

Baxterian Aspects and Exemplification

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The canonical point of entry: cross-count identity

According to one count, the many are the one and the one is the many. Composition-as-identity explains the unrestrictedness and the ontological innocence of mereological fusion, but at the price of accepting a type of identity that does not underwrite Leibniz's law:

There are two kinds of identity. One kind holds on different standards. It is the kind that holds between one thing (counted on some standard) and one thing (counted on that same standard). The other kind of identity holds between distinct things (counted on a strict standard) and a single thing (counted on a looser standard). It is identity because the several things (counting strictly) are identical with each other (counting loosely). (Baxter 1988a: 576)

Main applications:

- Composition as identity.
- Material constitution.
- Persistence over time.

Hence we have a first case of self-difference: between the whole and its parts.

Second case of self-difference: base and aspect

Cross-count identity as the distributive sense of many-one identity:

Consider a whole distinguished one way, as opposed to the whole distinguished another way. Suppose that one part is identical with the whole as distinguished one way. Another part is identical with the whole as distinguished another way. The numerically distinct parts are identical with things that are (by hypothesis) distinguished and yet numerically identical. So a many-one identity holds between parts and whole. (Baxter 1988b: 202)

One question about the whole, another question about the relation between the parts (individually) and the whole:

The account will have two parts: (1) the discernibility of identicals, to explain how a whole as distinguished one way can qualitatively differ yet be numerically identical with itself as distinguished another [way], and (2) cross-count identity, to explain how a part (which exists in one count) is identical with a whole as distinguished some way (which exists in another count). Many-one cross-count identity is a relation between many things in one count and a single thing in another, such that each different part is cross-count identical with the whole distinguished in a different way. (Baxter 1988b: 203)

Cross-count many-one identity as a complex of cross-count one-one identity and intra-count many-one identity:

The identity of part with whole is really the cross-count identity with whole as in sub-location, and then intra-count identity of that with the whole. (Baxter 1988b: 214)

Main applications:

- Aspectual predication.
- Exemplification.
- Parthood.

Third case of self-difference: among aspects

The account allows to account for qualitative heterogeneity among aspects of the same thing without numerical diversity:

It is tempting to ask, ‘What becomes of the parts in the count in which only the whole exists?’ Surely the whole from the middle to the left is distinguishable from the whole from the middle to the right. So they exist. The first is closer to the left edge than the second. They qualitatively differ. (Baxter 1988b: 202)

In addition, however, aspects of different things may also be identical with each other. Baxter’s account of exemplification as aspectual identity:

Here is the proposal in brief: the non-relational tie is the identity of an aspect of a universal with an aspect of a particular. If you think of aspects as parts, then the non-relational tie is the ‘partial identity’ of particular and universals. That’s putting it Armstrong’s suggestive way [making reference to (Armstrong 1997: 17)]. The aspect is the part they have in common. (Baxter 2001: 453)¹

First difficulty: the objectivity of counts

Cross-count-identity used to be taken to be *identification* across countings:

I make sense of many-one identity by positing that identity (in the familiar sense), number, and existence are relative to what I call ‘counts.’ (Baxter 1988b: 193)

I will be using ‘count’ as a technical term for the results of a given way of counting. A way of counting would be specified by giving rules or instructions or standards for counting. The results of a way of counting – a count – would be specified by saying what things are counted as one thing. (Baxter 1988b: 200)

Now, it is given a more ontologically robust reading: counts have to carve reality at some joints. But don’t these joints presuppose counts?

Second, related, difficulty: existence conditions for aspects

Aspects are the respects of similarity:

‘Does bittersweet resemble sugar?’ ‘Yes and no. Insofar as it is sweet it does. Insofar as it is bitter, it doesn’t.’ There is a property – sweetness – shared by bittersweet insofar as it is sweet, and sugar. (Baxter 1988b: 205)

But aspects are not universals, they are exemplified universals, which in turn explain both universals and exemplification.

