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Identity and Predication

Observations on P. Monaghan's Thesis

Identity and predication are basic philosophical concepts which have often led to amazing considerations from the paradox of Antisthenes onwards to some of Hegel's philosophems on judgement. Recently P. Monaghan pleaded in *Metaphysica* for an assimilation of identity and "property possession".[1] But property possession, in contrast to identity, is neither reflexive, nor symmetrical, nor transitive. What should we think about such an assimilation? Although Monaghan takes into consideration two objections to his thesis, there are other evident difficulties which cry for attention. Moreover his replies to these two objections are hardly comprehensible and, in my opinion, the use of the traditional concept of an entity's nature as well as the application of the fashionable concept of mereology do not make things clearer either. Finally, both of Monaghan's puzzles are not cogent enough to confirm his thesis.

The main question and its difficulties

Following Monaghan we can use global variables.[2] The application of a property to a logical subject can be reproduced by a specific relation as "::". The scheme "$x :: u$" means that x possesses the property u. It is true that there is a strong overlapping of property possession (also called "ontical predication") and identity, because in every adequate system it is a theorem that

(1) $\exists u \, (x :: u) \leftrightarrow x = x$

That is, property possession and self-identity are equivalent. Nevertheless this is far different from

(2) $\exists x \, (x :: u) \leftrightarrow u = u$

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[1]   Monaghan 2005.
[2]   See Bealer 1982: 76, 82; Mertz 1997: 207. Of course, if one works without logical types caution is needed to avoid the well-known paradoxes; in our limited context, however, we can be confident of having everything under control.

because it could happen that a property is not exemplified, although it goes without saying that it is identical with itself. While (1) is valid without restrictions, (2) requires that only exemplified properties are to be admitted. This means still a logical asymmetry between the left and the right side of predication which is by no means compatible with identity. The validity of (1) cannot mean that the relations of predication and identity are identical as in

$$(3) \qquad \lambda xu\,(x::u) \;=\; \lambda xy\,(x=y)$$

what Monaghan actually is maintaining. Because $\forall x\exists u\,(x=u)$ is equivalent to $\forall u\exists x\,(x=u)$ and every entity possesses a property would follow with (3) that every property, e.g. being a round square, should also be exemplified.[3] This difficulty is joined by many others which show that here the notions of property and predication are radically changed or that the assumption (3) is simply wrong.

I)   The exemplification of a property (e.g. having caught a cold) can be *de re* contingent, but not so identity. Therefore property possession and identity are different relations.

II)   As there are no things without properties, (3) implies that all entities are properties. But properties appear in contradictory pairs (*being round, being not-round*); common individuals like Socrates do not behave like this; therefore not everything can be a property.

III)   Every property would be self-applicable. The property *being a body* however is itself not a body. The property of non-existence should not exist and the negation of self-identity should be a property different from itself.

IV)   There could exist only one object. Suppose that $a\neq b$. Either both possess self-identity or for one of them, say *a,* should be valid $a\neq a$. The latter is absurd. If, however, both objects are possessing self-identity, i.e. $a::\lambda x(x=x)$ and $b::\lambda x(x=x)$, follows with (3) that $a=b$.

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[3] The equivalence between $\forall x\exists u\,(x=u)$ and $\forall u\exists x\,(x=u)$ holds only if we have *global variables*, as above mentioned. In the case of a two-sorted language with x and u belonging to different sorts, there is no equivalence, because this would mean the same as an equivalence between „All X are U" and „All U are X".

V) The negation becomes an enigma. Let us take two different but compatible properties u and v. From $a :: u$ and $\neg(a :: v)$ follows, because of Tertium Non Datur and complementation of the property v, that $a :: \bar{v}$, and thus $u = \bar{v}$. That is, no pair of properties could be compatible.

VI) As Monaghan rightly observes, no property could be really universal, because from $a :: u \wedge b :: u$ would follow with (3) that $a = b$.

VII) As Monaghan mentions, an entity could possess only one property, because from $a :: u \wedge a :: v$ would follow $u = v$.

VIII) If relations are properties, states of affairs like 1 < 2 and 2 < 3 become inexplicable. The pair (1,2) should be identical with the pair (2,3) and in consequence 1 = 3.

Perhaps one could avoid the one or the other difficulty. For example, in the logic and ontology of Mertz you can evade the objection (VII) because in it there are only particularized properties (instances) as predicates of objects. On the contrary, it does not seem possible to eliminate *all* the difficulties – they all arise from the questionable assimilation (3).

