

Rosaria Egidi • Guido Bonino (Eds.)  
**Fostering the Ontological Turn**  
Gustav Bergmann (1906-1987)



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# Fostering the Ontological Turn

Gustav Bergmann (1906-1987)



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## INTRODUCTION

On 18-19 May 2007 an international conference was held in Rome, at the Università di Roma Tre, devoted to the philosophy of Gustav Bergmann (1906-1987). The conference was the third in a series including other two meetings, in Iowa City (19-20 May 2006) and in Aix-en-Provence (9-11 December 2006), organized by the University of Iowa and by the Université de Provence Aix-Marseille 1, respectively. Gustav Bergmann, a young member of the Vienna Circle, fled to the USA in 1938, began his philosophical career as a philosopher of science much in the standard logical positivistic fashion, but after the departure from the orthodox views of logical positivism in the 1940s, he came to develop an increasingly original philosophy, which combined a deep interest for ontology with an unswerving allegiance to what he considered the true positivistic stance. Though his views were far from those of most of the American philosophical community of his time, in the 1950s and 1960s they were nonetheless object of discussion, and Bergmann himself engaged in disputes with the representatives of alternative conceptions. But in more recent decades a rather unfortunate neglect set in with reference to his works and ideas, except in some limited quarters. Not even the revival of interest for metaphysics and ontology in analytical philosophy, of which Bergmann can be regarded as a forerunner, has really changed the situation, perhaps because Bergmann's own brand of ontology seems to be out of line with those of his rivals. Hopefully the three conferences just mentioned, together with some other signs – first of all the new publication by Ontos Verlag of three volumes of Bergmann's works, edited by Erwin Tegtmeier, in 2003-2004 – are marking a recent change in the attitude of the philosophical community.

The title of the Rome conference and of this volume, *Fostering the Ontological Turn*, alludes to Bergmann's role in prompting the significant transformation which analytic philosophy underwent in its maturity, after having been baptized by a "linguistic turn" (a phrase, by the way, which was probably first used by Bergmann). It also pays a tribute to the title of a *Festschrift* presented to Bergmann in 1974 (*The Ontological Turn. Studies in the Philosophy of Gustav Bergmann*, eds. M.S. Gram and E.D. Klemke, Iowa City, University of Iowa Press). We would like to make use of the opportunity of this introduction to thank all the participants to the conference, and especially to Kevin Mulligan, whose paper could not be included

here, for the interesting discussions which took place in Rome and which certainly provided useful suggestions to be incorporated in the final versions of the contributions collected in this volume.

The volume is divided into three sections, which have been devised *a posteriori* and are not to be intended as too rigidly demarcated, but rather as a somewhat blurred grouping of papers widely varied for their topics. The first section, “Categories of a realistic ontology”, includes the contributions which are more specifically concerned with the fundamental categories of Bergmann’s ontology and, for that matter, of ontology in general. In his long essay, “Universals, Particulars, Tropes and Blobs”, Fred Wilson argues for the admittance into the ontological inventory of the world of both universals and bare particulars, while showing how that conclusion can be come to by strictly adhering to Bergmann’s empiricist and positivistic philosophical method; at the same time he shows the confusions implicit in nominalism and in trope theories and the unacceptable consequences which follow from such views. Herbert Hochberg, who could not attend the conference, but who nevertheless was so kind as to provide a paper, “The Matter of Particulars”, focuses on the notions of particular and particularity (what makes an entity a particular); many different conceptions, medieval and contemporary, are thoroughly examined, with a special consideration for Bergmann’s views, both from his middle and his late philosophy. Bare particulars are also the subject of Francesco Martinello’s contribution, “Bare Particulars: Some Remarks”, in which it is argued that Bergmann’s most compelling reason to accept bare particulars lies in his ideal language method. Pasquale Frascolla, in “On Bergmann’s Reading of the ‘Tractatus’ Ontology” critically analyses Bergmann’s interpretation of the main ontological notions of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, such as those of object and logical form, and argues that it is ultimately based on grave misunderstandings. A comparative analysis of the views of the middle and of the late Bergmann concerning the notion of function is put forward by Erwin Tegtmeier’s in “Complexes, Nexus, and Functions in the Middle and the Late Bergmann”; the connections with the question of how complexes hold together are also pointed out, while the role of exemplification in holding together facts is examined in Guido Bonino’s paper, “Bergmann on Exemplification”.

