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ARE ALL UNIVERSALS INSTANTIATED?

by

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ABSTRACT

In contemporary metaphysics the struggle between realism and nominalism is apparent and important, but it tends to overshadow the struggle within realism itself. As a realist, D.M. Armstrong is very aware of this internal struggle and forms a theory of universals at the heart of this issue. His theory is based on the naturalistic notion that the physical universe is all that there is. This naturalism leads him to formulate the Principle of Instantiation, stating that all universals must be instantiated in a particular. That is, there can be no universals that are uninstantiated and thus reside in what has become known as a "Platonic heaven". Many other realists challenge the Principle of Instantiation and claim that realism yields a Platonic realm of the Forms that houses all universals. These other realists also argue that contrary to Armstrong's view realism is not compatible with naturalism. In this paper, I argue that Armstrong's theory of universals has the resources to resist this criticism. I will show that by adopting his theory of universals, the combination of realism and naturalism is attainable. Along with this combination and the Principle of Instantiation, Armstrong maintains a legitimate theory, which holds strength within this metaphysical debate.

INTRODUCTION

It is believed by most that there are concrete entities in our world. That is, things that exist in time and/or space.¹ Most would also agree that these concrete things are *particulars*. And if we assume that these particulars are the things that make up our concrete world, we can assume that “particulars have properties and stand in relations to other particulars.”² For example, a baseball is a particular thing, and this particular thing can be said to have the property of being *white* and the relation of being *in* my baseball glove. The question then, which gives rise to a controversy within metaphysics, is what these properties and relations are. (I.e., What is the *white* of the baseball and the *in* between the baseball and the glove?) Are they part of or separate from particulars? Do they exist in time and/or space? If they do not exist in time and/or space, do they exist somewhere? Are they shared among particulars? The different answers to these questions are where many metaphysicians are divided.

The main division here is a result of the last questions posed: Are they (i.e. properties and relations) shared among particulars? Within metaphysics there are those who answer ‘yes’ to this question and believe that multiple particulars can share the same properties and/or relations. For example, two different baseballs could simultaneously both possess, or what we will refer to as instantiate, the property *white* and the relation *in*.

¹ Some authors (e.g. Grossmann 1992) refer to concrete things as spatial and/or temporal because, according to them, such things as thoughts can be temporally located but not spatially located.

² Armstrong, Nominalism 11.

This set of metaphysicians, called realists, refers to these properties and relations as *universals* and claims that these universals can be simultaneously located in multiple particulars. The contrast to realism is a view referred to as nominalism. Nominalism rejects the theory that particulars can share the same properties and relations. For the sake of this essay, we will be putting nominalism aside and focusing, for the most part, on realism and the questions and controversy that arise within.

Realism is thought to be first formulated by Plato. In the Platonic dialogue titled *Parmenides*, a philosopher addresses Socrates and says, “. . . there are certain forms from which these other things (i.e. particulars), by getting a share of them (forms), derive their names – as, for instance, they come to be like by getting a share of likeness, large by getting a share of largeness, and just and beautiful by getting a share of justice and beauty . . .”³ The philosopher addressing Socrates in this passage is Parmenides, and he is referring to the Platonic forms which are the entities that, for example, give beautiful particulars beauty and large particulars largeness. In other words, Plato believed that there was a realm separate from our worldly realm that housed what he referred to as forms. His forms or ideas resided outside our known world and give particulars their properties (e.g., they give beautiful particulars beauty.). These forms are what modern philosophers refer to as universals, and it is the questions that surround these universals that have caused much controversy between realists themselves.

The question of what universals are has caused a divide within realism. Some realists side with Plato and claim that universals can reside outside particulars, while

³ Louise, 364.

others believe that universals must be properties or relations that belong to a particular. Therefore, Platonists claim that universals are abstract entities that do not need particulars in order to exist while other metaphysicians denounce the existence of a “Platonic heaven” that houses all the universals that exist. They believe that universals only exist in the particular that instantiates them.