Third difficulty: Ramsey’s problem

Frank Plumpton Ramsey argued in 1925 that “the whole theory of particulars and universals is due to mistaking for a fundamental characteristic of reality what is merely a characteristic of language” (? : 13,405). His argument to this effect is that “Socrates is wise.” and “Wisdom is a characteristic of Socrates.” “assert the same fact and express the same proposition” (? : 12,404), while having their subject and predicate exchanged respectively. A distinction based solely on the difference in grammatical role between the subject and the predicate term in these sentences thus does not seem to cut any ice.

On Baxter’s theory, universals *are* counts:

[The u]niversal is better thought of as various particulars insofar as they are the same way, counted as identical. The similar aspects of distinct particulars are counted as identical. The differing aspects of the same particular are counted as distinct, in this count of universals [which distinguishes necessarily co-instantiated universals]. They help compose different universals. (Baxter 2001: 456)

¹Armstrong (2004: 142) says of Baxter’s theory that its great attraction is “that it involves nothing but the particulars and universals”: “Because the suggested link between the two is partial identity, any need for a fundamental tie, a copula, or what have you, seems to be eliminated. All the trouble that this tie has caused to those of us who accept universals alongside particulars, the tie that so many others use as a major reproach against the postulation of universals, is at a stroke removed.”

Universals, then, are particulars, or better “particulars strictly identical in a different count” (Baxter 2001: 456). Particulars are ‘concrete’ universals:

Think of the locations of each of the parts [of some particular]. Think of the whole as a concrete universal. Then the whole is wholly present in each of these locations, just like any universal. As before, we can distinguish the whole insofar as it is in one location from itself insofar as it is in another. These are aspects of it. There is no further work for parts to do in this context. We can regard the whole as a single thing, yet get all the complexity numerically distinct parts could give us. Thus we can think of spatial parts of a particular whole as aspects of a concrete universal. (Baxter 2001: 453)

The symmetry introduced by “think[ing] of a particular as like a universal in having aspects” (Baxter 2001: 453) and identifying the aspects of particulars with universals, presupposes that a prior distinction can be made between particulars and universals.

A defense of exemplification

The aspects of a universal are indeed the particulars exemplifying it, loosely counted as one. The aspects of a particular, however, are not the universals it exemplifies. What we get if we loosely count as one the (strictly) different universals exemplified by one particular is not the particular, but its nature or ‘type’, the most inclusive property it exemplifies (Armstrong 1997: 125). Different particulars could exemplify this property, because indiscernible particulars need not be identical.

There is no one-one cross-count identity: cross-count identity is always collectively and irreducibly many-one. Hume in so far as he is benevolent and Benevolence insofar as it is had by Hume are not identical: one is an aspect of Hume and the other one is an aspect of Benevolence and Hume and Benevolence are not identical. Hume in so far as he is benevolent and Benevolence insofar as it is had by Hume do stand in some intimate relation however: the relation of exemplification.

First advantage: some counts are better than others

Irreducible many-one identity holds between a (single) thing and its (many) aspects. In one count, there are many Hume aspects, in another (better one), there is a single thing. In one count, there are many aspects of Benevolence, in another (better one), there is a single thing.

Second advantage: no bundle theory of particulars

If an individual has more than one aspect, they are only collectively many-one identical with it. But even if a universal has more than one aspect, they are not only collectively but also distributively many-one identical with it – this is what universals essentially are.

This explains why universals, but not particulars, are multiply located: F qua exemplified by a is 2 metres apart from F qua exemplified by b :

...a universal insofar as it is in one location, is not in another. Insofar as it is in one location, it is separate from (spatially discontinuous from) itself insofar as it is in the other. (Baxter 2001: 451)

Baxter’s insight that a universal would not be the universal it is if it had different exemplifications is best brought out in terms of possible worlds: framed in this language, the claim becomes that properties do not stand in non-trivial counterpart relations: they are strictly identical across possible worlds (Lewis 1986: 205).²

Whenever a exemplifies F , two relational properties are exemplified by a and F respectively, namely having F as a property and being a property of a . The first of these just mimics F : it is essential to a iff F is. The latter, however, differs from F in at least one important respect, or so I want to claim: whenever it is had by a property G , it is an essential property of G . We have thick universals, but slender particulars.

