SOLO: VIEWS ON UNIVERSALS AND PARTICULARS

(IN TYPICAL CONTEXTS)
This essay is an attempt to emphasize the point that the problem of universals and particulars should be examined in the context in which these words occur. Moreover, in order that some genuine questions relating these words are answered, it is necessary to determine the context.

However, an account of universals and particulars is influenced by the nature of the context. It is the context which decides the criterion of calling anything universal or particular. But, as much has not been said by any theorist who put forth the theories of universals and particulars. Were it the case, the approach to the problem would have been simple. It would have been the examination of the theories by the standards that are declared as authoritative by the
theorists. On the contrary, one has to examine the theory for its internal consistency, just by the guide line of the nature of the context in the first place, and then, it may happen that one is able to 'see' the criterion that is at work. At times, it may not be so easy to 'name' the criterion satisfactorily. But that does not affect the account, so far as the criterion is somehow evident.

This criterion which decides the universals and particulars in any context - is what I have called 'The principle of classification'. In order to understand the working of this principle, the theories themselves will have to be examined, since, 'the principle' is not a presupposition. Or, it would have been possible to establish it beforehand and then proceed. In other words, it would have been possible to give reasons for making the presuppositions.

We may be able to detect the working of the principle, or at times, even give it an appropriate name by examining in brief the salient features of some outstanding theories. And some of the prominent contexts which give rise to these theories are metaphysical, epistemological, logical, linguistic and

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1 Even when I use the word 'the principle', I shall mean the entire phrase. Aaron had used this phrase in his book 'Theory of Universals', p.240. He calls it a way of using words or way of imagining. According to him it is a way of grouping.
psychological. These contexts (and many other contexts not mentioned here), are not exclusive of each other. But it only means that a metaphysical context for example, will take the help of the other non-metaphysical context (that is, the nomenclature) in order to make the presentation of its theories conventional; both logically and linguistically. On the other hand, a logical context for example, may take the help of the other non-logical contexts (that is, the nomenclature) in order to present the theories in a manner which is most communicable.

However, in the case of universals and particulars, the words are fundamentally metaphysically - oriented - as is the case with most technical words, that they have their home-discipline; for example, the word wave-length, the word zero, the word God, soul, predicate etc. It is possible to suggest the home-discipline of each.

I. Some Views

In order to facilitate discussion, the views on universals and particulars may be divided into the Indian thought and the modern Western thought.

2 These views are mentioned in order to 'make explicit' the working of the principle of classification, only. They are the examples and hence, they do not recur in this essay any more.
However, there are some theories which could at once be classified under one of these headings. Where such an case is available, I would prefer to take them in groups in order not to repeat the well-known expositions of these. When a particular view does not seem so simple, it may be reserved for a special comment. With these considerations in view, I have thought of classifying some theories under the Indian thought and some others under the Western thought. At some stage, there may occur a terminological clash between them; at some stage, one of them may run into verbal bankruptcy and the other, into thought bankruptcy. There may be some borrowing and lending. It is precisely due to their lack of self-sufficiency both, in thought and words, that they are unable to offer sufficient resistance to some challenges. All kinds of age and clime do not suit their survival capacity.

(a) In Traditional Indian Thought\(^5\) - with 'existence' as the principle.

Generally speaking, the problem of universals and particulars in Indian thought was discussed by posing such questions as regards the nature of universals and particulars, their relation with each other and the difference between them.

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\(^5\) Cf. R.R. Dravid's book on 'The Problem of Universals in Indian Philosophy for the exposition of some important view on the problem.'
Another noteworthy aspect is this, that most of the theories in Indian philosophy have been discussed on the basis of the idea of existence.

With 'existence' as the principle then, I may cite some instances. It may be 'shown' or 'made explicit' the extent to which the universal-particular dichotomy stands justified by the standards of the principle of classification.

It may however be remembered that nowhere do the theorists say that, 'Let us presuppose that the things to be qualified as universals or particulars must exist'. And hence it is quite reasonable to say that the principle is often made explicit through the study of the theories themselves, rather than say that some principles are presupposed.

On the basis of the idea of existence then, Sāṅkhyaśas have conjectured prakṛti as the supreme universal. The various manifestations of it are particulars.

