

DISCUSSION

PARTICULARS—BARE AND QUALIFIED

In his article "Particulars"¹ Professor Wilfrid Sellars has defended a position which substitutes for the "absurd notion" of "bare" particulars a concept deemed by him to be more defensible. Moreover he presents us with a diagnosis of this "absurdity," and presents his conception of a particular as one which will strike at the roots of the disease as well as remove its more obvious manifestations. The conception to which this therapeutic value is attributed is not an original one; it is essentially the particular of, e.g., McTaggart which he puts forward. But since Professor Sellars draws from the conception some novel implications and puts it to some novel uses, it would be appropriate to critically consider the whole question in the context of his discussion.²

Professor Sellars considers the absurdity of "bare" particulars to be generally admitted, although he throws in for good measure a brief *reductio ad absurdum*, which we shall discuss later. This absurdity he traces to a confusion between facts and particulars. It is because we conceive a particular to contain a universal as a part that we are forced to embrace one or the other of two equally repugnant alternatives: (1) the particular consists solely of universals;³ (2) the particular contains in addition to universals a "bare" (i.e., unqualified) particular. But we only get into this dilemma by illegitimately assimilating particulars to facts, which do contain universals as parts. Another form of the same confusion is the supposition that the same *basic* particular (one which does not itself contain particulars as parts) can exemplify two or more universals. For if it could it would be complex, and this complexity could only come from the multiplicity of *universals it contained*; we would then be back in the fatal dilemma. But these confusions can all be avoided if we stick to the true concept of a particular as an *instance* (or, synonymously, an *exemplification*) of a universal. A particular which exemplifies Greemness⁴ does not contain Greemness as a part—it is an instance of Greemness; more concisely expressed, it is a grum, i.e., it is greem. "When we say that *a* is

¹ This journal, Vol. XIII, No. 2, Dec., 1952, pp. 184-199.

² We forego consideration of the many other interesting points in the paper, e.g., the discussion of the relation of universals and classes.

³ Professor Sellars refers us elsewhere for an exhibition of the absurdity of this alternative.

⁴ Professor Sellars' jargon, not a misprint.

greem, we imply no internal complexity in *a*.”⁵ Having grasped this notion we are not tempted to fall into the above confusions. As incomplex, the particular can neither exemplify more than one universal nor contain a universal as a part; and so our dilemma is avoided.

When we examine the course of this argument more closely, however, it itself begins to bear traces of confusion. It would seem that the argument for the impossibility of multiple exemplification requires that we not conceive instancing (or exemplification) as a relation. It is true that Sellars does not explicitly make this assumption; it is only the conception of “the instancing relation as a relation which binds *a* and Greemness to constitute a greem item” which he stigmatizes as an “obvious howler.”⁶ But the argument itself seems to require the stronger assumption that instancing is not a relation at all. We are told that “a basic particular which is an instance of Greemness is not a bare particular standing in a relation to Greemness, it is a grum.” And likewise an instance of Kleemness is a klum. “Surely, however intimately related a grum and a klum may be, they cannot be identical.”⁷ That this argument presupposes the non-relational status of instancing is shown by the following consideration. If “a grum” meant that which stands in the relation of instancing to Greemness (and analogously for a klum)—whatever sort of relation instancing were, and whether a “bare” particular were involved or not—it would certainly not be impossible for a grum and a klum to be identical; just as it is not impossible for a president and a nephew to be identical. In general if being a grum (i.e., being an instance of Greemness) and being a klum (i.e., being an instance of Kleemness) were defined relationally, then their identity would certainly be conceivable, and so it would be conceivable that the same particular be an instance of more than one universal. Thus Sellars’s argument rests on the denial that instancing is a relation of any sort.

This denial of the relational status of exemplification is to be found explicitly stated in C. D. Broad, who classifies it as a “mode of union,”⁸ and in W. E. Johnson, who speaks of the “characterizing tie,”⁹ as well as in McTaggart, who holds that although in a given situation of exemplification it is true that, e.g., Smith stands in a certain relation to Happiness, this fact is derivative from a more fundamental one—viz., the fact that Smith is happy (this latter fact being nonrelational in character).¹⁰ But this denial seems to me no more intelligible when covertly assumed by Sellars than

⁵ Sellars, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁸ *Examination of McTaggart's Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1934), Vol. I, p. 94.

⁹ *Logic* (Cambridge, 1924), Vol. I, pp. 10–11.