One of the main problems that has risen out of realism encompasses this idea of *instantiation*. Instantiation occurs when a particular has properties or stands in relations. If one were to observe this particular, its properties, and relations, one would be observing this particular instantiating these properties and relations. For example, a red pen that is inside a box could be instantiating the property of *redness* and the relation *being inside-ness*. The *redness* and *being inside-ness* of the pen are the property and relation that the particular pen is instantiating. The question that causes problems to arise is whether these universals must be instantiated. Some, such as Alan Donagan, Michael Loux, and Reinhardt Grossmann, say that all universals do not necessarily have to be instantiated. And others, such as D. M. Armstrong, claim that all universals must be instantiated (not necessarily now), thus accepting what Armstrong refers to as the Principle of Instantiation, which states that for every universal (property or relation) there must be a particular that instantiates that universal.⁴

Armstrong endorses this principle because, as he points out in his book *A World of States of Affairs*, he supports the doctrines of both naturalism and physicalism. Naturalism is the idea that all the entities in our world of space and time are all that there

⁴ Armstrong, Universals 75.

is. That is, nothing exists outside of our world of space and time. Physicalism goes along with naturalism by claiming that all that exists in our spatiotemporal world is governed by the laws of physics.⁵ The problem that has risen out of Armstrong's support for both realism and naturalism is the problem of uninstantiated universals. When it comes to those that support realism, the acceptance of uninstantiated universals is common. Armstrong, on the other hand, does not want to accept uninstantiated universals because he believes this entails that something is outside of our spatiotemporal world. He wants to support the idea of universals, but he wants them to be entities that must exist and be instantiated in particulars that exist in the world as we know it. This is a very bold claim and because of its boldness, it leaves itself open to question.

In the following pages, I will be questioning D. M. Armstrong's view of universals and the Principle of Instantiation. That is, I will be questioning his version of natural realism and if it is plausible. First, I will look more closely at universals by examining Armstrong's view. Then I will state his case for the Principle of Instantiation (i.e. that there are no universals that are outside of our spatiotemporal world), and follow that with an analysis of those who support the view of uninstantiated universals. Finally, I will look at the viability of Armstrong's outlook to see if it is plausible to be a naturalist and a realist at the same time.

UNIVERSALS

To understand the Principle of Instantiation we must first understand what universals are and how they work. To do this I will be accepting Armstrong's view from

⁵ Armstrong, A World of States of Affairs 5-6.

his 1989 work titled Universals: An Opinionated Introduction. In chapter five, *Universals as Attributes*, Armstrong explains his theory and in doing so he first rejects the bundle theory, which is the theory that particulars are only a bundle of properties.⁶ Following this rejection he addresses the idea of uninstantiated universals and the problems that go along with them. He then illustrates his view of universals and how they function in our world.

As mentioned, the bundle theory claims that particulars are nothing other than a bundle of properties. Armstrong believes this view creates problems because of the Identity of Indiscernibles; the notion that two particulars that have the same properties are identical. Thus, if two bundles had the same properties they would be the same particular.⁷ This principle seems strange, but one can see that it is necessary if one were to accept the bundle theory. If two things share the same properties and relations, and nothing distinguishes them from each other, would they be the same thing? They would be according to this principle and therefore according to the bundle theory. But it seems absurd to think that two different particulars that have the same properties are truly identical, and it also seems absurd to think that two particulars could not be composed of the same properties.⁸ For example, we can imagine two hats that share the same properties. If we follow the Identity of Indiscernibles principle, we have to conclude that these are identical and thus the same. It is absurd to say that they are the same because we have two of them, but it does not seem strange to have or imagine two hats that have

⁶ Armstrong, Universals 62.

⁷ On page 61-62 of Universals: An Opinionated Introduction Armstrong claims that temporal and spatial location does not count as properties.

⁸ Armstrong, Universals 66-67.

the same properties. If we can have two hats with the same properties that are still not the same hat, there must be something other than the properties that distinguishes them. This other thing is the particular that instantiates these properties. Therefore, it seems that the Identity of Indiscernibles in connection with the bundle theory causes inconsistency.

Another reason Armstrong finds the bundle theory to be incompatible with a theory of universals is that it causes universals to be the substances that make up our world. If particulars are just bundles of universals and are not separate from the universals, our world would only consist of universals. Thus, it would allow universals to be independent substances that all particulars are composed of. According to Armstrong, the world cannot be made up of only universals because it seems absurd to have properties in the world that are not the properties of anything.⁹ As I have mentioned and will go into more detail about later, Armstrong does not want to accept properties (universals) that are not the properties of anything (i.e. not instantiated by a particular). So, Armstrong supports the substance-attribute theory of universals and particulars in lieu of the bundle theory.

Once Armstrong rejects the bundle theory, he wants to accept the Principle of Instantiation, but before we look at that principle let's examine how his universals look. In this chapter, one of the first things Armstrong explains is what constitutes a universal and what does not. He addresses three issues regarding universals: Are there disjunctive universals? Are there negative universals? and Are there conjunctive universals? A

⁹ *ibid* 73-74.

disjunctive universal would be a universal that was linked together by disjunction. For example, *being red or being square* would be considered a disjunctive universal.

