

## ON BASIC PARTICULARS

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'Particulars' play a primary role in the core of our thought structure. It is 'particulars' with which we think about the world which is presented to us. The world consists of 'particulars' and therefore any thought about the world will involve the use of particulars. In this paper an attempt is made (1) to give a brief exposition of the views of Locke, Hume, Leibnitz and early Wittgenstein on the nature of basic particulars, (2) to give a detailed account of Strawson's view of basic particulars, (3) to put forward Strawsonian argument against the views of these philosophers, and (4) to show some inadequacies in Strawsonian view of basic particulars.

### I

Let us begin with the Locke's view of 'particulars'. Locke says that in reality there are only particulars but in our minds there is something else not images but ideas. By 'idea' he means that the term, which stands for the object of the understanding when, a man thinks. He adds that it will easily be granted to us that there are such ideas in man's mind, everyone is conscious of them in himself also conscious of them in others. Whatever conscious activity we are engaged upon, we must necessarily be 'having ideas'. Locke sometimes thought of these ideas as 'mental images' or 'pictures in the mind's eye'. It is assumed that, in relation to anything in the world, there can be my idea of it and the thing itself. We all have ideas, which are expressed by the words such as whiteness, hardness, sweetness, thinking, motion etc. These 'ideas' Locke considers as 'simple ideas' which supply the materials for our experience. He says that in our experience of

the objective world we are directly confronted with our own ideas or sensory states; he thinks that in everything we say our immediate subject-matter consists of our own ideas, the reference to things being a secondary one. The material of our knowledge is the simple ideas out of which complex creation is composed.

Hume begins by saying "All the perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into distinct kinds, which I shall call impressions and ideas."<sup>1</sup> Hume departs from Locke's position. He called Locke's ideas of sense and reflection 'impressions' and 'ideas' as representations of imagination and memory. But Hume seems to be very clear when he says that if a primary information consists of representations and our thoughts of copies of those representations, then we cannot find out how accurate the representations of sense may be, nor can we form any idea of the real world, as distinct from our impressions of it. In our perception we find that two things always come together i.e., ideas and impressions always appear to correspond each other. So not only in every prescription of the mind either an impression or an idea, it also looks as if there is an exactly resembling idea for every impression and vice-versa. Hume argues that everything in the mind is either an impression or an idea and everything in the mind is either a simple impression or comes to be there as the result of the appearance in the mind of simple impressions because all simple ideas are caused by their corresponding impressions. But all complex perceptions are made up of simple perceptions alone and so without simple perceptions there would be no complex perceptions at all. All simple impressions are either impressions of sensations or impressions of reflections. But impressions of reflections occur only as a result of something appearing before the mind. And since impressions and ideas are the only things that appear there, it could not be the case that only impressions that occur on a mind are impressions of reflection. So there would be no impressions of reflection unless there were some impressions of sensation. Taken all together this implies that everything that comes into the mind comes there as a result of our having impressions of sensations. Thus, according to Hume, there is no thought or mental activity unless there are impressions of sensations. So from Hume's point of view it follows that 'ideas' and 'impressions' are primary in our thoughts structure.

Leibnitz considers monads as basic particulars in our conceptual

framework. He argues that monads are in the real world and they represent the world only because of their association with their organic body. Bodies are composed of simple substances, without parts. Leibnitz says, "there must be simple substances, since there are compound substances, for the compound is only a collection or *agreatum* of simple substances,"<sup>22</sup> These simple substances are called monads by Leibnitz, of which empirical things are composed. They are 'the true atoms of nature and, in a word, the elements of things.'<sup>23</sup> Since monad is without parts, we cannot ascribe extension, figure, divisibility to it. Each monad develops according to its own inner constitution and laws, it is insusceptible of increase through the activities of other monads, since the simple cannot have parts added to it or subtracted from it. But each monad, being gifted with some degree of perception, mirrors the universe, that is the total system, in its own way. The ultimate realities are monads or simple substances. There are, of course, invisible, what we perceive are aggregate of monads. Substances in the sense of aggregates of monads are phenomenal, according to Leibnitz. The world of everyday life, the world of sense-perception and also of science is phenomenal. The monads or ultimate realities are not phenomenal, they do not appear for perception but are known only by a process of philosophical analysis.

The ultimate realities are monads, simple substances conceived according to an analogy with souls. No two of these monads are alike. Each has its own particular characteristics. Moreover, each monad forms a world apart, in the sense that it develops its potentialities from within. Leibnitz does not, of course deny that on the phenomenal level there is what we call efficient or mechanical causality. We have to distinguish between the physical level at which this statement is true and the metaphysical level at which we speak about monads. Each monad is like a subject, which virtually contains all its predicates, and the primitive force of the monad is, as it were, the law of its variations and changes. But though there are innumerable monads or simple substances, each of which pre-contains all its successive variations, they do not form a chaotic mass. Though each monad is world apart, it changes in harmonious correspondence with the changes in all other monads according to a law or harmony pre-established by God. The universe is thus a system in the sense that world would be different from those which now are if anything is taken away or supposed different. Thus each monad or substance

expresses the whole universe, though some expresses it more distinctly than others as they enjoy a high degree of perception.