¹⁰ *The Nature of Existence* (Cambridge, 1921), Vol. I, p. 70.

when explicitly avowed by the above-mentioned. If instancing is not a relation, what categoreal status does it have? It seems impossible to provide any plausible alternative. It likewise seems impossible to frame any general concept of relation which would exclude instancing. If the notion of a relation is definable at all, it would have to be defined in some such way as this: a universal which requires two or more entities (of appropriate type level or levels) for its exemplification. And any such definition would surely cover instancing. Moreover the characteristics which Broad cites to distinguish the "inherence mode of union" from relations, and which Johnson cites to differentiate the "characterizing tie" from relations, all seem to hold of relations as well. For example, Broad and Johnson each insists that his version of instancing is not a *component* of any fact or "construct," but is a mode of togetherness or mode of union of the components—viz., a particular and a universal—in a complex of a certain sort. According to Johnson its "peculiar and sole function" is to bind components together to form a unity.¹¹ But this is an excellent account of the function of relations in general. In any admittedly relational fact—such as the fact that John loves Mary—the relational term (whether we call it a *component* or not is unimportant) has as its "peculiar and sole function" binding the other terms together into a unity of a certain sort. Thus it appears that there is no intelligible alternative to construing instancing as a relation.

But if this be the case, Sellars's whole position collapses. More specifically, once we have clearly grasped the relational status of instancing, three consequences can be seen to follow which, taken together, completely subvert his position.

1. We must ask concerning any situation involving this relation (e.g., a exemplifying Greemness) what the relata are. One of them is a universal. What is the other? It will obviously not do to reply—a grum (defined as an instance of greemness); for this would amount to saying that the relatum in question is that which stands in the instancing relation to Greemness; true enough but hardly enlightening. It still leaves open the question—what is it that stands in the instancing relation to Greemness? Thus, since Sellars's "instance" is seen to beg the question, the only alternative left appears to be a "bare" particular, or what I prefer to call a substratum.¹² Once we see the need for supplying an entity to which the universal involved bears the relation of being exemplified, we can see that only a *bare* particular would do the job; Sellars's *qualified* particular would presuppose the very relationship for which it is to be a term.

¹¹ Broad, *loc. cit.*, Johnson, *loc. cit.*

¹² To consider an individual thing as consisting wholly of universals would amount to giving up the exemplification relation altogether, at least as fundamental. The whole discussion between Professor Sellars and myself proceeds in a framework set by the rejection of this alternative.

2. It also follows that a concrete individual thing is to be conceived as including universals as components. For in any relational situation the interrelated parts form a whole by virtue of that relationship. Thus whenever a substratum exemplified a universal (or universals) a whole is formed consisting of the substratum and the universals so related. Professor Sellars would presumably say that this whole is a fact, not an individual. But even assuming that there are such entities as "facts," it would seem that what is primarily formed by the holding of exemplification relations is rather a concrete individual,¹³ and this for two reasons. First a fact, at least as usually conceived by philosophers, is timeless; but since a substratum exemplifies a universal at a particular time, a whole is likewise generated which exists *at that time*. Second, and more important, if we take a "bare" substratum as the relatum of the instancing relation, we still need a concrete qualified individual to make our ontology complete. We need to speak not only of bare substrata and universals, but also of concrete qualified particular things. And what can a concrete individual be (having rejected Sellars's incomplex qualified particulars and their aggregates) but the whole consisting of a substratum plus universals related to it by the relation of exemplification.

3. It is evident, as mentioned before, that once the relational status of instancing is clearly grasped, multiple exemplification becomes quite intelligible. As Sellars admits, there is no reason why the same bare substratum could not stand in the same relation to two or more universals. Whether this is ever actually the case is a question which would have to be settled on other grounds. But in terms of the position we are presenting there is nothing in the categoreal nature of the entities involved which would rule out the possibility.

Thus it seems that if we are to retain particulars at all, we are forced into the "absurdity" of bare particulars with its attendant "howlers" of multiple instancing and the notion that an individual thing contains universals as constituents. But what of the *reductio* of this notion effected by Sellars? I quote:

Perhaps the neatest way in which to expose the absurdity of bare particulars, is to show that the sentence, 'Universals are exemplified by bare particulars,' is a self-contradiction. As a matter of fact, the self-contradictory character of this sentence becomes evident the moment we translate it into the symbolism of *Principia Mathematica*. It becomes, ' $(x) \cdot (\exists \phi) \phi x \supset - (\exists \phi) \phi x$ ' or, in other words, 'If a particular exemplifies a universal, then there is no universal which it exemplifies.'¹⁴

¹³ Presumably anything which could be called a concrete individual would require (on our analysis) *many* universals exemplified by a substratum.