Armstrong says that this cannot be a universal because a blue square and a red ball would then have the disjunctive universal of *being red or being square*, but they would not share anything in common. As for negative universals, Armstrong again claims that they are not universals. Lacking a property is not a universal in itself and it does not explain the particular by any means. For example, *not being a car* explains nothing about our red ball and thus is not a property.¹⁰ The last type of universal that Armstrong addresses is conjunctive universals, which he believes can be actual universals. A conjunctive universal is the notion of having two properties, together, as a single universal for one particular. For example, a red ball does not just have the properties of *being red* and *being spherical* separately, but it has the conjunctive property of *being red and being spherical* together. According to Armstrong, this is not only a universal, but it has the possibility of having more power than the sum of the two properties if they were instantiated by themselves.¹¹ A way to further understand this would be to think of a symphony orchestra. The symphony orchestra as a whole (all the instruments playing together) can be thought to have much more power than each instrument individually. One can imagine listening to Beethoven's 9th symphony as a whole and listening to each instrument playing the same piece individually. The symphony as a whole has much

¹⁰ It was brought to my attention during a presentation I gave on Armstrong in a graduate level metaphysics course that *not being a female* does give us information about a particular person. But this is only the case for things, such as humans, that only have the option of possessing one property (*being female*) or another (*being male*) and it does not show any presence or power in the particular.

¹¹ Armstrong, Universals 84.

more impact and power than that of the individual instruments. Conjunctive universals can be seen the same way. That is, properties instantiated together could have more power than if they were instantiated individually. So, Armstrong claims that disjunctive and negative universals cause problems within his view, but conjunctive universals fit into his system.

To go into more detail on Armstrong's universals, he describes what he refers to as *states of affairs*. A state of affairs is "a particular's having a certain property, or two or more particulars standing in a certain relation."¹² In other words, particulars have properties and relations. These properties and relations are universals. Universals and particulars are constituents of states of affairs. Thus, any particular and its instantiated properties is a state of affairs. Armstrong refers to particulars which are conceptually stripped of their properties as thin particulars and particulars with all of their properties as thick particulars (or states of affairs). Thin particulars are only concepts in our mind and they do not occur in our world because universals give particulars nature, kind, and sort, and without universals being instantiated a particular would have no nature, kind, or sort.¹³ Thus, a particular only exists when it is instantiating properties and relations. Therefore, thick particulars are thin particulars and their properties, and these thick particulars or states of affairs are what make up our world. For example, a thin particular with its properties yields a state of affairs which is a particular and thus not repeatable. This state of affairs can then have a relation that yields a new particular. This acquiring of properties and relations and yielding of more complex particulars is what our world is

¹² Armstrong, Nominalism 80.

¹³ Armstrong, Universals 94.

made of. Everything that makes up our universe is anything from a thin particular with a property to complex thick particulars. Even our universe itself is a complex thick particular or state of affairs.¹⁴

After we come to realize what particulars, universals, and states of affairs are, Armstrong wants to explain why these properties and relations have to occur with the particular. In order to help in the understanding of this, he references a book by David Seargent where Seargent points out that universals should be thought of as *ways*. Properties are ways things are and relations are ways things stand to each other. Armstrong references this because it allows us to understand that universals are not “floating free,” but are the *ways* a particular thing is. They exist because of each other, not separate from each other.¹⁵

As has been shown, Armstrong has a substance-attribute view of particulars and universals. There are particulars and universals that make up states of affairs. These universals are the *ways* particulars are and these states of affairs are that which makes up our universe. Now that we have a grasp of universals, we will focus on the instantiation of universals through the Principle of Instantiation.

PRINCIPLE OF INSTANTIATION

The Principle of Instantiation of universals is the notion that for every universal there must be at least one particular that instantiates it.¹⁶ That is to say that every universal must be instantiated (in the past, present, or future), and that there are no

¹⁴ Armstrong, Nominalism 115.

¹⁵ Armstrong, Universals 96-97.

