The Problem of Universals, Realism, and God

By Paul Gould

Abstract There has been much discussion of late on what exactly the Problem of Universals is and is not. Of course answers to these questions and many more like it depend on what is supposed to be explained by a solution to the Problem of Universals. In this paper, I seek to establish two claims: first, that when the facts (explanada) to be explained and the kind of explanation needed are elucidated, it will be shown that the Problem of Universals is a real metaphysical problem, not a pseudo problem; secondly, the facts whose explanation posed the problem in the Problem of Universals still provide reason to think realism regarding universals is true, even if God exists.

There has been much discussion of late on what exactly the Problem of Universals is and is not. Is it a linguistic, epistemic, semantic, or metaphysical problem? Is it the problem of the one over many or the many over one? Is it a problem about sparse properties or abundant properties? Is it about reconciling apparent inconsistencies or eliminating unspecified scenarios? Does a solution to the problem require conceptual analysis, ontological commitment, or identifying truthmakers? Is the problem a real problem or merely a pseudo problem? Is God's reality relevant to the problem and proffered solutions? And so on.

Of course answers to these questions and many more like it depend on what is supposed to be explained by a solution to the Problem of Universals. In what follows I seek to establish two claims: first, that when the facts (explanada) to be explained and the kind of explanation needed are elucidated, it will be shown that the Problem of Universals is a real metaphysical problem, not a pseudo problem; secondly, the facts whose explanation posed the problem in the Problem of Universals still provide reason to think realism regarding universals is true, even if God exists. Thus, the Problem of Universals does provide *prima facie* support for realism

regarding universals—and the problem is, or ought to be, of central concern in the contemporary discussion between Realists and anti-realists.

1. The Problem of Universals is (at bottom) a Metaphysical Problem

Keith Campbell introduces the Problem of Universals as follows:

> Now we can pose two very different questions about, say, red things. We can take *one* single red object and ask of it: what is it about this thing in virtue of which it is red? We shall call this the *A question*.
> Secondly, we can ask of any *two* red things: what is it about these two things in virtue of which they are both red? Let that be the *B question*. (1990, 29)

Campbell is not asking how a predicate, (e.g., the "…is F" in "*a* is F") applies to particulars (e.g., the *a* in "*a* is F"). Nor is Campbell asking epistemological questions about how we can know or recognize that a predicate correctly applies to a particular. Rather, some phenomenon is noted by Campbell, and he seeks a hypothesis that, if true, would explain it. Indeed, as Alex Oliver points out, "we know we are in the realm of murky metaphysics by the presence of the weasel words 'in virtue of'" (1996, 48). I agree with Oliver. The Problem of Universals is fundamentally a *metaphysical* problem and once the murkiness of this kind of explanation is resolved and a solution to the problem is offered, something can be said about the semantics of predicates and the epistemology of predicate application. This is an important point that shouldn't be overlooked: our fundamental evidence to be explained in the Problem of Universals does not come from the behavior of linguistic expressions but from an objective, worldly reality.[1]

Following Campbell then, there are two facts in need of metaphysical explanation, qualitative facts (identified in the *A question*) and resemblance facts (identified in the *B question*). We can parse such facts by way of semantic ascent into the formal mode with the following sentences:

---

[1] Michael Jubien suggests that there is a kind of conceptual bias among philosophers when considering the Problem of Universals, in thinking that "we must look hard at natural language semantics in order to evolve a theory of properties." But this, according to Jubien, is to put the semantic cart before the metaphysical horse (1989, 164).

(1) *a* is F.
(2) *a* and *b* are both F.

Parsed in the formal (and canonical) mode the question is how sentences like (1) and (2) can be true.