These particulars are graded on the evolution ladder which is constructed by Sāṅkhyā thought. A particular at a higher level may be called a universal from the point of view

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4 Technically speaking, its two classes are contradictory. That is, an extension of a term is analysed into positive and negative classes. It also includes a class which characterises nothing.
of the particular at a lower level. As regards Puruṣa, the Sānkhyas have judiciously refrained from allotting the dichotomy of universal and particular. Perhaps, it is due to the lack of direct experience with Puruṣa. And their position here is consistent with their understanding of universals and particulars by the standards of the principle of existence.

As the tradition goes, Indian philosophy founded its epistemology and logic on the grounds of its ontology. On such a dualistic ontology of Prakṛti and Puruṣa then, the Sānkhyas would justify their other branches. (Some thinkers may interpret it as a system justifying ontology on the basis of their accepted epistemology. For that matter, a difference of opinion regarding priority could be maintained throughout philosophy. This is of course, controversial).

Now, the Sānkhyas vindicate the existence of universals and particulars by their three methods of knowledge. They exist because

i. the Vedas say so,

ii. they are perceived in their hierarchy,

iii. the highest universal that is Prakṛti can be inferred.

On the basis of existence, Nyāya system has sufficient to say regarding the nature of universals and particulars.
its ontology consisted of sixteen 'Padārthas', which could be approached through seven categories. Vaiśeṣika system has elaborated over them. The categories of Śāmānya and Viśeṣa formed two separate categories, the remaining five being 'Āravya', 'Cana', 'Karma', 'Samavāya' and 'Abhāva'. (This category of 'Abhāva', especially 'Anyonyabhāva' may be explained by involving the concepts, Śāmānya and Viśeṣa. But it would form a separate topic on the concept of negation).

The Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika epistemology was so formulated that it took an account of all these seven categories. However, it may be asked as to what sort of entities are known through the categories of Śāmānya and Viśeṣa. The lack of specific account over this complexity has led some philosophers to interpret these entities diversely. Some philosophers may call these entities as concrete, others may call them abstract.

About abstract 'Padārtha', it may be said that each distinguishable abstract entity may be called a particular; their group, which is also abstract, may be called a universal.

Another important question yet claims our attention. What should the remaining five categories be, if not universal and particular? But this could be answered. The remaining

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5 especially the category of Viśeṣa. The entire system gives a prominent place to particulars, which are unique.
five categories are independent categories. They approach the 'Padārtha' in their specific way through any of the four ways of knowing; the same 'Padārtha' may be 'Dravya and Sāmāṇya' or 'Dravya and Viṣeṣa' depending whether the 'Padārtha' is concrete or abstract.

That the status of universals and particulars is at least epistemological is an obvious truism, or one can never communicate sensibly. But it is not this aspect that is in question. The question here is whether they have any basis in ontology. Do the entities exist as universals and particulars, as distinct entities in space and time? The Nyāya answer is positive; the 'Sāmāṇya' in 'cow' is known through perception first; then the other methods of knowledge play their due role.

Status of universals and particulars in Nyāya logic is expressed through a different terminology. 'Vyāpti' (universal relation) is the 'ground' of valid inference. 'Sāmāṇya-lakṣaṇa' is one of the several requirements which establish 'Vyāpti' at first.

Not that the Naiyāyika equated Sāmāṇya with either of the two. Though of course, 'Sāmāṇya-lakṣaṇa' has more

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5 'Vyāpti' is 'formal implication'. It may be seen to correspond to formal rules of logic. If 'Samānyalakṣaṇa' too is entertained along with 'Vyāpti', we may have 'Material implication'.
proximity to 'Ua^an^a' than 'Vyāpti' has to 'Sāmānyya'. 'Vyāpti' does not carry an existential import but 'Sāmānyalakṣaṇa' has a tendency to satisfy the expectation of finding structural similarity. Hence the account on universals would be in keeping with the idea of 'existence' if 'Sāmānyalakṣaṇa' is treated as a universal. More sensibly, it is a principle of grouping, rather than an entity (Sāmānyya is a term of course).

In Vedānta philosophy, the problem may be considered from the point of view of existence thus:

Brahman has to be the highest universal; all the rest of the world in all or many forms are the particulars. Their reality and unreality is a matter of detail in each 'Āchāryas' philosophy.

The position of Brahman as the highest universal is not affected by the variations in ontological presupposition. Of course, the nature and constitution of the Brahman is again a matter of both, detail and difference of opinion.