¹⁶ Armstrong, Universals 75-76.

uninstantiated universals. The opposite of this principle, or the belief that there are uninstantiated universals, goes back to Plato. One of the major problems concerning this Platonic idea is the question of where these universals are. If a universal is not instantiated by a particular, where does it reside? Properties and relations that are not found in a particular and not found in our world of time and space must reside outside of our spatiotemporal world in what is known as a “Platonic heaven.” And if there is a Platonic heaven where uninstantiated universals are, we should place all universals there because even instantiated universals might not have been or might not be instantiated at all times.¹⁷

These universals that are not instantiated give us an odd view of properties, relations, and particulars. This view causes universals to be seen as *universalia ante res*, or universals before things. If we think of universals before things and in a separate realm from our spatiotemporal realm, we then have to view particulars as “bloblike” because they have no structure if they do not have properties. Armstrong would prefer to view particulars as a “layer-cake” or as a thick particular. That is, as a particular with layers of properties and relations. Also, with uninstantiated universals we are inclined to accept this Platonic heaven, which we have to give way to if there are uninstantiated universals. We can easily accept our own spatiotemporal world where we observe the instantiation of properties, but to assume there is a world out there for uninstantiated universals is a lot to ask for, or at least that is what Armstrong believes.¹⁸

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 76.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 76-77.

Although it may seem to be asking for too much to put all our universals in a Platonic heaven, there are reasons behind this Platonic theory. Predicates can be turned into general terms (e.g. predicate: red; general term: redness) and these general terms are the universals of particulars that satisfy these predicates. There is not a problem when we elicit predicates such as 'red', but when we elicit a word such as 'unicorn' we run into a problem. Since 'unicorn' is not an instantiated universal, must there be uninstantiated universals? Armstrong would say no and claim that this is not a problem because there are words such as 'unicorn' that do not refer to particulars in our world. To show this he references Gilbert Ryle's 'Fido'-Fido fallacy, where Ryle points out that all names (e.g. 'Fido') do not have to correspond to a particular object. Therefore, using the proper name 'Fido' does not mean there has to be a general term corresponding to it and therefore a universal.¹⁹

Another way Armstrong could alleviate this problem is to evoke his combinatorial theory of possibility. This theory states that possible particulars are just a combination of particulars that actually exist.²⁰ Therefore, particulars with properties and relations in possible worlds are just a recombination of the properties and relations in our actual world. This recombination can be easily seen in the case of the unicorn. A unicorn can exist in a possible world because it is a construction of properties (e.g. horseness) that are instantiated in the actual world. It does not possess any universals that do not exist in our actual world so there is no need for uninstantiated universals in this case. Thus, one can

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 78-79.

²⁰ Armstrong, "Nature" 186.

have the concept or idea of a particular that does not exist in our actual world, but this concept or idea need not yield uninstantiated universals.

Using the combinatorial theory of possibility works with such predicates as ‘unicorn’, but what about putative universals that are not instantiated in our world? Cannot we think of a predicates that is not a recombination of actual instantiated universals? If this is the case, then Armstrong can just go back to the ‘Fido’-Fido fallacy. There are terms that do not correspond to particular objects. Therefore, if the combinatorial theory cannot be applied to a predicate that does not seem to be instantiated, then the idea that not all predicates correspond to a universal will.

Plato also thought uninstantiated universals were necessary because of the imperfections we have in our world. He claimed that there is nothing in our world that is actually perfect. There are no perfect straight lines or circles and no perfect forms of justice. These instances in our world fall short of perfection so there must be a Platonic heaven where a perfect straight line, a perfect circle, and a perfect form of justice reside. But, as Armstrong asks, cannot perfection just be a thought in our mind? And cannot these things appear to be perfect even if they are not?²¹ I do not believe this is a stretch at all. It is easy to think of something as more perfect than it actually is. We seem to do this all the time by convincing ourselves that something is perfect when it really is not. Also, things can appear to be perfect as in the case of a perfect circle or line. One can look at a line that has a slight curve in it and believe it to be straight.

²¹ Armstrong, Universals 80.

What about concepts in the mind that have never been instantiated by a particular? Do these ideas have to be uninstantiated universals? Armstrong uses the example of a wallpaper design that has never been and never will be instantiated by a particular wallpaper. Some might consider this a universal that is not and never will be instantiated. Here Armstrong does not reference his combinational theory of possibility, but it does work for this instance. A wallpaper designer might have a design in his/her head, but just never happened use this design on any particular wallpaper. This design is not like any other design, but its properties are not properties that have never been instantiated. The design will still have colors and shapes that are or have been instantiated thus it will possess no uninstantiated universals. This design is one that would occur in a possible world and would then just be a recombination of the actual world's instantiated universals.