Wittgenstein says, "A proposition is a picture of reality. A proposition is a model of realities we think it to be" "According to *Tractatus* a proposition really is a picture, of what it represents. In a picture, according to the *Tractatus* picture and the things is the state of affairs it represents. Since a proposition is considered to be a picture, there must be as many elements to be distinguished in it as in the state of affairs it portrays. The two must have the same logical or mathematical multiplicity. According to the *Tractatus*, a picture must have something in common with what it pictures. This common thing is the picture's form of representation. "All pictures must have in common reality the same logical form in order to be able to picture reality at all, either truly or falsely. This logical form also is called "The form of Reality".<sup>5</sup> is defined as the possibility that things in the world are related as are the elements of the picture. Propositions since they are pictures have the same form as the reality they depict.

## II

After discussing the views of Locke, Hume, Leibnitz and early Wittgenstein regarding the nature of 'particulars', let us give a detailed account of Strawson's view of particulars. Strawson considers material bodies and persons as basic particulars. A Strawsonian person, to begin with, is to be understood as distinct from a material body, which retains the contrast customarily observed between person and things. Material bodies, according to Strawson, are basic to our schemes of identification. But if we experience only material bodies, the question arises of whence derives the idea of that which has these ideas. How do we identify ourselves as distinct from the particulars, which we identify or re-identify?

It would seem to follow certain obvious answers to these questions that we are not material bodies and that our idea of ourselves is not the idea of material body. This, in fact, is Strawson's view, but he desists from following the tempting path, followed by Locke, which leads to the conclusion that we are immaterial entities, instead he emphasizes that many of the terms which are correctly applicable to material bodies can also be correctly applied to ourselves as a person.

Now, an important question may arise here: How to describe this conception of material body in terms of predication? A Strawsonian reaction to such a question would begin with an obvious classification of predication. There are two kinds of terms, M-predicates and P-predicates applicable respectively to material bodies and to persons; but there is an overlap. If it is sensible to say of a person that he is sad; it is no less sensible to say of that very same person that he weighs three hundred pounds. Persons, then, are distinct from material bodies, but they are not therefore immaterial bodies or incorporeal nonbodies. A person has states of consciousness as well as physical attributes and is not merely to be identified with one or the other.

Persons are irreducible to parts of themselves and are thus "primitive" in just the same ways in which material bodies have been said to be. This means that our ability to identify and re-identify material bodies is insufficient for identification and re-identification of persons, for we might exhaustively identify an individual X under all the M-predicates true of X without thereby identifying X as a person. P-predicates are accordingly, identifiable in terms of and are not to be reduced to M-predicates. We have not identified X as a person until we have correctly ascribed to him at least one P-predicate.

To understand the fact material bodies are basic, we have to note that what Strawson says about identification. He holds that they are basic with respect to identification. To identify a particular means to pick it up. Conceptually discriminate it from other particulars (speaker identification); and to identify a particular about which someone else has made a remark is to know which particular it is that has been referred to in that remark. In explaining this, Strawson speaks of criteria or requirements of identification. He says that the requirements of hearer-identification could be regarded as fulfilled if the hearer knew that the particular being referred to was identical with some particular about which he knew some individuating fact or facts, other than the fact that it was the particular being referred to. He further says that to know an individuating fact about a particular is to know that such and such a thing is true of that particular and of no other particular whatever. Now the question is: How is this requirement ordinarily fulfilled? The answer is that the individuating fact known about a particular by someone identifying it is a fact which locates it in our common spatio-temporal

framework or uniquely relates it to some other particular whose place in the framework is known.

Strawson further argues that we can identify particulars only if we employ "a single unified spatio-temporal system." We can have such a system only if we are able to re-identify objects i.e., able to identify object B encountered at time  $t_2$  as the same object as object A encountered at  $t_1$ . Hence we must have criteria of re-identification.

To say that a given kind of particulars is basic is to say something like the following: particulars of kind 'a' are basic particulars if and only if we can identify particulars of kind 'a' without referring to particulars of any other kind, and there are particulars of some other kind such that we cannot identify particulars of that kind without referring to particulars of kind 'a'. According to Strawson, pains and other images are not basic particulars, for in general we can identify a pain only as so and so's pain. Our identification of pains essentially involves a reference to particulars of a different type, namely persons. And from the premise that we can identify particulars only by relating them uniquely to this "unitary spatio-temporal framework" Strawson infers that material bodies are basic particulars in the above sense.

