

# Second Philosophy

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Title	Universals
Date	08 March 2009

## INTRODUCTION

Is talk of Universals Just Metaphysical Nonsense?

### The Problem of `The One Over The Many`

In philosophy most of us can agree that there are singular objects that we call `Individuals` or `Particulars` in philosophy speak. These Particulars are unique things that have a single location they are humans, animals, plants and objects, all material things. For example chairs, humans, sheep, trees, tomatoes, pebbles are all particulars.

These particulars have properties, for instance, ripe tomatoes are red, sheep are woolly, trees are twiggy, pebbles are hard, humans can be kindly. These entities don't seem to be like particulars at all. Philosophers call them universals. This debate is about whether they exist at all and it is just one more chapter in one of the oldest debates in philosophical history. It goes back to Plato and probably beyond and up to the present day.

Now you might think it is absurd to deny that there are such things as redness, woolliness, hardness and kindliness and so on. It might seem just obvious that such things ie universals, exist. If two ripe tomatoes are red then this obviously follows from the fact that a universal redness is instantiated in (Possessed by) both of them.

Redness is instantiated in fire engines, traffic lights, pillar boxes (in the UK), rubies and mature robins. There is single entity redness, a universal, that is shared by all these particulars. Those who think it is obvious that universals must exist are called Realists they believe Universals are real entities.

### The Realist Case for Universals

The Realists will defend their position by first pointing out that it is obvious that things share a nature as described above. They will also point out that our ability to use language depends on this being so. For example we use predicates to describe particulars, eg California is sunny. The `is sunny` predicate appears to name a universal. It names something in the world. We can use `is sunny` to describe other locations eg `Saudi Arabia is sunny` and we mean by it the same thing. So the Realist says this predicate expresses a universal ie sunniness. These predicates, obvious and necessary features of our language, are nouns, sunniness, redness, kindliness that do the job of referring to universals.

Realists also point out that there are true sentences that involve the use of universals. Thus I can say `Red is a colour`, `Kindliness` is a virtue. Again this seems obviously true and necessary for our use of language and all that follows from that. For instance if we deny the universals of kindliness or courage then where would virtue ethics be? Where would any discussion of ethics be?

Realists point out that Plato raised the issue of universals is the argument of the so called' One Over the Many` ie how could many similar things be classified in the same way. His solution was to postulate the existence of perfect `Forms` outside of space and time. Aristotle abandoned the idea of perfect forms and said instead that forms existed in particulars. They were what gave the particulars their common nature. For example each particular horse had instantiated within it the form of `horsiness`.

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A modern defender of Realism, DM Armstrong, has pointed out that there may be a situation of what he terms, 'Moorean Facts' in relation to universals. He is referring to G E Moore's assertion that although he could doubt many things in philosophy he could not doubt that he had hands. Armstrong notes the ubiquity of our talk about the sameness of different things, a ubiquity founded on the common sense belief in the existence of universals, a ubiquity that forces us to take the issue of universals seriously.

## The Nominalist Case Against Universals

The opponents of the Realists are the Nominalists. Nominalists are uneasy about what a universal could be. M J Loux has defined the Nominalist as one who believes, "The only things that exist are concrete particulars." As such the Nominalist denies the existence of abstract real entities that can exist simultaneously in multiple locations in an immaterial form. Further since universals are immaterial then they cannot connect causally with concrete particulars so how, the Nominalist asks, can there be any interconnection between the two entities?

How then does the Nominalist account for the use of universals in our language? For the Nominalist, universals talk is just a feature of the loose way ordinary language is used. As Quine pointed out you may talk of redness but all you really mean is that one cherry is red and another cherry is red and so on. You can of course imagine the set of all things that are red but it is made up of concrete individuals and there is, at root, no extra abstract entity of redness. The Nominalists believe that every statement that uses a universal as a predicate can be paraphrased into a statement where the universal is made to disappear. The predicate remains but it applies only to a unique object. Thus for Quine 'Redness is a sign of ripeness' becomes 'Red fruits are ripe.' Or 'Plato exemplifies wisdom' becomes 'Plato is wise'.

In technical terms to assert that both a and b have the same property F-ness is not to assert the existence of a universal F-ness as the Realist postulates. The universal can be paraphrased away as a and b are both F. This amounts to no more than saying a is F and b is F. There is no more substantial point to explain here than a or b just is F. For the Nominalist the use of universals is a convenient theoretical fiction. The only substantial issues about either a or b being F are scientific or semantic. They are not ontological. The fact that a is F is just ultimately a brute fact about the universe it is basic and inexplicable.