CRITICISM OF ARMSTRONG

Along with Plato, Alan Donagan refers to and supports the notion of uninstantiated universals in a 1963 issue of *The Monist*. Here he is analyzing Bertrand Russell's theory of universals from his book titled The Problems of Philosophy. Russell, a realist, is claiming that in order to understand the statement "I am in my room" we must understand *I*, *my room*, and *in*. *I* and *my room* are not that difficult to grasp because they are names of things or particulars, but *in* is not as obvious. Russell says that "*in* has meaning; it denotes a relation which holds between me and my room," and *in* can be instantiated in many places so it is real and it is a universal.²² After going over Russell's

²² Donagan, 212.

view, Donagan claims that *in* can hold true for a negative statement just as it can for an affirmative one (I am not in my room/I am in my room), and he even points out where Russell states that negative facts are possible. With this being said, Donagan believes that Russell's theory shows support for uninstantiated universals just as it would for instantiated ones. On the other hand, Russell evades this problem by accepting the Principle of Acquaintance. This principle claims that "in every proposition that we can apprehend all the constituents are really entities with which we have immediate acquaintance."²³ That is, we can only contemplate those things that we are acquainted with. If we are not acquainted with something, we cannot comprehend or make judgments about that thing. Thus we cannot think of negative propositions because we are not acquainted with the negation.²⁴ Donagan attempts to refute this assertion by claiming that there can be actual relations that we are not acquainted with. For example, there might be a relationship between two particulars that we are not aware of and do not have language for. So saying that two particulars have a relation that you are not acquainted with is a coherent statement. If one could think of a case of an instantiated universal that one were not acquainted with, one could also think of an uninstantiated universal that one were not acquainted with. Thus, we have uninstantiated universals.²⁵

I can understand the claim that there are instantiated universals that we are not aware of, acquainted with, or do not have the language to express. It is not hard to imagine two particulars that have some relation that has either not been discovered or

²³ *Ibid*, 218.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 218.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 219-220.

cannot be comprehended by our human minds. For example, it is possible that there is a universal, let's call it universal *a*, that humans are not acquainted with, yet it is instantiated by particular *X*. The idea of there being universals that I am not aware of is not a stretch of the imagination. On the other hand, it seems counterintuitive to say that two particulars do not share a relation (negative property) that I am not familiar with. Then, instead of particular *X* instantiating a universal that I am not aware of, particular *X* would not be instantiating a universal that I am not aware of. That is, there is a universal that one would not be aware of that is not instantiated in a particular. This would then seem to be asserting the idea that there are uninstantiated universals, but we are just not acquainted with them. Regardless of this claim of unfamiliar uninstantiated universals, this would not go against Armstrong's view of universals. These uninstantiated universals that the particulars have would be seen as negative universals, which are not accepted as universals. Not having a property, whether we are familiar with that property or not, is not in itself a universal. Therefore, Donagan's notion of uninstantiated universals would not fit into Armstrong's theory of universals.

Another contemporary philosopher that shows support for uninstantiated universals is Michael Loux. He claims that there are universals that are always instantiated in all possible worlds, such as "*being colored if green*" and "*being self-identical*", some are sometimes instantiated in all possible worlds, such as *being red*, and some are never instantiated in any possible world, such as *bachelors being married*.²⁶ Loux claims that our actual world is just a possible world, and that there are universals

²⁶ Loux, 93.

that are sometimes true in all possible worlds, which are instantiated in our actual world and not necessarily instantiated in other possible worlds. For example, redness is instantiated in our actual world, but there is a possible world where nothing is red because redness is not instantiated in any particular. Thus, we have possible worlds with uninstantiated universals. This does not cause a problem because even though Loux declares that our actual world is just one possible world it is really more than that. Our actual world is one of the worlds that was possible, but the difference is that now it is actual and this is the line of argument that Armstrong would take. To once again call upon Armstrong's combinatorial theory of possibility, possible worlds are just a recombination of that which is actualized in our actual world. Therefore, possible worlds are dependent on what is actualized, and are thus just philosophical ideas that enable philosophers to talk about possibility.

Regardless of the distinction between possible worlds and our actual world, Loux goes on to claim that since there could be universals that are instantiated in the actual world and not in another possible world, there could be universals that are instantiated in another possible world and not in the actual world.²⁷ But this claim that there are universals that are instantiated in possible worlds that are not instantiated in our actual world contradicts Armstrong's combinatorial theory of possibility. To restate the theory, Armstrong's view is that universals in possible worlds are just recombinations of the universals that are instantiated in our actual world. Thus, there could be no universals that are instantiated in a possible and not in the actual world because those properties and

²⁷ Loux, 96.

relations that are in possible worlds are only the ones that are in our actual world.

Therefore, there are no uninstantiated universals.