¹⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 184, fn. 1.

Would it not be better to maintain that instancing is not a relation, however unintelligible this may be, rather than embrace so stark a contradiction?

Fortunately for our position, the situation is not precisely as Sellars depicts it. Whenever an old and widely held doctrine is shown to involve some simple and glaring contradiction, the suspicion quite properly arises that the doctrine in question has been distorted through translation into a language not rich enough to express it adequately. This is precisely what has happened here. Of course if to call a particular "bare" were to deny that it exemplifies universals in the same sense of 'exemplify' in which its function is just exactly to exemplify universals, then the notion would be self-contradictory; also it probably never would have been held so widely (assuming we can ignore the current theory according to which philosophical sanity first descended on the human race some time after 1900). On the other hand, there must be some sense in which a substratum fails to exemplify any universal; else why call it "bare"? Evidently what is called for is a distinction of senses of "exemplify" and it must be admitted that advocates of substrata have not explicitly done this job. It is not difficult, however, to distinguish two such senses, in terms of which we can give an analysis of the substratum concept which will both reflect the way in which the notion of substratum has been used and also enable us to avoid the above contradiction.

Let us refer to the exemplification relation which holds between a substratum and a universal as "underlying." As we have pointed out already, in any such relationship there will be generated a complex whole consisting of the substratum and one or more universals which it underlies. This complex is what we ordinarily think of as a concrete qualified individual thing—like a rock, a man, or a chair, (or, in a event ontology, a slice of the history of a rock, a man, or a chair). This concrete individual will also sustain a certain relation to each of its properties which will be a sort of part-whole relation, and which could also be correctly termed "exemplification." We would certainly ordinarily say that the pencil exemplifies the color yellow, in addition to the ultimate substratum of the pencil, if any, exemplifying the color. Let us call this sort of exemplification "inclusion." We could now proceed to draw various distinctions between the two relations. For example the first relation is external, the second internal. A substratum might have underlain quite different properties from those which it in fact does and still be the same substratum; since it includes no properties, its identity does not depend on being associated with one set of universals rather than another. But a concrete individual could not possibly fail to include any of its properties and still be exactly the same individual which it is; its self-identity depends on its constituents.

In terms of this distinction we can characterize a "bare" particular as something which underlies universals but includes none; the latter feature constituting its "bareness" as contrasted with a concrete individual. So characterized the concept is not subject to the alleged contradiction. It only appears to be self-contradictory when we attempt to express it in a linguistic framework which has been constructed for a purpose not requiring the ontological distinctions which are crucial here;¹⁵ in such cases it is an easy matter to multiply contradictions, which a more adequate interpretation will show to be without necessity.

Incidentally this distinction also enables us to dispose of another of Sellars's arguments against treating a universal as a component of an individual thing. We are told that to conceive a particular, *a*, and a property, Greemness, as bound by the instancing relation into a complex whole which is greem, would be to say that it is the complex *a-instancing-Greemness* which is greem, not *a* itself. But this is a "self-contradictory mistake, since to say that *a* is an instance of Greemness is exactly to say that *a* is greem."¹⁶ Our distinction clears up this "mare's nest" quite simply. The substratum, *a*, is greem in the sense of underlying Greemness, while the complex *a-underlying-Greemness* is greem, in the sense of including Greemness. Conceived in this way no contradiction is involved.

In this discussion I have argued, contrary to Professor Sellars, that the only intelligible alternative to a Russellian doctrine of an individual thing as a complex of universals, is the concept of an individual as a complex consisting of a substratum underlying one or more universals; that the notion of an "instance of a universal" which is qualified yet incomplex will not bear close examination, and in fact collapses as soon as we ask about the categoreal status of instancing. I would not wish to maintain, however, that the substratum theory is without difficulties. I believe, in fact, that it is subject to serious paradoxes; paradoxes which are, however, much more subtle than the one presented by Professor Sellars, and which are of a less fatal character than those which plague his concept of "instances." But this is, in Professor Sellars's happy phrase, "a story for another occasion."

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¹⁵ Ironically enough, the language of *Principia Mathematica* seems to presuppose something like the notion of a particular we are presenting here. But since this language was designed to analyze mathematics, not metaphysics, it does not contain in its structure the distinction of two senses of exemplification which is necessary for explicitly stating the notion.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 190.