Universals are recognised as having existence, and they may be approached by all methods of knowledge. At the level of world, universals are termed as Sāmānyya or Jāti. They are class-names. Classes are natural. Each individual in that natural class is a particular. However, their membership is often decided by some constitutive factors like shape, size etc. (That is, the 'Ākṛti').
The Vedāntins did not have a logical system different than that of Sāṅkharas. But they had their minor variations. Hence, the nature of universals and particulars, and the status they occupied, cannot be very different or special in any way. As a matter of fact, Indian systems were not very particular in analysing the words in a context, totally and rigorously logical.

Buddhist philosophy, however, had some interesting but at times quite perplexing views on existence. Its general attitude to philosophy as a whole, was negative: It maintained that there are no 'metaphysical' or other - worldly basis upon which one should root one's epistemology; that was said because its concept of reality was regimented. It meant strictly no change. And such a criterion of 'no change' whatever, is unintelligible to reason and unavailable to sense experience. Hence the 'world' is unreal. But this is the case ultimately. However, universals are necessary to understand particulars. And our empirical experience is that of particulars. We never experience universals. Thus, universals are inferred through inference whereas particulars are known through perception. Thus, inference and perception give the knowledge of universals and particulars, respectively. Yet, both of them have a nominal status. Both of them are merely names. But of course, universals as names justify the Buddhist ontology more faithfully.
than the particulars as names. But, for the Buddhists, the distinction is only functional and not structural. The function of such an epistemology is to serve a pragmatic purpose, that of - 'explaining' the empirical world. Thus, the Buddhist epistemology is arbitrary and calculated. In such a theory of knowledge, universals and particulars will be nominal.

Relation between Universals and Particulars: In Indian Thought

Once a status has been allotted to those words, it is customary to ask for an account of their relationship. So is the case with the traditional theories. Those theories may be classified under the headings, conceptualism, realism and nominalism. (Some comments on these to follow, especially in Chapter three).

The relation between universals and particulars has to be studied within the system. It cannot be done in isolation. And hence, the bare question 'how is a universal related to a particular?' is vague, unless a system is mentioned explicitly or a context is indicated somehow.

But it is possible to compare a universal of one context with a universal of the other. This would make a vertical comparison. Then we should maintain types of universals:
Such a comparison with the elements outside the context and seeking a relationship with them would form an extra-systematic unity of thought. To compare the universals (or particulars) within a system would be a horizontal comparison which may be called an intra-systematic unity of thought.

In Sāṁkhya system it is possible to see the relationship in different contexts. Ontologically speaking, universals 'contain' particulars. And this is evident in its theory of causation. Now, the nature of this causal relation between the cause and the effect on one hand and that between universal and particular on the other may be comparable - not by the standards of language that describes it, but by the standard of the principle of existence, that underlies the classification; be it the dichotomy of universal or particular, or that of cause and effect. But this point may be left aside. It is sufficient for me to hint that the words cause and effect are typically existential. No amount of deliberation would render them otherwise. But universals and particulars are used even otherwise. For instance, they may be used as the words having merely logical import. 7

Epistemologically speaking, the knowledge of universals

7 In the book 'Logical Theory' Strawson has made the distinction between universals and particulars on the basis of subject and predicate. He discusses the words in the logical and linguistic contexts. (Introduction to 'Logical Theory', hence onwards, refer to as "Logical Theory").
would not be possible without the knowledge of the particulars. It is, as it were, that 'there are' universals, because 'there are' particulars. However, Sāṅkhya system gives a hierarchy of knowledge corresponding to the hierarchy of the manifestations of Prakṛti. A particular from one aspect may be a universal from the other. Thus, the relationship between them is of the nature of part and whole in the sense that one could not be understood as a 'different entity' from the other - constitutively. (The comparison should not be carried further, or there would be complications regarding the very concepts of part and whole. If it is possible to extend the areas of the part, then the concept of whole slowly merges into the idea of infinity).

In Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika system, the relation between the category of universal and the category of particular should also reflect the relation between the sixteen Padārthas. Some of them could be understood through one category or the other; though none of the categories are exclusive of each other, still, prominence of one over the others could be conceived. For example, the category of 'substance' could be applied to a chair which is a particular object. Nevertheless it could also be viewed as a universal. Similarly, beauty can be understood through the category of universals, but it could also be conceived as the category of 'guna', that is quality. Thus, there can be various types of relation between universals.
and particulars. One is, that both universals and particulars are 'there' in one 'Padārtha'. The other is that universal is a general name of the class of particulars. The first type may be called ontological, the second, epistemological.