One last view to look at is that of Reinhardt Grossmann. In Grossmann's book, *The Existence of the World*, he differentiates between what he refers to as the views of an ontologist and a naturalist. An ontologist believes there to be two types of entities: individual entities and property entities. Individual entities are ones that are both temporal and spatial while property entities are atemporal and non-spatial.²⁸ The contrasting view is that of a naturalist who claims there is only that which is temporal and spatial.²⁹ That is, the naturalist believes that not only particulars are temporal and spatial, but properties are as well. Grossmann takes the side of the ontologist, and in doing so, describes what he calls the *universe* and the *world*. Grossmann's universe is the universe as we know it. It consists of all the concrete things we know about: atoms, molecules, plants, animals, solar systems, galaxies, etc. Therefore, the individual entities the ontologist claims are temporal and spatial are those that make up the universe. The *world* on the other hand is what Grossmann identifies as the place that houses the properties and abstract things that do not belong to the universe.³⁰ In other words, the *universe* is our concrete realm and the *world* is the abstract realm that some might refer to as the "Platonic heaven".

A naturalist, on the other hand, not only claims that the *universe* is all that exists, but he also claims, as is the case of Armstrong, that physics explains all that there is. If

²⁸ Grossmann, *The Existence of the World*, 6. Grossmann points out that many believe that that which is temporal is spatial and then assumes that that which is atemporal is not spatial.

²⁹ *ibid*, 7.

³⁰ *ibid*, 8.

he were ordered to give up naturalism, he would be forced to give up physics as well because there would be entities (i.e. universals) that were not explained by physics. Therefore, the ontologists would then believe that “the structure of the world is the proper subject of study for the philosopher, while the universe is the proper subject of study for the scientist”³¹, while the naturalist would probably claim that the universe is the proper subject of study for both the scientists and philosophers. The ontologist, with the acceptance of Grossmann’s *world*, would have to accept the idea of uninstantiated universals because of the atemporal non-spatial world, and the naturalist would have to deny uninstantiated universals because of their denial for Grossmann’s *world*.

As mentioned before, Armstrong’s view is that of a naturalist that claims both naturalism and physicalism. He wants to take the *universe* to be all that there is and claim that physics explains all that is in the universe. On the other hand, Grossmann allows there to be a realm, *the world*, which is separate from the universe and is not governed by the science of physics. When it came to Donagan and his acceptance of negative universals or Loux and his idea of possible worlds, Armstrong took issue with these claims and seemed to have an answer. But with Grossmann, there seems to be a larger amount of pressure on Armstrong’s view of realism.

DOES ARMSTRONG’S VIEW STAND UP TO THE CRITICISM?

For the most part we have mapped out Armstrong’s view of universals and how it aids the Principle of Instantiation. His view allows us to “bring universals down to earth” where we can observe their instantiation. Disregarding his view causes us to invent, as

³¹ *ibid*, 9.

he claims, a nonmaterial world or Platonic heaven that is not necessary for our ontology. His view allows us to refute the claim that universals can be negative properties, and it allows us to see universals as things that are only instantiated in our actual world. But of course this is not a foolproof system. If it were, there would be no need for philosophical inquiry. So, we now turn to the problems that lie within this view of universals to see if his view is strong enough to resist the criticism.

In his chapter *Universals as Attributes*, Armstrong claims that we should dismiss a Platonic heaven because it is a “mere hypothesis” that cannot be proven. This is a relevant claim, but just because a Platonic heaven is easily doubted does not mean that it is not real. Those who support uninstantiated universals do not claim that the existence of uninstantiated universals has been proven, but their existence has not been disproved either.³² We must then ask ourselves what is the more plausible view for modern realism.

In criticizing Armstrong’s form of realism, Grossmann also points out that a naturalistic realist view such as Armstrong’s could be inconsistent. He shows that naturalism could be looked at in two ways: pure naturalism and impure naturalism. A pure naturalist integrates naturalism with nominalism, and therefore rejects universals and accepts entities as in time and space. In contrast with this pure form, impure naturalism combines naturalism and realism and therefore also accepts entities as in time and space, but includes universals. Impure naturalism would also accept particulars as having a single location and universals as having multiply locations. Therefore, an impure naturalist would have to reject what is referred to as the axiom of localization

³² Donagan, 220.