## The Realists Strike Back

Armstrong has labelled the stance of the Nominalists as exemplified by Quine 'Ostrich Nominalism.' The refusal to take predicates seriously as we use them in our language is just to stick your head into the ontological sand about them. He points out that the Nominalists seem prepared to use universals while at the same time denying their existence. In answer to the Nominalist claim that the Realist cannot show the interrelationship between any particular and a universal he puts forward the idea of Non Relational Immanent Realism.

This Armstrong defines as," the view that, while we can distinguish the particularity of a particular from its properties, nevertheless the two actors are too intimately together to speak of a relation between them. The thisness and the nature are incapable of existing apart from each other. Bare particulars and uninstantiated universals are vicious abstractions from what may be called states of affairs: this-of-a-certain-nature. The thisness and the nature are therefore not related."

In technical terms a is F, in Nominalist terms, is a particular description. A has Fness is a non relational state of affairs in Realist terms. This reflects a deep division between those who think reality is made up of things and those who think reality is made up of states of affairs.

So which ontology do you subscribe to an ontology containing universals or an ontology of particulars only?

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## QUESTIONS:

- 1) Does it make any sense to deny the existence of Universals?
- 2) Does the ontology of the Nominalist miss out important features of the world?
- 3) Is reality made up of facts or states of affairs?

## REFERENCE:

- 1) Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy Universals:  
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/u/universa.htm>
- 2) States of Affairs. Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy;  
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/states-of-affairs>
- 3) Most general Books on Metaphysics will contain a discussion on the Universal v Particular Issue. The problem of `The One Over The Many`. See Helen Beebe and Julian Dodd `Reading Metaphysics` Blackwell 2007. This contains an interesting discussion between Devitt and Armstrong with an extensive commentary that I have used in the Introduction.

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## DISCUSSION:

**Oswy:** OK apologies as some of the intro seemed a little garbled?

**Oswy:** Hope you got the main points.

**Simulat:** it was fine for me Oswy

**Oswy:** I would like to start with the idea of Universals things we don't seem to be able to do without yet which seem odd when we analyse them?

**Deoridhe:** I find it perplexing that we can't take universals seriously as an aspect of our language that is meaningful and yet acknowledge that it is a generalization of perception, not necessarily a quality of something else per se.

**Simulat:** but the idea of the existence of universals is a bit garbled :-)

**Oswy:** Deo don't we take them seriously in language we use them all the time?

**Wichard:** No, Sim, I don't think so, so long as you stay with the realm of abstract mental constructions that have various features.

**Thoth:** I would question whether it makes sense to 'believe' in 'universals' AS universals. If one wants to use language terms, the qualities being called universals are 'context dependent'. and no 'particular' is 'elemental' - people, apples, chairs are all composite objects and get their qualities from the components from which they are made, and their relationships to other things they share contextual relationships with.

**Deoridhe:** I think so, Oswy, but I would argue the descriptors are a map, not the landscape.

**Reflection:** it may be that universals come in a number of different types too. So some universals are just concepts and so not actual, while some universals like redness, can be defined as a wavelength of electromagnetic energy and is actual wherever it exists

**Simulat:** I can see that things can have similarities for instance - that's real enough - so but I'm with Quine - its just a quirk of language and not a fact about the world

**Oswy:** Thoth why do we pick out things using universals?

**Wichard:** And we use these mental maps-objects-abstractions-universals as recognition and cognitive devices

**Thoth:** we recognize patterns.

**Lewis:** it seems to me that most universals are adjectives, not nouns, and the difficulty arises when we try to visualise them as nouns/objects

**Thoth:** shared 'patterns' that are similar some people elect to make more of than necessary....

**Thoth:** apply some metaphysical meaning... but it is just shared patterns in a given context. Personally, I think such thinking is misleading in terms of understanding what is going on - really going on... for example, where the qualities come from.

**Oswy:** Is it really just a matter of patterns?

**Thoth** nods

**Wichard:** Then our recognition and cognitive devices can be used in thinking, communications, as well as recognition.

**Thoth:** what else do you suggest it would be?

**Thoth:** it also depends on the level of granularity u wish to reason from and to.

**Oswy:** Well someone like Armstrong would suggest that they are real entities.

**Thoth:** calling a chair a 'particular' is fairly low res, no?

**Simulat:** that's a good point Lewis - language gets confusing when you nounify verbs and adjectives and then ask what is the ontology of that created noun

**Thoth:** a chair is made of many parts put together by a human. Each of those parts is made of smaller components... etc.

**Oswy:** I take it that when we refer to patterns we are referring to resemblances

**Deoridhe:** That was a good verbifying of a noun, Sim.

**Thoth:** a chair can be part of a dining set. We can be referring to many things. Resemblances are just one set of patterns.