The second section, “World, mind, and relations” is somewhat heterogeneous, in that it comprises rather different topics. On the one hand there are the contributions devoted to Bergmann’s “ontology of knowing”, such as Greg Jesson’s “Is Intentionality more like Hunting or more like Hitting?

Bergmann on Skepticism and Knowledge”, and Rosaria Egidi’s “Bergmann’s Critique of Representationalism”. The former focuses on Bergmann’s conception of intentionality, and on how it has to comply at the same time with the exigencies of realism and the phenomenon of error. The latter examines Bergmann’s critical arguments against the classical representational theories of knowledge and attempts an assessment of these arguments with respect to contemporary varieties of representationalism. On the other hand, Francesco Orilia, in “The Problem of Order in Relational States of Affairs: A Leibnizian View”, is concerned with the question of how the order in a relational state of affairs is to be accounted for from an ontological point of view; many alternatives are evaluated, and among them Bergmann’s, and a new solution, in Leibnizian spirit, is put forth. The notion of state of affairs is also central in “Singular Propositions as Possible States of Affairs”, by Alberto Voltolini, where the author considers the theoretical advantages of conceiving singular propositions as possible states of affairs, first of all the possibility of proposing a deflationary view of singular propositions themselves. Finally, Venanzio Raspa, in “... The most memorable Don Quixote of a great cause’. Bergmann’s Critique of Meinong”, provides a detailed examination of Bergmann’s reading of the philosophy of Meinong, in which attention is drawn on aspects of his works that were completely neglected by Bergmann.

More compactness is displayed in the last section of the book, “Metaphysics of space and time”. In “Particulars as Areas and Durations” Laird Addis deals with one of the most debated among Bergmann’s philosophical proposals, i.e., the identification of bare particulars with extensions of space and time, putting forward a tentative solution to the problems that such a view poses. L. Nathan Oaklander, in “Is there a Difference between Absolute and Relative Space?”, points out a tension between Bergmann’s supposedly absolutist view of space and his conception of bare particulars. Giuliano Torrenzo, in “Tenseless Time vs. Tensed Truthmakers”, by making reference to a methodological suggestion of Bergmann’s, proposes a new way of conceiving of the difference between eternalist A-theories of time and serious tensor B-theories. Finally, in the joint paper “Some Troubles with the Specious Present in Bergmann’s Ideal Language”, Fabio Minocchio and Andrea Pagliardi argue for the inadequacy of Bergmann’s ideal language to cope successfully with his notion of specious present.



## **Categories of a realistic ontology**



Fred Wilson

## UNIVERSALS, PARTICULARS, TROPES AND BLOBS

*Abstract.* This study explores how to do ontology within a positivist framework, and specifically the issue of universals and particulars. It is argued that universals and bare particulars are pieces of commonsense within this framework. It is argued further that a nominalism of tropes makes no ontological sense within this framework, and that its degenerate form as a nominalism in which the world is an amorphous lump or consists of mere blobs is simply silly. Bergmann, Sellars, Moore, Stout and Hochberg are among the philosophers discussed.

Everyone at some time or other considers model universes, so we can start there also. But we want to consider our model in much the same way as we consider the world in which we actually live, that is, as a world which we have experienced. Our model is a world in which the things that are there are in the first instance things that we have encountered in our experience of the world – our sensible experience of the real, everyday world. (There is also inner awareness and the things that it assures us are there, also in the world, but we need not consider entities of these sorts for what we are about). Now think of an apple, as we really encounter it, an apple which is green on the one side and red on the other. Think of looking at it with the red side before us and the green side away from us. As we experience it there is a red expanse, bounded by a certain shape, and rather bulgy. Even if we know that the other side is green, that green is not given to us in our sensory experience. The model universe is like that red expanse. The things in this universe are simple expanses which have sensible features, sensible qualities and sensible shapes. Two of the expanses are red and circular, the other is green and square. Now, back in the real world of apples and other ordinary things, suppose there are three apples, two red, one green, arranged in a straight line with the green one between the two red ones. The parts of the apples that we sensibly experience are on this line. We can imagine the same thing for the expanses in our model universe. So, in our model universe let us suppose our three expanses ordered just as the sensible appearances of the apples appear in an order. Let us suppose that the green expanse is between the two red ones.