(“No entity whatsoever can exist at different places at once or at interrupted time intervals.”) because the impure naturalist accepts universals as being multiply located.³³ Armstrong’s view could be seen as an impure naturalist view of universals. He is not willing to allow for uninstantiated universals, yet he is a naturalist and a realist. That is, he is a realist so he accepts universals and he is a naturalist so he only allows for entities in time and space (some, particulars, being singly located and others, universals, as multiply located). The problem that lies here is that Armstrong, as mentioned before, is also a physicalist and believes that all things within our universe (which is all that there is) are explained by physics. Rejecting the axiom of localization seems to be a contradiction to physics because it allows for entities to be multiply located. It seems that a realist that would reject this axiom would also reject the naturalist idea of the universe.³⁴ That is, Grossmann expects a naturalist to accept the axiom of localization because our universe is all that exists and physics tells us to accept the idea that things are not multiply located. On the other hand, Armstrong accepts that our universe is all that there is and that physics explains the laws of our universe, but he also wants to accept the multiple locations of universals. Grossmann wants to say that this is a rather counterintuitive way of thinking and therefore harms Armstrong’s cause, but this is not necessarily the case. Armstrong is willing to accept our universe as all that there is and physics as governing all that there is while rejecting the axiom of localization. He can do so because universals are instantiated in particulars and are thus located in time and space. Physics governs the laws of particulars and universals are properties that these

³³ Grossmann, 13.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

particulars instantiate. Therefore, physics is not undermined by the fact that universals are multiply located because universals are not the concrete entities that physics can explain.

As for instantiation, Armstrong allows it to be in the past, present, or future. This means that universals can be instantiated in the past and not instantiated in the present or future, instantiated in the present and not the past or future, instantiated in the future and not in the past or present, or in any combination of the three. But then do these properties and relations that are not particulars act like particulars? Meaning, can they cease to exist just as a particular does? For example, did species that are currently extinct possess universals that are no longer instantiated? If so, then the universals have to become extinct along with the species, otherwise they would currently be uninstantiated and need a place to reside (Platonic heaven). To alleviate this problem, past universals should be thought of as ceasing to exist with whatever instantiated them.³⁵ As for universals that will be instantiated in the future, they can just be thought of as universals that have not come into existence yet. When some new particular comes into existence the *way it is* or the *way it stands to others* will come into existence as well. Thus, there is no need for uninstantiated universals. Regardless, if universals have existed in the past and not currently or will exist in the future and not currently, we cannot think of them going somewhere after they exist or being somewhere before they exist. If we do not think

³⁵ Also, species that cease to exist could have instantiated universals that are currently instantiated yet in different combinations. But these universals would be presently instantiated universals and not just past universals.

along these lines, we would have to give way to a Platonic heaven or give way to accepting only currently instantiated universals which is not what we are trying to do.

But before we leave this last topic, let's take another look at Loux's claim about possible worlds. Loux says that there are universals that are instantiated in our actual world and not in possible worlds; therefore there could be universals that are instantiated in possible worlds and not our actual world. This problem seemed to be alleviated by Armstrong's combinatorial theory of possibility, but does this combinatorial theory refer only to universals that are currently instantiated? Can past universals be instantiated in possible worlds? If a past universal ceases to exist in our actual world, it seems plausible to still have it instantiated in a possible world. But this would then give us an uninstantiated universal in our actual world, which would violate the Principle of Instantiation. To make this clearer let's refer to the example of the dinosaurs. If the dinosaurs instantiated a universal that is no longer instantiated, it seems that it could still be instantiated in a possible world where the dinosaurs never became extinct. Then this dinosaur universal would be uninstantiated in our actual world. How would Armstrong correct this problem?

One way to view this problem would be to view universals that have ceased to exist (i.e. past universals) as universals that could exist in other possible worlds. That is, a dinosaur could have instantiated a universal that is no longer instantiated in our actual world, but could still be instantiated in a possible world. If we had universals that were instantiated in other possible worlds and not our actual world, some would say that we have uninstantiated universals. If these universals were considered to be uninstantiated,

they would not be able to be accepted as universals under Armstrong's theory.

Therefore, it would be impossible to have past universals that are instantiated in other possible worlds and not in our actual world. But if there cannot be past universals, all our universals would have to be currently or future instantiated universals. If this were the case, Armstrong could deal with this problem by again trying to employ his combinatorial theory of possibility. In the case of the dinosaurs, he could say that the dinosaurs possessed the same universals that are instantiated currently, but they are just arranged in a different way. This is not too hard to imagine because dinosaurs do seem to possess similar properties to things that exist in today's world (e.g. animality, movability, etc.). But then, if all universals that were instantiated by past particulars were still instantiated today, we would have no past universals. We would only have currently and future instantiated universals. This might be possible to think about because, as mentioned above, there are things of the past that do not exist anymore but could have instantiated universals that are still instantiated today. For example, dinosaurs could have instantiated such universals as animality and movability, which are still instantiated today. If this were the case, universals would have to be basic to persist through time. That is, the same universals that existed at the beginning of time would have to exist now because there could be no past universals. This is a far stretch, but it could be possible to see universals as so simple that they could not cease to exist. Of course new universals could come into existence, but once they exist they could not die out because, as we mentioned, a past universal would then exist in a possible world and yield an uninstantiated universals.

