draw the distinction?

A difference with respect to exemplification relation (MacBride: 2005)?

- numerical pattern of instantiation
 - **But:** multigrade universals
- particulars always enter into the first position
 - **But:** higher-order universals
- properties are unsaturated
 - **But:** this is just a metaphor

A difference between kinds of entities?

- particulars cannot at two places at the same time
 - **But:** might be true of some universals as well
- identity of indiscernibles is definitionally true of universals
 - **But:** they might have quiddities
- universals need to be exemplified
 - **But:** bare particulars might be possible

An ambiguity in Ramsey's argument

“Wisdom”, as it occurs in “Wisdom is a characteristic of Socrates” (2), stands for a *kind* rather than a property: it takes adjectives (“ironic wisdom”), nominal modifiers (“Socrates’ wisdom”), may be quantified (“much more wisdom”) and does not allow for negation – all this in contrast both to “... is wise” and to “being wise”.

Disambiguating Ramsey:

Socrates is wise.

“asserts the same fact and expresses the same proposition”

Either as:

(The kind) Wisdom is instantiated by Socrates.

Or as:

(The property) *being wise* is instantiated by Socrates.

My claims:

- in the first case, the argument is harmless
- in the second case, the argument is inconclusive

Properties and kinds

Properties	Kinds
are exemplified	are instantiated
how a thing is	what a thing is
qualitative	classificatory
may be lowest-level	typically high-level
perfect similarity	approximate similarity

Why they are intimately related:

- to instantiate the kind Man, something has to be human (to some degree)
- if something is human (to a sufficient degree), then it instantiates the kind Man (if it exists)

Why they are not identical:

- the Dog is four-legged, the property is not
- the Apple-Blossom is the state flower of Michigan, the property is not
- the Dino is extinct, but the property is not

A problem (Frege 1892):

Are there singular terms for properties at all?

Properties and kinds, ctd.

Consider:

(3) Red is George's favourite colour.

(4) The property of being red is the property of being
of George's favourite colour.

(3) is contingent – but is (4)? Macbeth (1995) and Schwartz (2002) have argued that *any* statement of an identity between properties is necessary: any supposedly non-rigid singular term “*P*-ing” designating a property may be taken to refer to the disjunctive property of “*P*'-ing in *w* or *P*''-ing in *w*' or ...” for the supposedly different referents of “*P*” in those different worlds. Instead of saying that “*P*-ing” non-rigidly refers to whatever *P*s in the relevant world, we may then say that it rigidly refers to this disjunctive property. This has become known as the ‘generalization problem’ (cf. Soames 2002).

A diagnosis:

- When we say that the property of being *F* is the property of being *G*, we are talking about *what it takes* for something to exemplify *F* (and *G*).
- Kinds do not in this way specify the qualitative character of things: they are instantiated by things *in virtue of* their properties.
- Even if the difference between kinds and particulars were ungrounded, not much would be lost.

What universals essentially are

(5) Red is George's actual favourite colour.

(6) The property of being red is the property of being
of George's actual favourite colour.

If (4) is contingent, is not then (4) contingent too?

A diagnosis: If a exemplifies F , a exemplifies the property (of) *having F as a property* and F exemplifies the property (of) *being a property of a* . While the first is essential to a iff F is, the latter is always essential to F .

A worry: Is this possible?

- Aquinas. it is essential to the world to have been created by God, but it is not essential to God to have created the world.
- Kripke: it is essential to me to have the parents I have, but it is not essential to my parents to have begotten me.
- Fine: it is essential to the set $\{a, b\}$ that a is a member of it, but it is not essential to a to be a member of the set.

An analogy:

- Suppose a is green.
- Is it essential to $\{x \mid x \text{ is green}\}$ that a is a member of it?
- Is it essential to $\{x \mid x \text{ is actually green}\}$ that a is a member of it?

An modal-realist argument:

- (Some) properties make for similarity across possibilia.
- If a and b are similar, they (literally) share a property.
- So (some) properties are strictly identical across possible worlds.
- So they cannot differ in properties which are not implicitly relational.
- The property of being exemplified by a is not implicitly relational.
- So if it is had in some world by some of these properties, it is had in all in which it exists.

Conclusion

If Ramsey's argument concerns properties, rather than kinds, there is some prospect for a metaphysical distinction.

We may still agree with him that "which sentence we use is a matter either of literary style, or of the point of view from which we approach the fact," as long as we are free to help ourselves to some regimentation.

Much more needs to be done.