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**Simulat:** how do you mean Deo?

**Oswy:** But the essence of Universals is resemblances. It is what things have in common the things that group particulars.

**Wichard:** Sequences and graphic arrays are patterns

**Deoridhe:** Nounifying. It was a verbifying of a noun.

**Wichard:** Oswy, doesn't abstraction figure into the concept of universals?

**Thoth:** but just because we can categorize things into some set doesn't imbue them with some metaphysical quality...

**Dexter:** As I understand it, universals belong to all particular things. If you have a chair, you need to distinguish the particular chair from its universal chairness which it has in common with all things. That was the original philosophical conundrum, that you cannot ever name a particular without having in mind a universal.

**Lewis:** agree Thoth

**Oswy:** We persistently pick out these universals or resemblances? The realists say because they are in fact real things.

**Thoth:** ...doesn't mean that 'redness' exists as something other than a way we find convenient to describe things that meet a given criteria.

**Dexter:** whatever

**Simulat:** Deo - I think its a verb that means "the act of making a part of speech that is not a noun into a noun" :-)

**Deoridhe:** "Redness" is our perception of certain light waves that get bounced off of an object.

**Wichard:** But some universals have to do with function; chair, hammer, art

**Thoth:** we do that, Oswy, because brains are pattern matching/seeking machines. And we seek to label and categorize things.

**Oswy:** Wichard Yes it does and that makes them even more mysterious to some. Like the universal courageous or wise or beautiful. they are not all like redness.

**Deoridhe:** Yes, Sim. I was just commenting on the shift from noun to verb in a sentence about the importance of not switching adjectives and verbs into nouns. It was a joke.

**Reflection:** although Oswy, it really just does seem to be that the human brain works on a categorical imperative, and so we all make universals of all types. it really doesn't seem to substantiate an idea of separate actualness at all

**Thoth:** it is only mysterious if we make it so...using terms like universals or qualia. Those are not helpful, imho.

**Simulat:** I knew that Deo :-) sorry - I should have just chuckled instead of analysing it - but I get in these moods

**Deoridhe** giggles at Sim.

**Oswy:** Well the universals seem very useful in our language and we as I said persist in using them.

**Thoth:** sure, it is a useful way to categorize things, I agree.

**Deoridhe:** But the category isn't the terrain. It's a way to communicate about, describe, and remember the terrain in words.

**Thoth:** but I would be careful to keep context/perspective straight, and not assign 'universals' any more status than that. Just my feeling, Oswy.

**Reflection:** sure Os, our categorical thought, though arguably illusion, is quite useful, which is an essential paradox

**Vajra:** why can you not name a chair without having in mind a universal, Dexter? Is it the problem of pointing?

**Lewis:** but you cannot think of "chairness" without thinking of an actual chair

**Oswy:** Ref I think if you take the recognising pattern line then it seems to imply that huge elements of our language are fictions.

**Deoridhe:** But "chairness" itself is based off of experience with things labeled, for us, "chairs".

**Reflection:** agreed Oswy, maybe all of language is fiction, but some of it is useful fiction ;-)

**Oswy:** It has also bothered a lot of philosophers that what is going on here goes beyond resemblance. Ie we are asking why resemblance?

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**Oswy:** We seem to be getting back to the idea that all of these things can be reduced to a sort of biological explanation ie we are evolved to see patterns in certain sorts of ways. So there is no real philosophical problem here at all.

**Thoth:** a lot of philosophy make much ado about things that don't need it, too :o)

**Simulat:** Oswy - Red is not a fiction - its a property of some things we see - we don't actually ever need to use the idea of redness - and in general speech is clearer if we don't - that doesn't make redness a fiction, but it also seems to me to indicate that we don't need it

**Oswy:** But the danger is that we end up with a totally reductive conception of ourselves. Ie: we are all biological evolved reduction.

**Dexter:** If we are evolved to see patterns, then the patters necessarily must be real and even encoded in our DNA

**Simulat:** redness is an unnecessary way of speaking

**Lewis:** I think the patterns are not coded into DNA, they're learned in infancy

**Thoth:** it's an artefact of language; it is useful in its proper context... but if you try to take it too far, it just confuses things unnecessarily.

**Lewis:** it's how we learn to make sense of what we perceive

**Simulat:** seems we can not use it at all and we won't lose the ability to express anything

**Reflection:** don't see the reductionist dilemma you are pointing to Os, there is plenty of complexity, pattern and synthesis, just not taking as actual the patterns, themselves

**Oswy:** So can you educe courage or virtue in the same way or beauty?

**Thoth:** what is courage, Oswy?

**Vajra:** Is there some problem about reduction per se? Explaining some things into other things?

**Deoridhe:** I don't think, in this case, it's a matter of reducing, Oswy. It's about how we combine information form the world in a way which can be remembered and communicated in words.