It is important to note that qualitative and resemblance facts are *different in kind*. Qualitative facts point to a particular's *distinctiveness*—for example, the fact that Socrates is human is one fact among many about Socrates. Socrates is (also) snub-nosed, wise, the teacher of Plato, and more besides. Each of these facts are distinct qualitative facts about the one and same Socrates. We would expect an answer to Campbell's *A question* to explain the objective, worldly difference among these facts. Resemblance facts, on the other hand, point to the *unity* of a class of objects—the redness of balls and fire trucks or the humanness shared by the 7 billion existing persons on planet earth, and so on. Members of each of these natural classes resemble each other in some respect. We would expect an answer to Campbell's *B question* to explain the objective, worldly resemblance among these facts. If, as I suggest, qualitative and resemblance facts are different in kind, then the Problem of Universals is not, contra Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra, the problem of the Many over One instead of the problem of the One over Many (2000). Rather, there are two kinds of facts to be explained in the Problem of Universals, and neither fact can be explained away in terms of the other (more on this below).

2. A Solution to the Problem of Universals Requires a Theory of Properties

Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra (2000, 257) thinks the Problem of Universals is the problem of giving a metaphysical explanation of how qualitative and resemblance facts are possible (or in the formal mode, how sentences expressing such facts can be true). Regarding resemblance facts, he asks, how is it possible for different things to be the same when their difference *apparently*

excludes their sameness? Regarding qualitative facts, he asks, how is it possible for the same thing to be different when its sameness *apparently excludes* its difference?

Casting the Problem of Universals in terms of how such facts are possible is, by my lights, a mistake. It also has the unfortunate effect of misconstruing the needed solution. But first, why is the Problem of Universals not about how such facts are possible? I give a simple reason. Qualitative and resemblance facts are to be taken as actual and *a fortiori* possible. They are Moorean facts. As David Armstrong states when considering resemblance facts,

> I suggest that the fact of sameness of type is a Moorean fact…[one of the many] facts which even philosophers should not deny, whatever philosophical account or analysis they give of such facts….Any comprehensive philosophy must try to give some account of Moorean facts. They constitute the compulsory questions in the philosophical examination paper. (1980, 441)

The question isn't one of possibility, rather, there is puzzlement over the sameness and distinctiveness of such facts, and this puzzlement is in need of analysis.

The next question is what a metaphysical explanation of qualitative and resemblance facts would be. Rodriguez-Pereyra (2000, 259-260)[2] thinks there are three candidates for the kind of solution the Problem of Universals requires:

(a) a *conceptual* analysis of the *content* of [(1) and (2)];
(b) an account of the *ontological commitment* of [(1) and (2)]; and
(c) an account of the *truthmakers* or *ontological grounds* of [(1) and (2)].

Candidate (a) is not viable because conceptual analysis can only tell us about the content of concepts we use whereas the Problem of Universals is "an ontological problem, an answer to which should tell us something about what there is" (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2000, 260). This leaves candidates (b) and (c) which are in need of further clarification. Regarding (b), "the ontological commitments of a sentence are those entities that must exist for the sentence to be true" (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2000, 260). Regarding (c) "the truthmaker of a sentence… is that *in virtue*

---

[2] Rodriguez-Pereyra is here following Oliver (1996, 50-74).

of which it is true" (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2000, 260). Rodriguez-Pereyra argues that (c) is the only viable candidate and hence the Problem of Universals is about providing the truthmaker for (1) and (2).

Why is (c) the only viable candidate for the kind of solution the Problem of Universals requires? The answer, according to Rodriguez-Pereyra, is because (c) is the only candidate that provides a basis for showing how it is *possible* that (1) and (2) be true. Since the truth-makers of a sentence are those entities the existence of which provide a *sufficient* condition for its truth, then if sentences (1) and (2)'s truth-makers exist they must be true. Which is to show how such facts, expressed in (1) and (2), are possible.

Contra Rodriguez-Pereyra, I do not see how truth-makers do any real work. As Frasier MacBride (2002, 31) points out, if the real worry is how qualitative and resemblance facts are possible, then appeal to truth-makers for sentences like (1) and (2) will not remove the worry. For the worry will apply to the entities that necessitate (1) and (2)'s truth as well. Add to this that plausibly the truth-maker for sentences like (1) and (2) are the corresponding qualitative and resemblance facts themselves, and it becomes clear that the worry has not be eliminated.