The concern with this idea is that our universals do seem to cease to exist. That is, there seems to be properties and relations that were once instantiated by particulars that are no longer instantiated. In the example of the dinosaurs, it would seem that they instantiated some dinosauriness that is no longer instantiated, but if this were the case, we would have past universals. To solve this problem we would have to revamp our concept of universals, and thus dinosauriness would not be a universal. We could possibly make universals simpler so that they could persist through time, but this is somewhat counterintuitive. Armstrong's universals are properties and relations that particulars instantiate, and it seems that properties and relations can possibly cease to exist. How would Armstrong solve this problem?

Armstrong could try to claim that there are no past instantiated universals, but it is not likely that he would make this claim. In his theory of universals, he claims that universals must exist in space and time. If this is so, there can be no uninstantiated universals because they exist in space and time and are therefore instantiated by particulars. They are not just free floating entities in our world of space and time, but they are *ways* particulars are or *ways* they stand to other particulars. With this being said, we must understand that our world of time consists of the past, present, and future. If a universal existed in our world, it does not just leave our world and go to a Platonic heaven when the particular that instantiates it ceases to exist. The universal either continues to exist because it is instantiated in another particular or it ceases to exist along with its particular. We cannot assume that past universals yield uninstantiated universals because that would put most of our present universals at risk. For example, if there is a

universal that is instantiated by humans and only humans, then it is at risk of being a past universal because it is possible that the human race could cease to exist. Therefore, universals such as the one in this example are not at risk of becoming uninstantiated because they were instantiated in time and space. The *way* something is does not go somewhere else (Platonic heaven) when the particular ceases to be that *way*.

If Armstrong does not want to accept uninstantiated universals, then he could be at risk of giving up past universals as well, but I do not believe that is necessary. His theory of universals requires universals to be instantiated by particulars and past universals fit that criterion. On top of that his adoption of an impure form of naturalism could be seen as contradicting physics, but as mentioned physics explains physical entities and universals are not that. They are entities that are instantiated by physical entities (particulars) and physics explains that, but it is not physics' job to explain the multiple locations of universals. Therefore, Armstrong's theory of universals stands up to the challenge. It is presented with a significant amount of criticism, but it has the ability to persist making it a rather attractive realist theory of universals.

CONCLUSION

Is Armstrong's view practical? At first glance his view seems rather coherent and compatible with a modern view of the world. Particulars can be thought of as thin, but are actually thick in reality. Universals are *ways things are* and *ways thing stand to each other*, which rids us of the idea that universals are mystical entities that are free of particulars. They are properties and relations with no negation, which allows a particular

to have a finite number of universals and thus causing them to be easier to comprehend and understand. And they are something that must be instantiated, which rids us of a Platonic heaven. As mentioned before, this does not disprove a Platonic heaven, but it is more intuitive to look at properties and relations without inventing a place to put them. The *way* a thing is or stands to another is not something that can exist on its own. The redness of a ball cannot exist without the ball so we do not have to think of it as something that can.

With this being said, there were a few things that threatened Armstrong's view. The Principle of Instantiation seems like an excellent way to rid us of a Platonic heaven, but whether or not this worked for past universals seemed to be a new question. The question of whether or not physics was threatened by the multiple locations of universals was also a serious challenge to Armstrong's theory. Both of these challenges can be dealt with using Armstrong's view. Past universals are said to exist in time and space and therefore do not require the existence of a separate world to house them even if they exist in the past. As for physics, universals are entities in our concrete world, but not entities that are concrete. Physics is the science that explains the physical objects of the world, and universals are only properties of these physical objects. Therefore, universals do not challenge the legitimacy of physics.

Therefore, Armstrong appears to have a reasonable view of universals. His explanation makes the combination of realism and naturalism an accurate view of our actual world. He does not succumb to the temptation of a Platonic heaven and therefore does not present us with an extreme or odd form of realism. Rather, his adequate view of

Rosenberger, Lawrence Joseph, 2009, UMSL, p. 28

universals along with the Principle of Instantiation is a reasonable realistic analysis for our modern day view of realism.

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