But how can it be defended? Strawson continues his argument and says that if a class of particulars is basic, then particulars of that must be "publicly observable", he then asks what categories of publicly observable entities are available? As it turns out, there are three such categories: (1) events and processes, (2) states and conditions and (3) material bodies or things possessing material bodies. Strawson's argument in essence consists in showing that due to "the contingent limitation of human powers", particular of groups (1) and (2) do not provide framework of the kind which are all adequate to our referring needs; they do not provide frame works which could be used for the purpose of identification. Material bodies, on the other hand, can and do provide such framework, hence they and they alone are basic particulars.

### III

After discussing different kinds of particulars, the question arises whether

these particulars can be considered as basic particulars in the Strawsonian sense. In answering this question we can very well say that these particulars cannot be regarded as basic particulars in Strawsonian sense. To begin with Locke's simple ideas as particulars, we can say that those ideas cannot be called basic in our thought structure. By 'basic particulars', Strawson means a particular which needs no other reference for its identification. If this is the criterion of basic particulars, then the Lockean simple ideas cannot be regarded as basic particulars. In the case of Lockean simple ideas, it is difficult to identify these ideas as they reside in individual's mind. If these ideas are 'ideas' in mind only, then we cannot locate them in space and time and thus question of identification and re-identification does not arise at all. But space-time locatability and identification and re-identification are the required criteria for thing to be particular. As Lockean simple ideas lack these criteria, it cannot be given the status of particulars in the Strawsonian sense.

Given the criteria of felt-resistance and endurance as the criteria of basic particulars. Humean sense-impressions cannot be regarded as the basic particulars. Hume considers ideas and impressions the basic elements in our thoughts structure. It is ideas and impressions, which make our knowledge possible. In this sense only we can consider Humean impressions as basic. But from the Strawsonian point of view Humean impressions cannot be considered as basic particulars. As Humean ideas and impressions come and go, it cannot be said that they can be re-identified as the same ideas and impressions previously identified. As they are only ideas in the mind, they cannot be said to have persistence. Hence we find that if we apply the Strawsonian criteria of basic particular, Hume's impressions cannot be considered as basic particulars in our conceptual framework.

Similarly, particulars of Leibnitz and '*Tractatus*' also cannot be considered as basic particulars too. Leibnitz considers monads as the basic particulars. He argues that reality consists of monads and thus in order to know reality we have to know monads. In this sense Leibnitz considers monads as the basic in our conceptual framework. But we find that Leibnitzian monads are spiritual in nature and they are windowless, and thereby we do not have access to them. As they are spiritual in nature, we cannot locate them in our spatio-temporal framework and

thereby cannot be considered as basic particulars. In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein talks about basic proposition as the primary particular in our thought structure. He says that proposition pictures the reality. But we cannot agree with Wittgenstein on this point. There are certain propositions, which picture certain facts, which do not have any existence in reality. Therefore we cannot consider elementary propositions as the basic particular.

An attempt can be made to show some inadequacies in Strawsonian view of basic particulars. As already discussed, for Strawson something to be called particulars must fulfil the characteristics of 'durability', 'identification and re-identification' and 'felt-resistance'. He argues that "material bodies" are the basic particulars, which satisfy all these required characteristics. But it can be argued that even if material bodies fulfil all these Strawsonian criteria yet they cannot be called basic. Material bodies can be considered as particulars but not basic particulars. Because to identify a material body we need a reference to space and time. We distinguish one material body from another only with reference to 'here and now', 'then and there'. So we find that the categories of space and time are basic in our conceptual framework. Though we cannot ignore the importance of material bodies in our thought structure, but we cannot consider them as basic.

The required criteria to call something-basic particular are also lacking in the case of person. The concept of person is not to be understood in terms of material body of individual, according to Strawson. He repeatedly mentions that the concept of person is to be understood as logically primitive concept failing which no ascription of corporal and non-corporal attributes is possible. The primitiveness of the concept, for Strawson, stands for the unanalysability of it. But as we have already seen that Strawson tried to analyse the concept of person as a being that admits of both. M-predicates and P-predicates. He says that in order to identify a being or thing as person it must have a reference to M-predicates and P-predicates. Thus, we see that on the one hand, Strawson is trying to introduce the concept of person as pre-requisite for simultaneous ascription of M-predicates and P-predicates and on the other hand, he is trying to understand the concept of person in terms of M-predicates and P-predicates. It seems Strawson is arguing in a circle. Moreover, Strawsonian particulars must possess the criteria



of 'durability', 'identification and re-identification' and 'felt-resistance. And these criteria cannot be applied to person if we accept the concept of person as a primitive concept. The primitiveness of the concept of person does not prove the 'business' of the concept. Thus, we fail to understand the primitiveness of the concept of person and its relation with basic particulars.

### NOTES

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