But, if the Problem of Universals is not, as I have suggested, about how qualitative and resemblance facts are possible, since they are actual, we can discern another candidate solution to the Problem of Universals. This candidate solution sets aside the demonstrative ideal embodied in (a)-(c) as unrealistic and seeks a more modest solution, an inference to the best explanation of the phenomena in question among various competitors:

(d) a proposed *theory of properties* that best explains (1) and (2).

Like anti-reductionism in causation, the term 'explanation' seems to resist analysis in non-explanatory terms, hence its appearance in candidate (d).[3] I think it is plausible that there are no non-explanatory terms that can adequately explicate the notion of explanation, and thus I shall not try and explicate it in terms of some other notion such as conceptual analysis, ontological commitment, or truthmakers. As Chris Swoyer points out, the role of such expressions as 'explain,' 'in virtue of,' 'because of', and the like is "to give reasons, to answer why-questions, and this is the central point of explanation" (1999, 109).

Why does an adequate solution to the Problem of Universals require a theory of properties? For starters, properties alone can't explain much (Swoyer, 1999, 104). What does the explaining is a theory of properties, an account of what properties are like and the things they do. In some cases, such a theory might be rather thin, in other cases it will have to be much more detailed, and will require the aid of auxiliary hypothesis. While insufficient as a solution to the Problem of Universals, candidates (a)-(c) do provide important desiderata for such a solution:

> D1: a theory of properties should remove puzzlement over how to make sense of (1) and (2).

> D2: a theory of properties should make explicit the ontological commitments involved in (1) and (2).

> D3: a theory of properties should provide an account of the truthmakers or ontological grounds of (1) and (2).

The many versions of Platonism and Nominalism within the philosophical lexicon are in fact candidate solutions to the Problem of Universals.

Consider what I'll call full-blooded Platonism regarding properties (FBP) and Trope Nominalism (TN).

---

[3] Typical arguments for anti-reductionism regarding causation involve (1) detailing the repeated failures of reductive analysis; (2) the fact that there is a sparse base of non-causal concepts that can be employed in providing a reductive analysis; and (3) the case of preemption. See John Carroll (2010).

(FBP) There are universals and concrete particulars united via the exemplification relation. Universals are multiply instantiated abstract entities, where an abstract entity is a necessarily existing essentially non-spatiotemporal entity (auxiliary hypothesis #1). Universals are abundant in this sense: every meaningful predicate (setting aside those that lead to Russellian paradox) refers to a universal (auxiliary hypothesis #2). Universals play the role of *making* or structuring reality: "universals play a fundamental constitutive role in the structure of the world" (Bealer, 1998, 268) (auxiliary hypothesis #3).

(TN) There are concrete particulars and properties that can be sorted into resemblance sets. Properties themselves are abstract particulars that are essentially spatiotemporal and can only be possessed by one concrete particular (auxiliary hypothesis #1). Tropes are abundant in this sense: every meaningful predicate somehow hooks up or "names"[4] a corresponding resemblance set of tropes (auxiliary hypothesis #2). Tropes play the role of *making* or structuring reality (auxiliary hypothesis #3).

Undoubtedly, (FPB) and (TN) would need to be filled out in greater detail. But the above should suffice to see how each of these theories of properties figures in as a solution to the Problem of Universals.

According to (FBP), universals, particulars, and the exemplification relation exist (satisfaction of D2). D1 can be satisfied by distinguishing between "the different respects— qualitative and numerical—in which things may be said to be the same or different" (MacBride, 2002, 31). Concrete particulars a and b are numerically distinct, even as they share the same universal, F. Finally, regarding D3, since particulars and universals exist and every meaningful predicate expresses a universal, it is reasonable to conclude that the singular term a and the predicate F are the truthmakers for (1) and a, b, and F the truthmakers for (2). According to (TN), abstract particulars (that is, property instances), concrete particulars, and sets exist (satisfaction of D2). Distinguishing between numerical diversity and qualitative resemblance can satisfy D1. Concrete particulars a and b are numerically distinct, even as they both possess (numerically distinct yet qualitatively similar) tropes F_1 and F_2, both belonging to the same

---

[4] Abstract singular terms name the set of resembling tropes, e.g., 'Wisdom' names the set of tropes that agree in being wisdoms; 'courage' names the set of tropes that agree in being courages, etc. General terms are then conventionally correlated with the set of tropes named by the corresponding abstract singular term: 'wise' is semantically tied to the set of tropes that is the referent of 'wisdom,' and so on. See Loux (2006, 76-77).

resembles set, F-ness. Regarding D3, the concrete particular *a* as well as the individual trope F_1 are the truthmakers for (1) and *a*, *b*, and F_1 and F_2 the truthmakers for (2).

