

Introduction to properties. Why believe in them? The world contains *general phenomena*: phenomena that look problematic or inexplicable unless you've got more going for you than particular things.

(1) Predication: What explains the applicability of predicates to certain particulars but not others? For example "...is red" applies to this shirt but not this one. Answer: the explanation is that "red" applies to all and only things that exemplify the property red.

(2) Reference: Abstract nouns are words like "cleanliness", "honesty", "redness", "speed", "circularity". Oftentimes we can say true things with such nouns. So, "honesty is a virtue," and "red is more like orange than like blue." These sentences cannot be true unless they're about something; that something is in each case a property.

(3) Sameness (sometimes called "one over many"): Distinct particulars may nevertheless be "the same" in certain respects. Thus two coins can have the same shape. Taking "same shape" literally, it seems that there must be something literally identical in the two coins. This would be the property roundness.

(4) Naturalness: Not any old collection of things constitutes a genuine type; equivalently, some classes are natural and others are arbitrary. What distinguishes these? Proposed explanation is that the members of natural classes are tied together by their common possession of a property.

The implicit arguments here: Such and such is an undeniable phenomenon; it is inexplicable without properties; therefore there are properties. People who accept an argument like this are called realists; others are nominalists.

What *are* the properties the realist accepts? Whatever is needed to explain general phenomena. But different things might be needed to explain different ones; so it is important to decide which of (1)-(4) is moving us. Armstrong started with (3) – "one over many" -- in an earlier book. There's something these two dimes share; something in them that's identical:

(a) this dime's shape is the same as that dime's shape.

The realist's interpretation is that there's a single entity, the universal roundness, which is wholly present where the first dime is and likewise wholly present where the second dime is. The reason the dimes are the same in shape is that there is literally something identical about them. But (a) admits of other interpretations. Suppose I go to a baseball game for the first few innings, and you go to the game for the last few. Then we might say:

(b) what I saw at 1 PM is the same as what you saw at 3 PM.

This is identity only in the "loose and popular" sense. Why? Strictly speaking, all I saw was an early inning of a game; and strictly speaking, what you saw was a later inning; and strictly speaking, an early inning is not identical to a later one. All we mean is that the innings I saw stand in a certain relation, the *(part-of-the)-same-game* relation – R_g for short – to the innings you saw:

(b') what I saw is the same game as (bears R_g to) what you saw

(Compare seeing "the same ship" from either end.) Just so, the nominalist could argue, all we need to mean by (a) is

(a') this coin is the same shape as (bears R_s to) that one.

One-over-Many is inconclusive, so we turn our attention from Sameness to Naturalness. Some classes of things are natural in that they comprise all the things of a certain type; others are not natural, or not as natural:

anything whatsoever...can be put, or rather be found, in a class with any number of other things of any sort whatsoever. You can take the Sydney Opera House, the square root of 2, the City of Berlin, ..., your last thought on June 6, 1988, along with indefinitely many other things, indeed an infinity of other things. It is a perfectly good class (12).

But it is not a perfectly *natural* class. The difference here manifests itself in a number of ways. Projectability. Consider the class of "grues," where a thing is grue iff it is examined before 2000 and found to be green or is not and is blue. All observed As are Bs, so most likely all As are Bs. This doesn't work with grue. Similarity. Grue things are not thereby similar. Laws. No natural laws about gruesomeness. Causation. Fruit isn't grue because it's unripe, it's green for that reason.

What makes a class C natural? One kind of nominalist – the primitivist -- says this cannot be explained in simpler terms. Another kind – the resemblance nominalist – says C's members resemble each other more than they resemble non-Cs. The realist says that C is natural if and because its members share some property. But then properties had better be *sparse*; not any old set of things is the extension of (what the realist means by) a property. The realist's properties are *universals*. More on universals in the next handout.