CHAPTER III

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I. A Retrospect:

In the last chapter we discussed the reasons that gave rise to vagueness.

The words do not always mean the same; nor do they always have the same reference. Due to the possibility of these multi-meanings and multi-reference, the words universals and particulars came to be called vague.

However, an attempt is often made by the thinkers to group them suitably. More or less similar words are classified under one heading. How those headings were constructed on the basis of some principle, and those words which satisfied the requirements of these principles were considered to fall under
Though, of course, it is not always very easy to pinpoint the principle of classification. Often it is not clear. It is mixed up with other principles. When this is the case, that is, when more than one principle of classification are involved in classifying, then the problems of border-line cases and the related problems of the vagueness of words and ambiguities result.

But more often than not, it is possible to detect outright, the principle of classification. Especially when such suggestive nomenclature as realism, conceptualism and nominalism is used.

If we explore these headings which claim to have explained the words universals and particulars, we will be able to discover the principle that works behind their classification. Of course, we should then be prepared to undertake the lengthy and elaborate process of analysis.

II. But what should we understand by Analysis?

A brief notice of the word's constitution and history

1 Recently, there is a tendency to use the words logicism, intuitionism and formalism, as better substitutes for these traditional ones.
will make it evident, that even the word 'analysis' which is common in philosophy, is used but metaphorically; I strongly hold that every word has its own home-discipline, so has analysis. Its home-discipline is empirical science; more closely we may say, it is chemistry. May be that more than one discipline claim the word to be their off-spring; but this is not our subject. All that we want to point out, is the metaphorical use of the word, due to which we follow a certain process. Analysis thus is the process of reduction to the constituents.

But whether it is understood as reduction to the constituents, which are referents, or constituents which are experiential, is a further complexity.

These constituents are called individuals. And there is no unanimity amongst philosophers over the word individual. But there is sufficient agreement over this, that individual is a unit.

A logician, a linguistic philosopher or a metaphysician will decide the parameter of the individual in his own particular style.²

Returning to the point of analysis, we should remember

² Further discussion on Individual to follow subsequently.
that if we take into account only the reference, then we will have to concentrate on the rules of language and logic. And if we take into account only the experience, then the rules of language and logic play a second fiddle. In order not to be selectively exclusive in favour of the one against the other, it is necessary to consider as many view-points as possible. Then alone can we justly point out the workmanship of one principle - if there is a singular principle. Then alone can we say even otherwise, that there is no singular principle as such, but some more.

Or we may even be left with some position which can be justified only from a certain point of view.

III. Realist view of Universals and Particulars:

It is singular to consider this subject under the broad classification such as this; because a general principle which forms the basis of many a school, could be thus titled. This principle can be explored after we have accepted the realist stand and understood the 'realist language'.

The problem of universals and particulars will have to

3 There is no definite account of such a language in the sense in which there is metalanguage and there is object language. We may contend that the realist language will use metaphors more often than other languages.
be understood from the realist, the conceptualist and the nominalist stand-point, and from the stand-point of the language which is characteristic to these schools.

To some extent, the problem could also be understood from a neutral stand-point and neutral language. (A neutral language will minimise as far as possible, the influence of metaphors).

IV. A Note: Functional nature of Classification

Before considering these views, it is important to note that the theories are classified on the basis of general principle which may be common to them. This, however, does not mean that the classification is free from the influence of other principles. There may be overlapping. We cannot overlook the element of arbitrariness in all classification. And hence a particular philosopher (or a theory) may often be looked upon as a realist from one view-point, and a nominalist from the other.

Let us instantiate this point. Wittgenstein's famous theory of family resemblance invited a lot of controversy. It was disputed whether Wittgenstein should be called a nominalist or a realist. The difficulty is evident and the controversy may be appreciated, if we take a note of even these salient features of his argument.
(i) Look at what understanding a general word comes to.

(ii) Try thinking of the meaning of the word, without thinking of the word.

(iii) Look at how understanding is used and how 'meaning' is used.

Now, we may compare the contention of (i), (ii) and (iii) with (iv).

(iv) Look and see whether you find something common to all the things.

It can be seen that the emphasis in (i), (ii) and (iii) is on language and its use.

Whereas the emphasis in (iv) is on empirical observation.

Hence, his example of 'The common character between all games is that they are games' is interpreted with different emphasis on the phrase 'the common character' and the word 'are'.

The nominalist emphasis would suggest that the common character is nothing else but the word game.

To emphasise that the common character is really common would suggest a realistic position.

So, we have seen the absurdity of classifying a single theory under one heading without admitting the possibility of it being classified under other headings too.
For, our attempt to classify Wittgenstein under one heading or the other, would be misinterpreting his thought. It will be a narrow interpretation if we analyse 'the common character' as merely a verbal explanation of the word 'game'. The interpretation is wider still; and this would suggest that there are other criteria too, on the basis of which 'the common characters' may be called games.