Prima facie, both (FBP) and (TN) satisfy desiderata D1-D3. The question that remains for these and any other proffered theory of properties (Realist or Nominalist) is which provides the best overall explanation for the phenomena captured in sentences (1) and (2). Isolating the two detailed above, the advocate of (FBP) argues that her view offers a richer explanation for the phenomena in question; the advocate of (TN) retorts that her view is just as explanatorily rich without the bloated two-tier view of reality. The (FBP) defender responds that (TN) is not in fact as explanatorily rich for reason X and, there are other costs Y besides. And the debate ensues. The debate, which is a familiar one by now, will proceed in terms of metaphysical benefit and cost, epistemic security, theoretical elegance, and coherence with the rest of our views about the world.[5] Still, as an attempt to find the best overall metaphysical explanation for qualitative and resemblance facts, an adequate solution to the Problem of Universals must be in terms of a theory of property, not merely in terms of conceptual analysis, ontological commitment, or truthmakers alone.

3. The Problem of Universals is a Real Problem

The Problem of Universals has fallen on hard times, largely because it has been misconstrued of late. Michael Devitt (1980, 433) sets up the problem by quoting Armstrong: "Many different particulars can all have what appears to be the same nature." That is, the Problem of Universals is a problem of accounting for *resemblance* facts. I think this is only part of the problem, but let this pass. Devitt continues, "It is a pity that Armstrong takes no serious account of the 'new' metaphysics of W.V. Quine and others according to which there is no such

---

[5] Representative examples of this dialectic and theory-weighing can be found in Loux (2006) and Moreland (2001).

problem as Armstrong seeks to solve" (1980, 433). Why, in following Quine, is there no such problem? In short, because sentences such as (1) and (2) can be true without ontological commitment to F-ness whether understood as a universal, trope, or something else. In considering sentence (2), Devitt asks, "in virtue of what are *a* and *b* both F" (1980, 435)? The answer is that (2) is true in virtue of:

(1) *a* is F; and
(3) *b* is F.

That is, Devitt thinks that if there is any Problem of Universals, it is how to account for the facts captured in (1) and (3). Again, I simply note in passing that I agree that *qualitative* facts are one of two kinds of facts in need of explanation in the Problem of Universals. Devitt argues that the Quinean will ultimately see no problem here (i.e., with (1) and (3)) "because there is a well-known semantic theory which shows that the likes of [(1) and (3)] can be true without there being any universals: [(1)] is true if and only if there exists an x such that 'a' designates x and 'F' applies to x" (1980, 435). That "*a* is F" is a brute-fact, no explanation can (or need) be given. Hence, "the one-over-many is a pseudo problem; the explanations prompted by it are pseudo explanations" (Devitt and Sterelny, 1987, 228).

Is the Problem of Universals a pseudo-problem as Devitt claims? I do not think so—the problem is a genuine problem, for at least two reasons. First, explanation can go farther than Devitt suggests and this is evidence that the Quinean explanation has not gone far enough. Secondly, resemblance facts don't simply "fall out" when sentences such as (2) are parsed into their conjuncts as in (1) and (3)—resemblance facts remain unexplained on this move.

Devitt (1980, 436) agrees that if explanation can go further than Quinean brute-fact nominalism, if there can be genuine explanation for facts such as (1) and (3), then that would count as evidence of a genuine problem. But, it is argued, the realist (or non brute-fact

nominalist) is no better off, in point of real explanatory power than the brute-fact nominalist. No genuine explanation, hence no real problem. Consider the standard realist "solution," according to Devitt (1980) and Balaguer (2004). The realist argues that (1) is explained by

(4) a has the property F.