There is nothing that could be thought puzzling about this universe, save its size. For, there is nothing puzzling about coloured expanses or patches. As G.F. Stout once put it,

I may, in double vision, have two images of a single candle flame. Then there appear or *seem* to be two candle flames, whereas in fact there is only one. But the visual presentations do not merely seem to exist and be separate. Both they and their separation really appear, are really presented or given, and must therefore really exist. It is only because the images really exist and are really separate that there appear or seem to be two candle flames. (Stout, 1930, p. 390)

In this sense, as he says, «... nothing can really appear except what really is, and really is as it appears» (Stout, 1930, p. 390). Our patches are somewhat elementary as things, if you wish, but they are just things like these images that Stout describes: they are sensible, they are locally separate, and they have various sensible properties.

It is also worth noting that the things in this model universe have *sensible properties*. Indeed, so do things in the real world. These properties are given to us in experience. It is as we experience them that I want to consider these things and their properties. Thus, for example, while the things in this universe fall into various sets – and there is also the empty set into which none of them fall – and, indeed, all those things which are red form a set – the set of red things –, the point to be made is that the properties as we are going to consider them are not merely sets of things: the things in this world are experienced as having sensible properties, and not as members of sets. It is things and their properties in which we are interested, not the sets, the bare collections, into which those things arrange themselves.

So let us consider a model universe in which there are, first, two red patches both of which are circular. Let us suppose that the colour of the one is indistinguishable from the colour of the other, and that the shape of the one is indistinguishable from the shape of the other. Next, there is a green patch which is square. Here the colour of this expanse can be distinguished from the colour of the other two. The shape can also be distinguished. But we need some names. We have three things: let us call the two red things “Cebes” and “Simmias” and the green thing “Socrates”.

So we say of both Cebes and Simmias that they are red. It is sometimes said that there is a difficulty here, that there is a “problem of sameness”: in virtue of what, it is asked, are they both called the same? In virtue of what do we make the same predication “Cebes is red” and “Simmias is red” of the two things Cebes and Simmias? Well, to this is the answer not obvious? In the world as we experience it, there is a property in Cebes that

we have decided to refer to with the term ‘red’. Having made that decision, we note that in the world as we experience it there is a property in Simmias that is indistinguishable from the property in Cebes that we have decided to refer to using the term ‘red’, so the property in Cebes is the same as the property in Simmias – the same in the sense of ‘indistinguishable’ – and we therefore apply the same term, and predicate ‘red’ of Simmias just as we predicate ‘red’ of Cebes. Cebes and Simmias are the same by virtue of the fact that there is present in the one a property that is indistinguishable from one of the properties in the other. Taking the properties in things to be the same when they are indistinguishable, things turn out to be the same just in case each has a property that is the same as a property present in the others.

In the world as we experience it, then, the same property can be in several things. But in traditional terminology, if a property can be present in several things, then that property is a universal. Here is the solution to the problem of sameness. Things are the same in the sense of having the same term predicated of them by virtue of the fact that properties are universals, and the same property can be present in several things: properties as universals solve the problem of sameness.

This is how Bergmann approached the problem of sameness<sup>1</sup>. He began with the logical positivists. Their programme was to clarify and to defend empirical science after the fashion of Mill and Comte and Mach, but to improve that defence by showing more clearly the logical structure of the language of science. The framework for this elucidation of the logic of science was that established by the developments of a newer, more adequate logic, the logic to be found in the formal language of *Principia Mathematica*. The aim was to explore the logic of scientific theories. Generally speaking, science is of course empirical: it is about the world as we experience it. The formal language was to be used to describe the world, and present to us the logical form of the theories that science developed and to validate the inferences made in science. So to do this, non-logical or descriptive constants had to be added to the language of logic.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Bergmann, 1944, pp. 209-211. Note the insouciance with which he mixes talk of predicates and of characteristics (the latter can be “undefined” – p. 209 –; but surely the notion of definition applies to linguistic items, namely predicates, and not the entities to which they refer). Note, also, the equal insouciance with which Bergmann (p. 210) speaks of characteristics as “universals” on the basis of the fact that a term referring to a characteristic can appear in several sentences which truly describe the world.

These constants would refer to what is in the world as we experience it: how else could it validate logical inferences about what is in the world? how else could it show the logical structure of scientific theories? how else could science be defended against its critics?<sup>2</sup>

It is these constants that enable one to describe the world. To do this, they must be somehow hooked to the world: to the syntactical structure of the language must be added a semantics. This semantics must be such that sentences in the language can be used to describe the world as we experience it.