**Thoth:** it is a type of behaviour in a given type of situation.

**Deoridhe:** One of the problems with semantics is the farther one gets from an observable and clearly sharable example of a quality (say 'red' vs. 'beauty') the harder it is for people to have common ground.

**Oswy:** So behaviourism is all there is to it?

**Reflection:** well Dexter, the patterns that we develop do need to correlate with something actual to be useful, but there might be infinitely many and totally different patterns that could be functional (like light being conceptualized both as wave and particle)

**Thoth:** just because we can compress something using language that is complex into a single word doesn't create some new 'quality'...

**Simulat:** is reducing things to labels all there is to it ? :-)

**Thoth:** ...it is just a useful sort of shorthand for us to use to communicate.

**Dexter:** That doesn't even start to address it

**Thoth:** in a given context, we know what another means by using such words... because we share certain experiences and understandings. It's not really much more complicated or mysterious than that, I think.

**Reflection:** Oswy, courage, beauty are good examples because what those words relate to in culture is constantly changing, the Aztecs and ourselves might have fairly few referents in common with those

**Oswy:** I fear the reductionist impulse that reduces us all to a physicalist explanation as you know.

**Lewis:** why do you fear it, Oswy?

**Thoth:** what is wrong with reductionism? it is a valid tool to use to examine things...

**Oswy:** Why can we not say there are genuine abstract universal entities like redness that describe states of affairs in the world?

**Reflection:** Os, you are being reductionist about behaviourism, it is merely a pattern of thought among many others

**Thoth:** just because one uses it as ONE tool, doesn't make them a 'reductionist'...and few people use one analytical approach exclusively.

**Simulat:** I find the impulse to reduce everything to labels confusing

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**Deoridhe:** We can say it, Oswy. I think it's mistaking the map for the terrain, though, as I said.

**Oswy:** Lewis for one thing I think it tends to reduce us all to machines and it reduces the mental to the physical. It eliminates the abstract.

**Vajra:** So to explain lightening as electrical discharge is somehow problematic because it is reductionist?

**Thoth:** what if the mental IS, ultimately, physical?

**Deoridhe:** ....now I'm confused. The entire point to pattern making and the combining of different objects into one category is THAT it is abstract...

**Thoth:** should we shy away from the truth because it's not what we like or want?

**Lewis:** or to explain beauty as an emotional response to (for example) visual stimulus?

**Vajra:** Or is reductionism problematic only if we are explaining qualities of persons?

**Simulat:** right Thoth - if it is physical it doesn't make it any less important or amazing

**Dexter:** None of that has a bearing on the question if universals exist - it's irrelevant to say there are many patterns when you have no clue what the pattern is

**Thoth:** 'redness' IS a pattern, Dexter.

**Simulat:** Dexter - they exist as patterns of speech that we can do without

**Deoridhe:** I disagree that we can do without them. They serve a purpose.

**Oswy:** Vajra, I am not questioning every physical description and the one you cited is OK, it's when the physicalist language is used to reduce the 1st person the mental the abstract that I get worried. It's just too pat.

**Thoth:** they do serve a purpose...

**Deoridhe:** I don't want to have to come up for a new word for everything I see. Describing it is useful.

**Thoth:** in their proper place and context. And with proper understanding of what they are... and especially, what they are not.

**Simulat:** they do transmit meaning Deo - but we can transmit the same meaning without using them - so they are just a verbal habit

**Vajra:** Okay Oswy; Mental a special case for caution, indeed makes sense

**Simulat:** language habit that is

**Deoridhe:** shrugs. "Depends on the goal of the person. Also, how can we do such, Sim?"

**Dexter:** You have merely replaced the word universal with a very poorly defined word pattern. You have explained nothing

**Marya:** How is the word 'pattern' poorly defined, Dexter? You know what it means don't you?

**Simulat:** instead of saying that a cherry has the property of redness, we can just say the cherry is red

**Deoridhe:** Describe something in your environment to me so I can understand what it is without using any qualities that have been abstracted. We can see if I can figure out what it is."

**Reflection:** well sim, they are important verbal shortcuts, without which language and communication would become tedious at best

**Oswy:** Deo, I think you will find that Nominalists do want to reduce the abstract.

**Deoridhe:** I mean, I could say Sebastian is next to me, but how many of you will know what he is?

**Dexter:** If you were actually right, then there should have never been a philosophical controversy about this, as it is so easy and obvious

**Simulat:** I agree Reflection - but they aren't things that we should get our philosophical knickers into a twist about

**Vajra:** I know he is someone called Sebastian

**Deoridhe:** Oswy, I'm in neither of your categories and I refuse to be restricted in my opinion for what an abstract quantity of people who apparently aren't here might do or think.