Hence the demand for an exclusive realist, or nominalist or conceptualist explanation is misleading. No position whatsoever can thus be labelled exclusively.

(a) The realist stand-point

The realist stand is this: there is resemblance, recurrence, similarity or repetition of what may be termed as qualities. And on the basis of sameness of qualities the theories of universals and particulars are formed. We can broadly classify them under realism, because these theories speak of the 'existence' of particulars at least; some realists of Aristotelian and Bosanquet's vein may speak of the existence of universals too. These universals are termed as concrete universals.

But even if the existence of such concrete universals is held with suspicion by many thinkers, they have managed to accommodate the universals in a non-spatio-temporal world.
They have called them abstract universals.

The questions which the realists pose and answer are such questions as, 'Resemblance of what'? What recurs? What is similarity? What repeats?

And the answers which they attempt are called the theories of universals. Resemblance, similarity, repetition and recurrence are all 'due to universals'.

And those (entities or individuals) in virtue of which the universals form the basis of these relations of similarity, resemblance, etc., are called particulars. Numerical unity of anything, is the criterion for that thing to be a particular. So, two exactly similar billiard balls are two particulars, despite their identical constitution.

It is clear from this instance that spatio-temporal distinction of two exactly similar things forms sufficient ground for calling them particulars, and not universals. But, consider for example, a group of such billiard balls.

This group however, is often treated as a single universal by using the suggestive words like, 'the class', or 'the group', or 'the collection'. And hence, there is often a confusion whether 'a class, a group, a collection' etc. is not a universal. Now, from the stand-point of the realist, it is clearly not a universal because these words suggest
nothing else, but the maximum resemblance or similarity between the particulars that constitute the group, class collection etc. We have seen that in spite of the maximum similarity of billiard balls (except the numerical difference due to spatio-temporal aspect), we hesitate to call them 'the same balls'; this is because of the realist temptation to retain universals. And hence, the realist calls the balls 'more or less similar'.

So the discussion comes to this, that we can talk of universals because there are particulars.

But from the viewpoint of realism then, the universals must be exemplified; and those examples are particulars. There are well-known challenges to such a proposition. They arise from the very nature of the uncritical and naive treatment of the problem.

(b) The realist language

It is often a subject-predicate language. It is accepted that the language has limitations. A subject-predicate language has a tendency of making awkward suggestions, such as saying that 'there must be something to which the predicate applies'. Still traditionally, 'there must be a substratum where attributes reside.'

4 The Indian concept of संमय can never be even conceived without a substratum. 'Dharma' must have 'Dharma'. Qualities must have substratum. Even when we think of 'Vastu-Sūnyatā', there is void of 'something'.

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These duals, subject-predicate and substance-attributes are substituted by universals and particulars, that is to say if subject has a predication, then that predication must be a universal, because in virtue of the predication, many 'subjects' exist. These are particulars.

If substance has attributes, then these attributes which repeat themselves in other substances, must have a residing 'substratum', e.g. redness is substratum, red (colour) is attribute and red-rose is a substance. (Of course, substratum and substance are not thus distinguished by the advocates of those theories, because there is an attempt to keep to the traditional dichotomy).

Thus universals may represent (or may be substituted) for 'the more abstract or the more general' of the dual. The other part then is the particular.

V. (a) Conceptualist Stand-point

The conceptualist point of view is not different from the process of abstraction.

Abstraction is a process in which we are constantly engaged. Disc, how can you understand my experience of joy or sorrow? Hence, Russell was amused over the entire discussion on universals, for he said that when all the words in the dictionary can be pointed out as an answer to the question
'What is a universal'? 'Why is there a problem'? The words represent a thing or a concept or even a relation, and hence they have undergone a process of abstraction. Because of such an abstraction, we find that on mentioning the word 'dog', we shall not be wrong if we meant my dog or yours - unless specified. It is possible for a single word to represent an entire species or a class too.

Even if the conceptualists had been sufficiently analytic as we have said above, there are acceptable reasons to say that such words are universals. Because we may allow the relationship between the word and what it represents, as a universal; and this may serve as the principle of classifying all the words and what they represent under its heading; this heading may be anything; doghood, on-ness (relation), goodness (quality), beauty etc.

But conceptualist took the uncritical stand, and called the words as having 'a place in the mind'. That is, the words which the mind could accept as abstracted were universals.

Their concrete representations may be called particulars.

The difference between realism and conceptualism is only this; realism favours the 'existence' of universals. That is, realists say that the universals are ingredients in the structure of reality.
Conceptualists say that universals are the conceptual ingredients of the structural reality. That is they do not exist, but subsist; no knowledge whatsoever of the structural world could be claimed unless concepts are universals.

(b) The Conceptualist language

It is not different than the language of the realist. Prof. Wisdom once remarked that just because certain words (he meant abstract entities) could not be properly accommodated in the empirical world, a non-empirical world was invented.