As in the real world, so in our model world, red is a feature that recurs. Our language must be such that this fact finds a representation in the language. We therefore, let us say, let the constant 'R' pick out this feature that recurs. But this alone will not do, not even for our model world: for, red occurs or recurs twice. In fact, it recurs with another features that also recurs, specifically a shape. Let us pick out this feature with the constant 'C'. Moreover, these two features occur or recur *together*; in our world, as often in the real world, they are *with* one another. Let us represent this sort of connection with the constant 'W'. Thus we have as an attempt to describe our model world, or at least parts of it, the *sentence* that

W(R, C).

If we make, in the language of *Principia Mathematica*, 'R' and 'C' to be of the lowest type, then we should make 'W' to be of the next higher type, so that it can represent, not features that occur and recur, but the way in which those features occur and recur in the world. Constants of the lowest type represent features that occur in the world, constants of the next higher type represent the way or ways in which those features occur or recur.

Two other features of our model world also have to be recorded. There is the feature we call "green" and that which we call "square". These are clearly distinguishable from the features we have labelled 'R' and 'C'. Let us label them 'G' and 'S'. And we note that these features are, like the features R and C, *with* one another. That is, to describe our little world we also have

W(G, S).

But we also have to note that there are features of our world that we have not yet recorded in our language. We have not yet noted that there are

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Bergmann, 1944; also Bergmann, 1942. In a note to the latter, Bergmann mentions philosophical discussions he had had with Wilfrid Sellars, whom he thanks for the vigorous debate.

two expanses which are R, red, and another, *third* expanse which is green. These expanses are distinguishable from the features we have already recorded in our language, and distinguishable from one another. Let us therefore have the constants 'X', 'Y' and 'Z' pick out these three further features of this world.

These expanses go *with* the other features in the world in several ways. We record these *ways the world is* by the *sentences*

W(X, R, C)            W(Y, R, C)            W(Z, G, S)

These sentences, through the ways in which the terms are organized into these sentences, *picture* the ways in which features go together or are with one another in our model world. Cebes is one of the ways in which the features go together in our model world, Simmias is another, and Socrates is a third.

This is just one of the many ways in which one can go about constructing language to make it fit for describing the ways in which the world is. One might also, for example, represent the expanses by constants of the lowest type and the other features by constants of the next higher type, and represent one feature being with an expanse by a sentence of the sort

RX.

In that case, what we before represented by the sentence 'W(X, R, C)' is now represented by

RX

and

CX

*taken together*. That is, that red and circular are with the X-expanse is now represented by, in effect,

RX & CX.

Being *with* one another is now not represented by a single term juxtaposed to three other terms, but rather is represented by two juxtapositions and an ampersand sign, or, if you wish, by two juxtapositions of constants and the juxtaposition of two sentences. In any case, we now have our model world represented by

RX, CX, RY, CY, GZ, SZ.

These are simply two different conventions for representing features in our model world and the ways in which those features occur and recur in that world. Both sets of conventions conform to the logical or syntactical

structure required by *Principia Mathematica*. Bergmann in fact chose the second way to represent the ways the world is. But that is not the present point: either way would do. Either way can give pictures that represent the three things in our model universe, Cebes, Simmias, and Socrates – the three ways in which the distinguishable features in this universe go together, how they are with one another.

The point that needs to be made is this: In the world as we experience it, there are various distinguishable features that occur and among them some that recur. They recur in the sense that among two or more of the ways in which the world is, there is a feature in one of these ways that is *indistinguishable* from a feature in another of the ways the world is, or perhaps several other of the ways the world is. In our model, the feature represented by R occurs once with the expanse X and, *indistinguishably*, once with the expanse Y. As one says, the feature that occurs with X is one with the feature that is with X, they are *the same*. That is what indistinguishability amounts to: and that is why we say both expanses are red, and why in our structured language we apply the same term ‘R’ to that feature that is with X as we do to that feature that is with Y.

All this is common sense, and unproblematic. In constructing the outlines of the language that is needed for the logical analysis of the language of science, one hardly notices it. It is important, but something that one can take for granted as one gets on with the further tasks required for the defence of science.

Now let us suppose that a philosopher working within this common sense context starts to read philosophers such as Russell or Moore. Here is another tradition, using language to do something other than, or something more than, explore the logic of science. This other tradition takes up issues that have their roots in patterns of thought that deal with other issues.