Replies and Elucidations

It could turn out that the replies to (VI) and (VII) give a hint on the alternative conception of predication which Monaghan suggests.

As response to (VII) he tells us:

> My response to this objection is that it is based upon a mistaken [conception ...] of the relation of property possession. Property possession is not a one-many relation that at least one entity can bear to many properties. Rather property possession is the one-one relation of identity.[4]

That would be a mere repetition of the thesis, if one did not add that the concept of the nature of an entity had to be introduced and an extensional mereology to be applied:

> The nature of an entity is a property, which that entity possesses and which is complete in the sense that, for any property whatsoever, that property is a constituent part of the nature just in the case that property can be truly predicated of that entity (…) I understand the relations that ob-

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[4] Monaghan 2005: 73.

tain between an entity, its nature and the properties that are constituent parts of that nature to be the relation of extensional mereology.[5]

It is not easy to get illuminated by this explanation. If I interpret it correctly, the answer to the difficulty consists in the distinction between "true predication" (predication *lato sensu*) and "possession of a property" (predication *stricto sensu*) where the latter is a species and the first its genus. For a true predication it would be sufficient that a property is a proper or improper part of the subject's nature, therefore sometimes without requiring identity between property and argument. Then the analysis of "true predication" should be:

$$(4) \qquad\qquad F(a) := \equiv \quad F \le n(a))$$

where „$n(a)$" stand for the nature of the entity a and „$\le$" for the relation of proper or improper part. If it is not so, Monaghan would not have shown that the possession of a property (in the usual sense) coincides with the relation of identity, but only that he prefers an alternative use of language. If one wants to go beyond liberty of stipulation and beyond verbal questions, one has necessarily to think a little bit about clearness and adequacy of the claim (4).

First of all, it is striking that the effort made by introducing the nature $n(a)$ of a is superfluous, because a is just possessing the nature $n(a)$ as a property („the nature of an entity is a property, which that entity possesses", as Monaghan says). Then, because of $a :: n(a) \to a = n(a)$, one could simply explain the predication $F(a)$ as $F \le a$. Unfortunately, the concept of *part* is much less clear than the concept of predication.

Secondly, it becomes obvious that this analysis is not general enough to give an account of the predication of relations. If the book b is lying on the book a, should then the relation L of lying be a part of the nature of a (that is, simply, a part of a) or of b or of what else? Because *being part of something* is also a relation, other doubts must arise here.

As already mentioned under item (I), the contingent predications represent an obstacle, because the "traditional" notion of nature is opposed traditionally also to the accidental features. [6] Perhaps *rational* is somehow part of the nature of Socrates, but by no means *having caught a cold*.

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[5] Monaghan 2005: 74.

[6] Here I can also refer to Gracia 1988: 2–3, 9–10, 118, 121. "What is common to the thing and other actual or possible things is usually referred to by philosophers who use traditional terminology as the *thing's nature* (…) The features that a thing may or may not have, and thus are not necessary conditions for its kind of existence, are

Especially awkward is the effect of the obscure concept of *part*. Because the nature of Socrates – according to (3) – is supposed to be identical with Socrates, a part of his nature should be the same as a part of him. An eye is a part of Socrates but one cannot figure out how this eye should yield a true predicate of Socrates, a consequence which is implied by (4).

Moreover, properties permit predications (*lato sensu*) of other properties, too. Thus *human being* satisfies the property of *being exemplified by Plato*. Although we can maintain, or at least make an acceptable sense thereof, that *animal* is part of the property *human* – how can one possibly understand that *being exemplified by Plato* is also a part of *human*? Here we get into a dilemma. If *being exemplified by Plato* is not a part of *human*, because of (4), we cannot predicate *human* of Plato. If however the mentioned property is really part of *human*, because Socrates is a human being and the mereological relation ≤ is transitive, follows with (4): Socrates is exemplified by Plato. Both consequences are absurd.

Summarizing: all these problems and many others arise if one defends thesis (3) by a distinction between predication *lato sensu* and *stricto sensu* and eventually applies (4) as elucidation.

The motivation for the assimilation and the theoretical context

So far we have explained succinctly a few reasons against the assimilation of predication and identity. But can there be also mentioned reasons in favour?