But, queries Devitt: "an obvious question arises: how is [(4)] to be explained? The Realist feels that the one-place predicate in [(1)] left something unexplained, yet all he has done to explain it is offer a two-place predication….If there is a problem about *a being F* then there is at least as equal problem about *a having* F-ness" (1980, 437). Mark Balaguer adds, "This [i.e., (4)] doesn't seem very helpful. The claim that [*a*] possess [the property F] seems to do little more than tell us that [*a* has] some nature that makes it the case that [it] is [F]; this seems wholly uninformative, and so it seems that no genuine explanation has been given here" (2004, §3).

Sentence (4), understood as a "solution" to the Problem of Universals, is surely uninformative. But, as I argued in Section 2, an adequate solution to the Problem of Universals requires a *theory of properties*, not merely the postulation of some property F. Apart from an account of what properties are like and the things they do, properties cannot explain much. Devitt and Balaguer have mischaracterized what a solution to the Problem of Universals would be, it is not merely about providing an account of the ontological commitment of (1) and (3). A theory of properties along realist lines, such as (FBP) does in fact offer a genuine explanation for facts such as (1) and (3): properties, as structure-making entities, partially explain the character that things have. Talk of particulars and universals and the exemplification relation connecting the two does add to our understanding of why there is an objective, worldly difference among qualitative facts. The same could be said, *mutatis-mutandis* regarding (TN). Contra Devitt and

Balaguer, explanation can go further, and this counts as evidence of a genuine Problem of Universals.

Assume I am wrong and (1) and (3) are in no need of explanation. What about the claim that sentence (2) can be analyzed in terms of (1) and (3)? Balaguer (2004, §3) thinks that an appeal to resemblance facts "is a bit of red herring." For sentence

(2) *a* and *b* are both F

is short for the conjunction:

(5) *a* is F and *b* is F.

As long as (2) and (5) are broadly logically equivalent, then presumably, whatever account is offered for (5)'s conjuncts, captured in sentences (1) and (3), should suffice for (5). Resemblance facts have mysteriously vanished, reduced to the conjunction of qualitative facts among distinct particulars. The claim is that whatever is necessary to explain or account for each token of F, suffices to explain or account for the type F. There is no fact left unaccounted for and thus the Quinean is entitled to go on thinking he has no problem.

I say that (2) and (5) are not explanatorily equivalent.[6] Something has been left unexplained or accounted for—namely, the objective, worldly resemblance among particulars. Consider the following analogue from the philosophy of religion. The defender of the Leibnizean Cosmological Argument seeks to establish the premise that not every being can be a dependent being as follows. Even if each member of a series (of dependent beings) has an explanation for its existence, the *series itself* lacks an explanation—that is, the fact that there are and have always been dependent beings is left unexplained. Hence (as the argument goes), there must be a self-existent being that explains the *series* of dependent beings.[7] By analogy, even if each token

---

[6] That is, while (2) and (5) might be mutually (logically) entailing, (2) has different *content* than (5).
[7] For a nice exposition of this kind of argument, see Rowe (1993, 20-26).

of F can be accounted for, the natural groupings of qualitative facts—the various resemblance sets—lack an explanation. Or, as I have chosen to express it, the fact that there is an objective, worldly resemblance among distinct particulars demands explanation. Thus, sentence (2) is broadly explanatorily equivalent to

(6) *a* is F and *b* is F and the F of *a* and *b* resemble each other

not (5). The problem of the one and many is not a red herring—resemblance facts are Moorean, and they require an explanation. Thus, the Problem of Universals is a real problem, it cannot be easily waved-off by appeal to a Quinean Criterion of ontological commitment.