It turns out on this other tradition that world as we experience it and as that which our language is about consists of *entities*. And these are *simple* and *complex* – the descriptive constants are labels of *simples*, while sentences represent *complexes*. Complexes are made up of simples, simples are constituents of complexes. The features that have been labelled ‘red’ and ‘green’ and ‘square’ and ‘circle’ are *properties*. These are simple entities, and they occur in complexes. Indeed, as it turns out, in our model universe as in the real world, there are no simples that are not in complexes. Moreover, the feature labelled ‘red’ is one that *recurs* as this property red in several different complexes; that is what happens when one uses the term ‘red’ to apply to a given feature – one re-applies the same

term when there is a feature elsewhere that is *indistinguishable* from it. This piece of common sense becomes the truth that *the same property can occur and recur in several different complexes*.

Thus, the piece of common sense about the language of science and about how, in constructing that language, we use linguistic labels to pick out discernible features that occur and recur in the world as we experience it turns out to be a not unimportant *truth in metaphysics*, and in particular in *ontology*, which is that part of metaphysics that deals with what is, that is, what things or entities that are and the categories of things that are. Traditionally, if one holds that one and the same property can be in several different things, then one is holding the *realist position* that *properties are universals*, they are *realized*, and *realized multiply*, in diverse complex things in the world. That is, the world as we experience it.

Or rather: When one first comes across them, metaphysical claims are puzzling. What does it mean to say that entities are simple or complex – chairs have parts but are the legs which are parts also simple? and what about the sensible expanses of our model world, do they also have parts? Metaphysics says that they do, but those parts are certainly not like the parts of a chair. And what does it mean to say that some among the simple entities in the world as we experience it are universals? are there universals alongside chairs or alongside coloured expanses or alongside oysters or alongside rainbows? I can bump into a chair, and I can eat an oyster, and I can experience a coloured patch, and I can contemplate a rainbow: can I do any of these things with universals? But now our philosopher has discovered something – something important. When one reflects on the common sense way in which language is fit onto the world, then we discover that the metaphysical claims can be understood as claims about this language and how it fits onto the world. The metaphysical claims that puzzle us can be *explicated*, rendered as unproblematic common sense – common sense about how we fit language onto the world – how we fit the language of the empiricists and the logical positivists onto the world. So the ontological claim which we find puzzling to the effect that there are, among the simple entities in the world, universals becomes the piece of common sense that there are in the world as we are acquainted with it in our sensible experience, features that we label with descriptive constants, and some of these occur and indistinguishably recur – it is these features that we call “universals”.

What makes the claim that there are universals true is nothing more than the claim, for example, that there are two red shirts, or the claim about our model universe that there are two red patches.

Note how this commonsensical approach sets to one side as coy silliness certain claims that talk about universals is simple metaphysical nonsense, claims that quite literally are quite without any cognitive sense. Thus, David Lewis for one has said that

I have complained about the difficulty of understanding the relation that allegedly relates concrete things to the abstract simple possibilities – propositions or properties – that they realize.

[...] It's a nasty predicament to claim that you somehow understand a primitive notion, although you have no idea how you could possibly understand it [...] that's the predicament I claim others are in if they accept the alleged notion of realization of abstract simple possibilities. (Lewis, 1991, pp. 35-36)

How properties come to be “abstract” is not explained. In fact, it is perfectly clear that properties are there among the entities in the world as we experience it: they may not be “concrete”, whatever that is, but if ‘abstract’ means ‘abstracted from’, where to be abstracted from something means to be separated from it, then properties are certainly not abstract: they are simply features of the world as we experience it that occur and recur and *just for that reason* are realized in the things of our world. And what exactly is meant by a “proposition”? Since it is coupled with ‘property’, it likely means something like a complex whole represented by a sentence, the state of affairs that is meant by, and is, if you wish, the meaning of a sentence, in contrast to the simple properties which are meant by constants such as ‘red’. But we aren't told: essentially Lewis is simply obfuscating things by sloppy and misleading use of language. He should try explicating metaphysical claims, making them commonsensical, instead of making them more puzzling than they ordinarily are by the sloppy – undoubtedly deliberately sloppy – use of language. Whatever he means by what he is saying, he is evidently trying to make the point often made by others that they do not understand what it is for one entity to be present in, or realized, in several diverse things. What these philosophers are saying – what it is likely Lewis is saying in his obfuscating way – is that metaphysical claims are intrinsically puzzling, and in particular the claim that properties are universals and that these universals can be realized in many things is a puzzling claim without any clear sense.