In their logic, the relation is established through 'Vyāpti'. The 'less applicable' premise may be deduced from the 'more applicable', provided it suits some formal rules of logic. However, it is more sensible to view this relationship as that between the 'meanings' of two premises, rather than merely formal. The entire stretch of thought that has gone behind their meanings, independently of each other, counts more than other factors. 'Vyāpti' tries to 'show' this relationship. (To say that 'Vyāpti' establishes the relation would incline us to expect a rule that 'governs' the function of 'deduction' or 'induction'. However, such a rule would then be strict and rigorous, and hence, it would restrict the material mode.)

In the Vedāntic systems, the relationship is described metaphorically as the relation between Brahma and its appearances, or variations - as the case may be. Ontologically speaking, only the highest universal has 'existence'. But

8 However, Strawson holds (in 'Logical Theory') that establishment is possible in formal rule. Linguistic rule can only be 'shown'. (Cf. Chapter eight).
epistemologically, a relation has been conceived between this universal and its particulars, in order to give meaning to the world of experience. Thus, the invention of this relation has a pragmatic value.

However, the ontology of Buddhistic type cannot give rise to the question of such relationship. But they have ample significance in epistemology. It is worth noting that such an epistemology is not enlightening. It says nothing about the nature of reality. It is only functional, contrived to give a pragmatic account of our sense-experience. Universals and particulars have a strange relation; it is a relation between sense experience and its concept. Without the conceptual background of universals, particulars of empirical experience would remain uninterpreted. Thus, while particulars are 'given' universals are not; they are just a system of related concepts which make our experience with the objects meaningful.

To sum up then, it could be said that the universal in an ontology is different than a particular in an ontology. The difference may be due to the difference in constitution, the number of members incorporated, or even due to abstraction of some common characteristics; in other words, the difference may be qualitative, quantitative, or spatio-temporal. In brief, the difference between universals and particulars, is the difference between two individuals.
However, in a particular context there is a particular principle of classification which classifies them as universals or particulars. For example, from the point of view of ontology the systems mentioned here had the same principle.

It is possible to examine any other account on universals and particulars and make explicit, the principle: Often, it might not have a very distinct name; nevertheless, some principle has always been maintained in all attempts at classifying.

(b) In modern western thought

In western philosophy too, similar approaches are found. Right from Porphyry, Plato, Aristotle and the medieval philosophers like John of Ockham to current linguistic philosophers like Quine, Goodman, Church, ordinary-language philosophers like Strawson and many other thinkers have something to say on this ancient problem. (Sometimes, of course, it is said, it has been rather cryptic). It has been treated in modern logic too, but in novel outfit. For instance, it is discussed under subject-predicate problem in sentences; as individual expressions and predicates (or predicate expressions) in logic, as quantifiers in quantificational theory of logic, as numbers and sets, etc. in class logic. However, the traditional application of the words universals and particulars still continues. This practice has often created
complications. The words 'universals and particulars' suggest some sort of entities even if they are chimeric, as in Plato's world of Ideas, while the words like subject and predicate suggest that there is at least a reference; and the words individual expressions and predicate expressions suggest just a rule of logic. Then what could be the relation between the words like universals, predicates, predicate expressions, sets etc. on one hand and those like particulars, individual expressions and members etc. on the other?

There is an attempt at explaining the above point through out this essay, by the standard of the principle which labels the words as universals and particulars.

This principle may be present even when the mathematicians try to render universals as spaceless, timeless and positionless, like numbers. So-called universals are human inventions, though they are concepts in pure formal sciences, they are translated into the language of communication which is peculiar to the context in which the application of these concepts are sought.

Ramsay explained the linguistic neutrality of concepts by arguing in detail, that the subject and the predicate may exchange places without disturbing the function of the concept.  

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9 Cf. 'Foundations of Mathematics' by Ramsey. P. 116
Thus, the principle which labels the concept as universal is that of abstraction; after the pattern that the number (and so the universal) is undefined with reference to its position in space and time. A position can never be context free. For example, a triangle or an angle has to be in space and time. In abstraction, there is an attempt to eliminate such a position; but we shall note here that the abstraction in case of non-mathematical concepts may not be on same par as mathematical ones. Keeping in view the home-discipline of the words universals and particulars, it would be more sensible to call non-mathematical concepts as universals.