4. The Problem of Universals, Realism, and God

Historically, the facts whose explanation posed the problem in the Problem of Universals were viewed as providing reason to think realism regarding universals true. Some still think that universals provide the best solution to the problem, such as David Armstrong: "the main argument for the existence of universals is Plato's 'One over Many'….it shows that there is a strong preliminary case for accepting universals" (1980, 440). Most analytic philosophers today however think that even if the Problem of Universals is admitted to be a genuine problem, it supplies little reason in support of realism. Realism, we are told, enjoys no explanatory advantage over nominalism (of any variety). And even if realism does enjoy explanatory advantage over nominalism in some cases, if God is on the ontological books, all supposed advantages fall away. Hence, Bill Craig states that the Problem of Universals "is not the central concern in the contemporary discussion between Platonists and anti-Platonists" (2011, 309).

In this final section, I want to argue that realism does in fact enjoy explanatory advantage over its nominalist competitors, even if God exists. Thus, the Problem of Universals does provide *prima facie* support for realism regarding universals—and the problem is, or ought to be,

of central concern in the contemporary discussion between Platonists and anti-Platonists, or more generally, between Realist and anti-realists.[8]

Much of the work to establish my claim vis-à-vis realism has already been done in Sections 2 and 3. As it is typically discussed, the One Over Many argument is presented as follows:

> (OOM) Objects *a* and *b* are both F. The realist has a ready explanation for this fact. Objects *a* and *b* both possess the identical universal, *Fness*. The nominalist cannot account for this fact as well as the realist; therefore, realism regarding universals is true.[9]

Nominalists have attempted to undercut (OOM) in two ways. The first attempt, which can be found in *inter alia* Devitt (1980), Balaguer (2004), and Craig (2011), is to argue that (i) alleged resemblance facts supervene on qualitative facts, and (ii) an account of qualitative facts, repeated *ad infinitum*, suffices to account for any alleged resemblance facts. An account of the qualitative facts are then provided—usually bottoming-out in bruteness—and the claim is made that the realist alternative is no better off in terms of explanatory power. In response, even if the nominalist account offered for qualitative facts is explanatorily on par with a realist account, this first undercutting maneuver fails for reasons stated in Section 3. Resemblance facts have not been accounted for, rather, with a quick slight of hand, they have been swept under the rug. Realism is still explanatorily superior to nominalism in that it explains why there are resemblance facts whereas nominalism does not.

---

[8] That is, universals might be Aristotelian instead of Platonic—further arguments would need to be supplied to decide if universals are abstract or not—there are a number of arguments one might use, but they are beyond the scope of this paper. See Balaguer (2004).

[9] There is a parallel argument for qualitative facts that can be expressed as follows:

> (MOO) Object *a* is F and G. The realist has a ready explanation for these facts. Object *a* possesses the universals, *Fness* and *Gness*. The nominalist cannot account for these facts as well as the realist; therefore, realism regarding universals is true.

I think that (MOO) is not as strong as (OOM) for the simple reason that it appears that various nominalist accounts of qualitative facts can, *prima facie*, explain as well as the realist account, such as (TN). Thus, in the remainder of this paper I shall focus on the (OOM) argument and the *prima facie* support it renders for realism.

The second kind of undercutting argument against (OOM) admits *sui generis* resemblance facts and argues there is a nominalist friendly explanation for them. The Trope Nominalism articulated in Section 2 (i.e., (TN)) is as good an option as any—it takes both qualitative and resemblance facts seriously and offers an ontological assay of them in terms of particulars and exactly resembling (yet distinct) tropes. I think that (TN) has much to recommend it—I also think it has costs (if you don't like metaphysical parts and odd spatio-temporal locations then you won't be inclined to take properties to be sets of tropes, see Oliver 1996, 37). But, these considerations are irrelevant to the question at hand: is (TN) explanatorily superior to its realist competitor? And it seems that it is not. For realism regarding universals can go one step further than (TN) and explain why the F of *a* and *b* exactly resemble each other. The resemblance relation can be reduced, says the realist, to the identity relation—the resemblance between two perfectly similar objects is grounded in the fact that they both share the same universal, *Fness*, and *Fhood* is the respect in which they exactly resemble each other. The defender of (TN) must settle for a resemblance relation among sets of tropes as a brute fact. Once again, realism regarding universals is explanatorily superior to its nominalistic competitors.