But our philosopher – our positivist who has learned how to do ontology – has found a way out of this predicament: explicate the problem so that its solution can be found as a way of speaking about the language we create in

order to describe about the world as we experience it. Explicated, it turns out that to say that there are universals that are realized in or by various diverse things in the world is to say that, for example, the feature we call 'red' occurs and recurs in various ordinary things. The ontological claim is no more puzzling than the claim that there are two shirts or two expanses such that each has a feature that is indistinguishable from a feature had by the other and that we call this feature by the term 'red'. Who can be puzzled by the fact that one has two shirts which are both red or two patches which are both red? Again, let us not be coy: our philosopher has shown us how to make these puzzling things common sense, perfectly intelligible claims about the world as we experience it.

Our philosopher who started out as a positivist who takes all metaphysical claims to be nonsense – someone more or less like Bergmann – has thus found out – prodded by Russell and Moore and perhaps in some complicated way by Wittgenstein<sup>3</sup> – how to do ontology: one takes the puzzling metaphysical claim and transforms it into a piece of common sense by explicating it as a claim about the language we construct as we attempt to defend science. Defend science? But against what? Against metaphysics, of course. But that is, as it now turns out, against those claims of metaphysics that cannot be explicated as commonsensical truths about the language of science. There are universals – that is now common sense; but that does not mean that suddenly we have a way of conferring meaning on metaphysical claims to the effect, for example, that there is a God who created the universe and gave us an immortal soul, which is tainted to be inevitably evil through the presence in that soul of the effects of the original sin of pinching an apple from someone who made it for himself but who turned out not really to need it because, as it happened, he was self-sufficient and dependent on nothing. Our philosopher is still a positivist, but a positivist who has come to be an ontologist. Or better: the positivist has discovered how to be both a positivist and an ontologist.

So, there are properties which things have and these properties are universals. However, not everyone is comfortable with this claim. I am thinking of those philosophers who argue that the properties of things are not universals. Things do have features that we can, in our experience of the world, notice. We even call them by the same name. But that is ontologically misleading. In fact, it is claimed, the feature in Cebes that we label with the term 'red' is distinguishable from the feature in Socrates that we label 'green', while there is a feature in Cebes and one in Simmias that

<sup>3</sup> And no doubt by conversations with Everett Hall and Wilfrid Sellars.

we label with the term ‘red’, where we apply the same term because the feature in Cebes and the feature in Simmias are in that way indistinguishable: they are, in other words, the same, where, in contrast, this feature is different from that other feature in Socrates, and, indeed, is different from all the other features or properties in our model universe. But the philosophers that we are now considering, while granting that the feature of Cebes that we label ‘red’ is the same as the feature of Simmias that we also label ‘red’, also argue that there is a sense in which we in fact have two features that are *different* from one another: they are the same, that is, not different, in the sense of being indistinguishable, while in another sense of the term ‘different’, they are different – the red in Cebes is the same as the red in Simmias while nonetheless they are also different – there are two reds and not just one. *Properties are not universals*. Properties, while they recur in the sense of being indistinguishable from one another, never actually recur: every occurrence of a property is different from every other occurrence. These properties that differ on their every occurrence are what these philosophers call “tropes”. And since the defender of tropes denies what the realist claims, that they are universals, such a one can correctly be said to be a *nominalist*<sup>4</sup>.

The nominalist holds that no two things have sensible features that are the same. Some are indistinguishable in respect of some feature, say red, to continue with our example – they are qualitatively indistinguishable we may say. But they are nonetheless different, the nominalist holds: the red in Cebes while apparently the same as the red in Simmias is not the same as the red in Simmias, and the circle in Cebes, while apparently the same as the circle in Simmias, is in fact different. These differences are delivered to us in our experience of the world – or at least that is what the nominalist should say if he or she is trying to describe in a perspicuous way features and the ways features are in the world as we experience it.

The nominalist holds that the red in Cebes is different from the red in Simmias – we have as two entities Cebes-red and Simmias-red –, nonetheless the two reds are in fact indistinguishable: although they are not the same they are still exactly similar in their redness – this is given to us in our experience of the world. It could be suggested that the two reds are simple entities. But then, why are they also the same? Some suggest that the fact that they are both reds is a matter of their standing in a *relation of exact similarity*.