But, of course, many philosophers and mathematicians agreed in conceiving mathematical concepts as universals. For example, George Cantor conceived whole numbers and types of order as universals which relate to aggregates and arise from these aggregates when we abstract from the nature of the element. But if it is maintained that all other concepts of pure mathematics are universals, then where should we stop including further general concepts or terms under this heading? Of course, it is possible to limit the principle of abstraction thus: That only those concepts which are defined or understood irrespective of space and time, should be included for being labelled as universals.

There cannot be any argument against the view that the
concepts or classes of earthly occurrences are space-time dependent for their definitions. Of course, the symbols of logic and language too have no reference to position. However, when applied to the objects of reference, such universals have positions.

But, according to quantum physics, any description of position will be incomplete, since this branch of physics assumes discontinuity and hence the choice of place-time continuity out of infinite of continuance becomes quite difficult and highly arbitrary.

But we are not concerned with spatio-temporal position alone, while deciding the universals. No doubt that spatio-temporal element forms an important aspect of the contexts - most of them - in which the words generally occur: More so, when general words, class-names, abstractions, collective names, sets, etc. are understood as universals. Obviously in such cases, the principle of classification is at least spatio-temporal position, or to say minimally, they have at least a reference in some system.

But Waismann's position is rather double-standard. He holds that universals are space-time dependent, but at the same time, allows even spatio-temporally free abstractions as universals. Then let us allow his principle of classification
to have an 'open-textural nature'. Accordingly then, all possible criteria of labelling universals, could be included. Nevertheless, he cautiously admits that these criteria, which form the consideration—ground for anything to be called a universal, themselves cannot be open-textural concepts. There should be no vagueness about their definitions. There is no room for any border-line cases.

It is possible to examine the views of every individual thinker, and understand the pattern of his theory by the standards of the principle of classification. Sometimes, similar views are grouped under a common title. But such an endeavour to examine even these theories, would form an independent study in itself. However, I have not hesitated to emphasize a particular account of any theory of thinker, if it has any special or peculiar point to make. Such examples are possible throughout this essay. In this chapter, only some views on universals and particulars are examined regarding their internal consistency, which is determined by the relation of these words to the principle of classification. At appropriate places in the essay, this principle is exposed more fully.

But before concluding this chapter, one point must be mentioned.

Some linguistic philosophers (to name the outstanding thinker) for example, Wittgenstein, identified this problem
with the problem of naming. This insight of course served to criticize the totally metaphysical approach to the problem, regarding which the complaint was this, that those who have postulated the existence of universals have not always been clear about the problem.

Regarding the problem of naming itself, there is no agreement. There is a suggestion too that it is not a real problem and it may be solved without reference to universals. But this would leave Russell's treatment untouched. He has gone to the extent of calling each name in the dictionary a universal. Whereas Carnap complains by his 'principle of univocality', that he does not really understand what it means for a word to be a common name. For Pears, the standard theories of realists, conceptualists and nominalists are all unsatisfactory attempts to explain naming, all being circular. For example, to say that a thing is called by a certain name because it instantiates a certain universal, is obviously circular when particularised. But it only looks imposing when it is left in this general form. Yet, the explanation of meaning may be completed only when a particular universal is specified. And when it is specified, the explanation is circular. The different standard theories only suggest that different names need different explanations.
However, even those philosophers who treated the problem of universals as the problem of naming, could not evade the problem, even by analysis. Their anti-metaphysical approach however, made them rather unpopular at times, despite their significant contribution.

Metaphysics has found admirable sympathies these days, though of course, it had to wait its recognition for a sufficiently trying period. If the fundamentals of any system express metaphysical beliefs, and even if the past metaphysicians have at times forwarded queer theories, it does not follow that they will continue to do so. "But the opposite does not follow either...."10.

Any way, there are various approaches to the problem of universals and particulars. But even before they could be properly estimated for their balanced and consistent account, it is necessary to notice the vagueness that might surround the word, and understand the reasons for it. When the context is determined clearly after taking into account the varieties of ways in which the words may be used; it is easier to see the working of the principle of classification, which labels the words (or concepts) as universals and particulars.

The discussion is characterised more by an analytic approach. It is quite likely that these provisional strata in which the problem is classified and discussed, will seem blurred and the problem will appear hazy. But the analytic 'light' has aided our vision.

The problem then glares all the more steadily in our face.