Let us disregard thesis (3) and return to the common conception of property possession. Monaghan perceives two puzzles in

(5) $x :: y \wedge \neg (y :: y)$

if (3) is rejected. The "problem of relevance" is presented this way (where *y* is taken as "red"):

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usually called *accidental*" (p. 2–3). Gracia seems to consider here nature as *universal*, i. e. as opposite to individual. It is not his intention to deny the traditional distinction between the nature of an individual and the nature of its accidents. The locus classicus for this is Aristotle, *Metaph.*, Z, c.4 1029 1 – 1030a 7, cf. Dufour 2005: 281–287.

> For I ask: will x still be red, even if it does not bear the relation [of property possession] to y, but instead to some other non-red entity? And if not, why not? [7]

But it is always valid that $x :: y$ or $\neg (x :: y)$. Therefore, if x does not possess the property y, then $\neg (x :: y)$. The question whether x bears the relation of property possession to y, i.e. $x :: y$, in case of $\neg (x :: y)$, can have only one answer: not at all. Why not at all? Because of the Contradiction Principle. Consequently, the "problem of relevance" does not yield a satisfying motivation for (3).

The so-called "problem of contribution" is presented this way (where y is taken again as "red"):

> It is the problem of explaining how the non-red y *makes* x red. In other words, it is the problem of explaining how the non-red y contributes redness to x. And it is a problem that seems wholly mysterious to me. [8]

But the problem arises only if one engages oneself to two questionable assumptions:

i)   *Quasi-Causality*. If $x :: y$, the y itself has to make somehow that x exemplifies the property y.

ii)   *Homogeneity*. If something makes that $x :: y$, then it has also to be a y.

But which insights do yield us evidence for all that? If x exemplifies a property y, the reason or cause thereof needs not to be y itself. The reason for the application of a universal property can be another general property, or an individual accident, or an instance of Mertz, or an external fact.

Suppose that Socrates is short-sighted. The reason thereof (if there is any such reason) may be that his eyeballs have a certain shape. It would be odd to demand this shape also being short-sighted. So far, only these presuppositions (i) – (ii) are responsible for the problem but not the concept of predication in the usual meaning.

Perhaps one could understand Monaghan's thesis as a hint to Bundle-Theories. According to them a function can be defined which maps every individual into the set of its properties (instead of a set you can choose a conjunction of properties, an ontological totality or your favourite form of collecting entitites). In a second step one postulates the identity between

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[7]   Monaghan 2005: 72.
[8]   Ibid.

the individual and its set of properties. So every predication which does not involve identity is equivalent to the fact that the predicated property is an element of this set of properties – if elements are "parts", then every property of the individual is part of the "nature of the individual".

In this case many questions are left open, depending on how the Bundle-Theory is shaped. Normally, the point would consist in the inverse function which constitutes an individual from every set of properties. This allows us to enjoy Meinongian objects. It is quite rare that someone wants to defend an Aristotelian approach and ends up explaining universals as parts of individuals.[9] Of course it is true that thus there are no universal properties without individuals, but in return other absurdities are emerging.

I suppose that

(i)   an Aristotelian view has to avoid both Bundle-Theories and Bare Particulars.

(ii)   anyway, a *bridging-principle* must be adopted in order to connect predication and possession of universal parts.

That is:

(BP) $F(a)$ iff F is part of a

what equals the definition (4). But now there is a problem if we take extensional mereology seriously. Because of the mereological theorem[10] of Strong Supplementation: if Socrates has the universal U as a proper part, the entity *s–without–U* must exist, i.e.:

(6) $\exists x\,(x \neq s \wedge x = s - U)$

But we can also remove (via mereological sums and eventually supplementation) *all* universal parts, that is, we should get the equation:

(7) $(((s - U) - U^*) - U^{**} \,...) = x$

What about this x? If there is no such entity x, we get Bundle-Theory (Socrates is just a sum of universals). But if x exists, we obtain – because of the bridging-principle (BP) – just Bare Particulars, little *Dinge an sich*.

Perhaps one could weaken (BP) but such a solution would look too much ad hoc. A revision of the mereology for universal constituents is still open, but it is not clear how to tackle this problem. The question of the forms of

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[9]   There are, however, remarkable exceptions, like the two *Laws of Immanent Realisms* in Smith 1997: 106, 119.

[10] See Simons 1987: 29.

predication however can only be explained in this theoretical context. If we take the question isolated all evidence points against the assimilation of predication and identity.

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