<sup>4</sup> For further discussion of many of these points, cf. Wilson, 2007a.

It could be argued that this relation of exact similarity is an *internal relation*, where this ontological status is reflected in language by the fact that tropes are represented by terms like ‘Cebes-red’ and ‘Simmias-red’, or ‘this-red’ and ‘that-red’, or ‘red<sub>1</sub>’ and ‘red<sub>2</sub>’.

But surely, one must reply to this suggestion, to represent the feature by a *complex name* like ‘Cebes-red’ and ‘Simmias-red’ or by ‘red<sub>1</sub>’ and ‘red<sub>2</sub>’ is to allow that there is a feature of Cebes with respect to which it is indistinguishable from the corresponding feature in Simmias. When the nominalist uses such a term to say that Cebes is red, then what he or she says is that

Cebes is Cebes-red,

which draws attention to the very same feature to which the realist draws attention when he or she says that

Cebes is red.

The nominalist is representing the very same way the features of the world are with one another as is the realist, only he or she is doing it with terms which are special or oddly different. Speaking of an “internal relation” simply obscures this fact. That is, it obscures the fact that there is a feature of Cebes which is indistinguishable from a feature of Simmias, a feature which they therefore share. Which is all that the realist claims: when he or she claims that red is a universal (and so also that other properties are universals), all that is being claimed is that the two things have a feature with respect to which they are indistinguishable.

The nominalist thus cannot claim that he or she can be distinguished from the realist by virtue of his or her tropes being supposedly different but the same insofar as they are internally related since that supposed internal relation is nothing but the feature which, on the realist’s way of speaking, and of representing things, is something common to several things or at least something which can be shared by several things. Wishing nonetheless to save the tropes as being different yet the same yet not sharing a common feature, the nominalist may hold that two tropes, e.g., two reds, are simply different yet are related by an *external relation of exact similarity*.

But it is not too hard to see that this nominalist is after all committed to realism, that he or she cannot avoid universals. Russell so argued<sup>5</sup>.

He pointed out that on the view that exact similarity is an external relation the circle in Cebes is exactly similar to the circle in Simmias just as

<sup>5</sup> Russell, 1956. Cf. also Stout, 1930, pp. 388-390.

the red in Cebes is exactly similar to the red in Simmias. The relation of exact similarity is the same in the two cases. It is, therefore, a universal. But if one is going to admit one universal, one might as well have others (cf. Hochberg, 1984). So the nominalism turns out to be a sort of realism: it after all does admit universals.

But surely there is a simpler point to be made. For, surely, to say that the two reds are *exactly similar* says nothing very different than saying that the two reds are indistinguishable. Which is the same as saying that the two complexes of which the two reds are parts each have a feature where the feature in the one complex is indistinguishable from the corresponding feature in the other complex. And that is to say that they do after all share a feature, and the nominalist's attempt to avoid universals fails.

It would seem, then, that so long as the nominalist holds that what makes two tropes indistinguishable in kind, what grounds their sameness, is something that is presented to us in our experience of the world, then there is little to distinguish his or her position from that of the realist.

There is another way, however, for the nominalist to avoid universals as entities given in sense, and that is by arguing that what accounts for the sameness and difference of tropes is not known by sense at all. The nominalist can distinguish his or her view about why ordinary things are the same and different as others if he or she argues that what grounds the sameness of the tropes is not something given in sense. Stout, at times at least, seems to be a nominalist of this sort. Certainly, he tells us that «in mere acquaintance, we do not know the thing exists or what it is: we do not distinguish it from other things or from its qualities» (Stout, 1930, p. 393). What makes a concrete thing to be of a certain kind «presupposes that, in some sense, a plurality of things share in a common character», by which is meant that «each is characterised by a particular instance of a general kind or character» (Stout, 1930, p. 396). Resemblance of characters is not a relation; it «presupposes a complex unity of the peculiar type which I [Stout] call the distributive unity of a class» (Stout, 1930, p. 388). There is something which grounds this unity but it is not a relation and is not given in acquaintance, that is, in our sense experience of the world. In this respect Stout's view is akin to that of Plato. Certainly, Plato is a nominalist (see *Theaetetus*; Plato, 1987), for he holds that the entities that are known by sense are all such that «each of them is different from the other but the same as itself...» (*Theaetetus*, 184a10). This includes the properties of things, things such as, e.g., our Cebes and Simmias are, of course, known by sense: thus, «the mind perceive[s] the hardness of something by means