²Based on counterpart relations between particulars, we may of course introduce ‘counterpart’ relations for at least some extrinsic properties, e.g. one in which the property of being the biggest pig in w counts as a counterpart of being the biggest pig in v , and we may say that the first, but not the second, is exemplified by the oldest pig (in w and v respectively). However, these property nominalisations do not designate the property of being the biggest pig (whereas both “I” and “my counterpart in w ” do designate me, albeit in possibly different worlds). They designate, respectively, *being the biggest pig in w* and *being the biggest pig in v* . This ‘counterpart’ relation does not play the role counterpart relations among particulars play in the regimentation of our modal talk. When we say that Sam, actually the oldest pig, is the biggest pig but might not have been, we do not say that Sam and his counterpart in v differ in that Sam has the first property, but his counterpart lacks the latter: rather we say of one and the same property that they differ with respect to *it*.

Third advantage: all aspects are parts, but not all parts are aspects

Parts are not aspects. The parts, collectively, are the whole, but they are not aspects of it. It is not the case that whenever many are (cross-count identical to) one, they are its aspects. If a is the only white part of otherwise black b , the aspects b insofar as it has a as a part, b insofar as it is located at a 's location, b insofar as it is white are not identical to b – b is (cross-count) identical to *its* aspects, but these others are aspects of a , not of b .

Another reason not to take parts to be aspects: some parts have properties which are not, not even partially / aspectively or in any other sense, had by the whole. Even if a part of me is very small / beautiful / loved by the Gods, I may still be large, ugly or hated by the Gods.

Exemplification is parthood. Benevolence insofar as it is had by Hume is one part of Hume in so far as he is benevolent, but not the only part: the other part is Hume. But Hume is not a part of Benevolence insofar as it is had by Hume, only Benevolence is. Benevolence is cross-count identical with its aspect which is a part of an aspect of Hume which (possibly together with other aspects) is cross-count and many-one identical with Hume. In this sense Benevolence is a part of Hume iff Hume is benevolent.

Aspects of universals are simple, aspects of individuals complex – they have both a universal and the individual as parts. The aspects of an individual are still only collectively cross-count identical with it. This is a mystery.

What explains the difference between Fa on the one, and a and F on the other hand, is that in the first, but not necessarily the second case, the exemplification relation holds between a and F . The fact that a is F is different from the (mere) sum of its components exactly in the cases where a is not F . The exemplification relation, however, is not a 'extra' component of the fact: it is the relation of parthood that the universal F bears to the particular a if and only if a is F . Parthood is therefore exemplified, i.e. itself a part of a and F , hence, by the transitivity of parthood, also a part of a . We do have a regress: parthood is exemplified within a infinitely many times.

There is a regress, because the parthood relation has to be itself a part to be exemplified. The regress, however, is neither ontologically nor explanatorily vicious. It is ontologically harmless, because exemplification, on any account of this relation as a universal, will be a relation relating itself – this is not more problematical than the self-exemplification of the property of being a property.

More critically, the regress is not explanatorily vicious: the explanation of the unity of the fact is given, on the first stage, by a itself. This is an explanation by a thing, not by the fact that a contains F . It is true that F is a part of a if and only if a explains that Fa , but this does not mean that the latter explanation is implicitly conditional, that it 'works' only under some condition. The explanation is contingent, this is true, but so is the explanandum. I submit that this is acceptable.

Fourth advantage: self-difference contained

Numerical self-difference always involves many-one identity: two things that are numerically the same but qualitatively differ are aspects of the same thing, to which they (together with perhaps other aspects) are many-one identical.

Fifth advantage: determinables

Determinates are not aspects of determinables. To take them to be aspects of determinables forces us to make a distinction between aspects of universals: some (like Benevolence insofar as it is had by Hume) entail that Hume is benevolent, some (like red insofar as *it is* (?) scarlet) does not entail that scarlet is red (scarlet is a kind of red, but not red).

Determinates are rather parts of determinables.

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