Language has sometimes created confusions and the apt examples could be the realist and conceptualist approach to the problem of universals and particulars.

VI.(a) The Nominalist point of view

Despite minute controversies amongst the nominalists over many a problem in philosophy, the theories have managed to maintain the common title of nominalism. This is because of their initial commitment and emphasis on language analysis. (We shall see in the next chapter, their principle features) Even universals and particulars are nothing other than the programme of using words.

The suggestion of A.J. Ayer in 'On what there is', is the voice of this 'ism'. He says that 'The only ground for believing in abstract entities is that the words have meaning.'
If we can show that the words have meaning without any assumption of abstract entity as such, which can be predicated in language, then "there should be no objections to anyone saying that there are universals". The reason is simple: all that it means is this, that predicates (or predicative expressions) are meaningfully used and understood.

(b) The Nominalist Language

Due to the emphasis on language, this traditional terminology of universals and particulars which is metaphysically oriented, loses its meaning. In nominalism, particulars may be nothing else than the individual expression, and universals nothing else but predicate expressions, and the use of general words.

The language of the nominalist attempts to avoid ontic suggestions, as far as possible. Even if the skeleton of the language may resemble the subject-predicate form, yet there is a vast difference when it is interpreted. The interpretation of object-language is often sought in meta-language. But what neutralises the meta-language of the ontic commitments? And it is not possible to answer this question, because even metalinguage depends on object language for its meaning. Thus, there is no escape from minimum commitment.

5 We will say that the host discipline of these words is ontology. Their use in non-ontic theories is only metaphorical.
such an idea was put forth by stressing the fact that all naming is circular.

VII (a) A Neutral position and a Neutral language

By neutral position, the indication is generally towards ontologically neutral position. Obviously, there cannot be a conceptually or linguistically neutral position. For, we communicate and we use language for communication. That is, concepts and meaningful words are indispensable to any theory. Hence, we are committed to meaningful communication always (unless of course we do not care to communicate, as in the case of mystical experiences). There is no escape from the conceptual and linguistic context.

Hence, we may examine the case for ontologically neutral position. But even here, we encounter some unsurmountable barriers. For, even if we are able to communicate, what exactly do we communicate? It is an information, an opinion or a prediction or a matter-of-fact view on reality. In other words, it is description and prescription concerning reality. At least the communication has to be descriptive, if we choose to drop prescription, because the latter compels us to presuppose more than the former.

Hence, there is a tendency to call the descriptive views on reality, as descriptive metaphysics.
No matter how technically we develop our theories with the help of techniques of logic and language; no matter how ontologically neutral we may be in developing the theories later on; but it is important to remember that we cannot eliminate the initial interaction between the two fundamentally different complexes. The one is reality (or that which is experienced) and the other is the respondent (or that which experiences)\(^6\).

This is the minimal supposition. Hence, we are justified in maintaining that there cannot be any position which is ontologically neutral.

(b) Neutral Language

We strongly hold (and agree with extreme nominalism only on this point) that language has nothing to do with the ontological commitment. (That is, as Quine said, with emphasis, that what we believe is the case, and not what actually may be the case).

It is only because of our interest in what we believe to be the case is, that we employ language. It is because we seek justifications for our ontology, that we invent a suitable platform where common interests can meet. Language is the common platform, and that is all. And if there has been

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\(^6\) The point is as old as philosophising. Indian Philosophers have used different terminology; modern thinkers too use the dichotomy of environment and actor, etc.
a strong suggestion of a one-to-one relationship between language and reality, it is only due to the ancient linguistic habit, which has come to become seasoned. The suggestion hence, that 'the dog' (the words) has a counterpart 'the dog' (an entity) is only a well-formed and established convention. Whereas 'pegasus' (the word) does not have a counterpart in reality. Hence, it does not have any connection with reality, and hence, no question of establishing a convention arises.

The point is this: Many words in language have a well-established relation with 'what is believed to be the case. But this does not mean that language is committed to any ontology; it is free not to be so committed, because it is not affected when the universe of discourse (or the context) is fictitious, or highly abstract, as in logic and mathematics.

The language then, is not entitled to give an account of universals and particulars.

Moreover, the very words universals and particulars have their origin in ontology. Therefore, whenever an account which is non-ontological is attempted, the explanation becomes very tedious and unsatisfactory.

The words have to be modified to suit the non-ontic context, and hence, in order to uphold the superiority of language and logic or epistemology, over ontology, many theories are put forward.
hence it would be reasonable to accept the limiting factor that the words are constantly shadowed by their home-discipline. The implied metaphor, even if not detected, has played the role of an anchor. No matter how buoyant the words appear, their floating is not free from the tie.

hence, the attempt to translate the words universals and particulars in the technical nomenclature has not been quite satisfactory.