of touch», and so on for other sensible properties of things. It follows, Plato holds, that the red in Cebes and the red in Simmias are different from one another, which creates what is for him the problem of sameness. For, why the two things are the same, why they are similar in colour, and indeed why the colour in these two things is different as a colour from the green in Socrates, are all not given in sense. Why, therefore, do we reckon the property in Cebes as the same as the property in Simmias? In fact, the colour properties of the three things are all different as localized at three separate places, and in trying to say why there are two reds and a green Plato has for himself a problem. Plato argues that besides the localized properties, the tropes, there are non-local properties in which these tropes *participate* which account for the sameness of these tropes. These are the forms that account for the sameness of the two reds and the difference of these from the trope which is green. Cebes is red because it has a character that participates in the form of red, and Simmias is red because of the character in it that participates in the same form of red, while Socrates is green because it has a character that participates in a different form, the form of green. The forms account for what Cebes *is*, and why it is the *same* and *different* as other things. But these forms are not given in sense. Plato argues that they are known another way: in his terms they are known by the mind as such, the mind “by itself” as he speaks. As he puts it with regard to these forms, «their being (that is, that they both are)» and their «similarity, dissimilarity, identity and difference» are all «in the class of things which the mind gets at by itself» – with regard to their being, what they are in themselves and relative to other forms, «the mind by itself has the job of reaching a decision by reviewing them and comparing them with each other» (*Theaetetus*, 186b10).

There is a problem here, for both Plato and Stout. Tropes are given in sense, we are acquainted with them. Forms we are not given in sense, we are not acquainted with these entities which account for why tropes are the same and different in kind; they are known by the “mind by itself”. But if the sameness of two tropes is not given in sense but only in some other way, then we have the relationship that the red in Cebes participates in the form of red, and the question immediately arises, or should immediately arise (though unfortunately it more often does not arise), how do we know this fact? Indeed, what is it that we know when we know what we know when we say that the property in Cebes and that in Simmias are both reds? We know the tropes one way and the forms another way, but what we also have to know is the *complex* of this trope, the red in Cebes, participating in

the form red – the complex represented by the statement that “Cebes-red is red”. Besides the eye of the senses which gives us the sensible world, the tropes, and the eye of the mind which gives us the forms, we need a third eye to cognize how the materials of sense come together with the materials furnished by the acting “by itself”. But no philosopher has ever convincingly argued that we do in fact have a third “eye”. Certainly not Plato and certainly not Stout: neither of them provides a solution to this problem.

Indeed, they really do not tell us what the second sort or way of knowing is, how this special eye of the mind which we are all supposed to have really works. They claim that it exists and that through it we know those entities that ground the sameness and difference of tropes, but we are not told how precisely we are to get hold of this form of knowing. What is this *mind* that *by itself* gives us *non-sensory* knowledge of certain entities, entities which are themselves puzzling?

There is, however, a deeper point about this sort of nominalism. It seeks to defend tropes by separating them from the entities, the forms or what have you, that make them the same and different from other tropes, and holding that while the tropes are given in sense, these other entities are not and are known in some other non-sensory way. This means that *the world as we ordinarily experience it contains nothing that grounds the sameness and difference of things*. The red in Cebes is given in sense but not that which makes it a red. It follows that so far as sense is concerned the characteristics of things are devoid of kinds, they are simply little *blobs*. Which surely is a point of view that is not just puzzling but quite unacceptable.

This sort of nominalism can be approached another way. One can argue that precisely because the forms or what have you are not given in sense then they can be dismissed on empiricist grounds as non-existent. Certainly, for the philosopher who begins by constructing a language to describe the ordinary world given to us in our ordinary sensible experience will find it quite unacceptable to think that one’s ontology can tolerate such entities. It follows that for such a one who proposes to also be a nominalist is committed to the view that tropes are blobs. We may very well call them the same or different, but they *are* the same and different only because we *call them by different names*. The red in Cebes and the red in Simmias are indeed two, two different tropes, but they are both reds only because that is how we have *decided* to label them.

A term like ‘red’ in our language has world-word connections and word-word connections. The term itself corresponds to one of the forms of a Platonist. The world-word connections, the relations of denotation if you