What if we add God to our ontological books, does this tip the explanatory scale in favor of nominalism, thereby undercutting realism's *prima facie* appeal as articulated in (OOM)? Brian Leftow, who defends a view he calls Theist Concept Nominalism, argues "if there were a God, this would have dramatic implications for the problem of universals. In particular, it would (I believe) blunt the force of all standard arguments for realism" (2006, 325).

Leftow thinks that non-theistic versions of Nominalism (e.g., trope theories, human concept-nominalism, human predicate-nominalism, likeness-nominalism and set-nominalism) are either obviously false or less plausible than realism. Realism is a better theory—still, it is a

strange theory, one that Ockham bids us to avoid if possible. If it can be established that divine concepts can do the work typically ascribed to universals, then "it is simple parsimony to let divine concepts do as much work as they can once they're in one's metaphysic" (Leftow, 2006, 326). Leftow's Theistic Conceptual Nominalism, as a theory of properties, can be summarized as follows:

> (TCN) There are divine concepts and concrete particulars (i.e., one divine concrete particular and many non-divine concrete particulars). Divine concepts are (a kind of) mental particulars, understood in terms of events and powers (auxiliary hypothesis #1).[10] Divine concepts are abundant in this sense: every meaningful *non-divine* predicate refers to a divine concept (auxiliary hypothesis #2). God creates concrete particulars (other than himself) in accord with his divine concepts, i.e., concrete particular *a* is an F because God made *a* an F, in accord with his concept F-ness (auxiliary hypothesis #3).[11]

Can (TCN) account for qualitative and resemblance facts as well as the realist, thereby undercutting (OOM)? Such a conclusion, as I shall argue, is hardly obvious. Thus, even if God is introduced into one's ontology, realism may still be the best option on offer to account for qualitative and resemblance facts.

In an attempt to undercut (OOM), Leftow argues that (TCN) explains resemblance (and qualitative) facts as well as realism. Consider two cats perfectly similar in species. Against the realist, Leftow asks:

> [W]hy think that both being cats has to be explained by a common constituent? If there is any work to do here, God can do it. What makes two cats perfectly similar in species— both cats—can be their depending causally on the same divine concept. At any moment in which both exist, God sustains both. He keeps them in being and intentionally keeps them cats. (2006, 337)

Leftow concludes:

---

[10] "my ontological commitment is not what it might seem….In saying that God has concepts, the most I commit myself to is that there is in God whatever underlying reality makes it apt to speak of concept-possession….I suggest that in the last analysis, the ontology of divine concepts is in terms of divine mental events and powers" (Leftow, 2006, 349).

[11] "If there is a God, Fido is a dog not because of what he resembles but because this is what God made him to be, in accord with His concept *dog*" (Leftow, 2006, 346).

And this (obviously) is a genuine *causal* explanation of their likeness. Thus God and his concepts do all of the explanatory work—Puss is a cat because God creates him in accord with the concept *being a cat*; Puss and Boots resemble each other because God creates them in accord with his concept *being a cat*. Or again: Why is Puss a cat? Because of God and God's concepts. Why are Puss and Boots exactly resembling cats? Because of God and God's concepts. God and God's concepts, we are told, are sufficient to explain any qualitative and resemblance fact about any existent entity. One wonders if, in explaining everything, they explain nothing—still let wonderment pass.

Assume Leftow's (TCN) explains qualitative and resemblance facts. Does it follow that (because of Ockham's razor) theists ought to be Nominalists? Not obviously so. *Ontological* economy (in terms of number of *kinds* of entities) would need to be balanced with *ideological* economy (in terms of the number of *primitive facts* within one's theory). At every turn, Leftow appeals to brute facts in order to support his Nominalism. Thus, at the end of the day, it could turn out that realism's explanatory simplicity outweighs any (putative) gains in ontological simplicity on (TCN).[12]

Questions and puzzlement remain: What is it for two objects *a* and *b* to depend causally on the same divine concept F? How is the distinction between God's sustaining *a* and *b* in being and intentionally keeping them as F's to be understood? If God removes his 'intentional keeping' would *a* and *b* cease to be F, even if they do not cease to be? What exactly *is* a divine concept to be identified with given (TCN)? How is intrinsicality ultimately understood on (TCN)? Even if these questions can be answered, (TCN) is not a theory that can uniformly be applied to all entities divine and non-divine. Leftow acknowledges, "Theist concept-nominalism won't do for

---

[12] For a helpful discussion of how to balance ontological and ideological economy (with respect to explanatory adequacy) see Loux (2006, 61) and Oliver, (1996, 1-7).

attributes God Himself has, whether or not we share them….Some other theory of attributes will have to do in [God's case]" (2006, 352). If a realist solution to the Problem of Universals can be applied uniformly to all predicates divine and non-divine (as (FBP) does), then that counts in favor of the realist solution over the nominalist one.[13] Thus, it is not obvious that (TCN) has accounted for resemblance and qualitative facts *as well as* the realist, hence (OOM) is not necessarily undercut by (TCN).

If (TCN) turns out to be a viable solution to the Problem of Universals (that is, the above questions can be satisfactorily answered and the puzzlement removed), it will need to set out its costs and benefits like any other solution on offer. The introduction of God within one's ontology doesn't automatically undercut (OOM). Further, (as some have argued, e.g., Davis 2011) it may turn out that realism regarding properties is necessary for intentionality in the first place, in which case the Problem of Universals is still a problem, even for God. Leftow is correct: the introduction of God into one's inventory has dramatic implications related to the Problem of Universals. But this point is hardly unique to the Problem of Universals—God's existence has dramatic implications in any and all areas of philosophy. The theist needs to engage in the same metaphysical spadework as the nontheist (a point Leftow does not deny). In philosophy, just as in life, God doesn't always take away our problems.

---

[13] See Gould (2011), where it is argued that the realist (even the Platonist) can endorse an abundant theory of properties and a unified theory of predication without incoherence.

References

Armstrong D (1980) Against 'Ostrich Nominalism': A reply to Michael Devitt. Pacific
        Philosophical Quarterly 61: 440-449.
Balaguer M (2004) Platonism in metaphysics. In: Zalta E (ed) Stanford Encyclopedia of
        Philosophy, URL=<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/platonism/>
Bealer G (1998) A Theory of Concepts and Concept Possession. Philosophical Issues 9: 261-
        301.
Campbell K (1990) Abstract particulars. Basil Blackwell, Oxford.
Carroll J (2010) Anti-reductionism. In Beebee, Hitchcock, Menzies (eds), The Oxford handbook
        of causation Oxford University Press, Oxford.
Craig WL (2011) A nominalist perspective on God and abstract objects. Philosophia Christi 13:
        305-320.
Davis R (2011) God and the Platonic horde: A defense of limited conceptualism. Philosophia
        Christi 13: 289-303.
Devitt M (1980)'Ostrich nominalism' or 'Mirage realism'? Pacific Philosophical Quarterly 61:
        433-439.
Devitt M, Sterelny K (1987) Language and Reality. Basil Blackwell, Oxford.
Gould P (2011) The problem of God and abstract objects: A prolegomenon. Philosophia Christi
        13: 255-274.
Jubien M (1989) On properties and property theory. In: Chierchia, Partee, Turner (eds)
    Properties, types and meanings, Vol. 1. Kluwer, Dordrecht.
Leftow B (2006) God and the problem of universals. In: Zimmerman (ed) Oxford studies in
        metaphysics, Vol. 2. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
Loux, M (2006) Metaphysics: A contemporary introduction. Routledge, London.
MacBride F (2002) The Problem of Universals and the limits of truth-making. Philosophical
        Papers 31: 27-37.
Moreland, JP (2001) Universals. McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal.
Oliver A (1996) The metaphysics of properties. Mind 105:1-80.
Rodriquez-Pereyra G (2000) What is the problem of universals? Mind 109:255-273.
Rowe W (1993) Philosophy of religion. Wadsworth Publishing, Belmont.
Swoyer C (1999) How ontology might be possible: Explanation and inference in metaphysics.
        Midwest Studies in Philosophy 23:100-131.