**Deoridhe:** Nope, he isn't, Vajra.

**Vajra:** or some thing called Sebastian

**Thoth:** Vaj... there's no one sitting next to you that I can see. ;o) or are you sharing screens in RL?

**Deoridhe:** grins at Thoth. "I was the one with Sebastian next to me, and he's next to me offline."

**Thoth:** ahhh

**Thoth:** points out he's been awake for far too many consecutive hours.....

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**Deoridhe:** He is something called Sebastian, yes.

**Vajra:** So I know that there are some other things true about it. It is a thing that is in time and space e.g. (or else a representation of one lol)

**Oswy:** Dexter, the Nominalists certainly seemed to have a problem. They have resemblance Nominalist, Set Nominalist, Trope theory, and eventually David Lewis and Many Worlds Theory.

**Reflection:** Dexter these debates tend to come from times before science had progressed very far in its reductionism, and it is only in the 20th century that this has meaningfully spread to neuroscience, which makes it possible for us to discuss this paradox, using entirely different patterns, and ones which do not necessitate that universals have some separate existence, outside the patterning of neurons

**Oswy:** It is easy I admit to say well it's all a matter of light waves and patterns and leave it at that.

**Deoridhe:** Except no one said that, Oswy.

**Oswy:** I think some people tonight came fairly close?

**Dexter:** That's the incoherent; I can't even start to understand it. How would the problem not reoccur in the patterning of neurons?

**Deoridhe:** Though I'm not sure how saying things have universal qualities is any less reductive, just in a different way.

**Thoth:** although at a fundamental level, much of it is. Things we are interested in this discussion, however, like ourselves, do not come into existence until several levels of structure and organization further up.

**Thoth:** the problem with much of philosophy, it seems to me, is that often people forget that the world is made up of things organized in various levels of structure... and tend to see just 'their' level as the only one(s) that matter at a given time.

**Reflection:** hahaha, Dexter, then we're even, because I have difficulty seeing the problem ;-)

**Dexter:** If anything, the problem of universals gets more salient in science and neuroscience. But I assume I have a varying understanding of the problem

**Deoridhe:** What I said, and what I heard some other people saying, is that our description and communication about things is perception which includes light waves) and patterns. I would add to that that our description and communication about things is imperfect and tends to be generalized for the sake of communication. If I attempted to sell Sebastian by simply saying I was selling Sebastian, I probably would get no attention except from the people combating human trafficking, but Sebastian isn't human.

**Thoth:** a furball??

**Deoridhe** grins at Thoth. "Sebastian is not animate."

**Oswy:** I say again we use universals all the time. We pick things out using universals all the time we link and categorise particulars all the time. Now this could be just a matter of biology ie that's how our brains are. It could be the universals are real entities fused in the way Armstrong says in a state of affairs.

**Thoth:** universals are just linguistic shortcuts to help us categorize things. Why make it more than that?

**Vajra:** Why should there be any resistance at all to believing in universals? Especially if we suppose that universals are patterns in phenomena. I mean independent existence of universals. I don't see the nominalist's motivation

**Vajra:** Is it because they think existence must be in space and time?

**Thoth:** if you believe in them IN the right context, Vaj, and understand them for what they are - linguistic shortcuts, then sure... I can 'believe' in universals. But we assign the meanings and words ourselves. They have no other 'existence' than that.

**Reflection:** Oswy, reality can exist, absolutely without any of our current "universals" having any actual reality themselves. They can be completely useful, and also quite fictional

**Vajra:** They may be Thoth, but the realism I am assuming is language independent (some patterns not all are language independent). I just don't see why people want to think otherwise

**Vajra:** I see that it is Possible that universals do not have mind/language independent existence But I just don't see why anyone is motivated to say so

**Thoth:** Vaj, take 'redness'; some creatures cannot see that color and may see a tomato as 'yellow'

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**Deoridhe:** I find that perspective, that things just have a quality of some sort as an integral part of them, as reductionist as saying things just have a quality as a convenience.

**Oswy:** Ref I can see that and it's the point Thoth is making about linguistic shortcuts. But I am with Dexter on this; I think I think that is being too easily satisfied with what I have to call a physicalist reductive explanation[?]

**Thoth:** and I think that if you fear reduction, then you lose a very powerful tool to understanding the world.

**Oswy:** What if my intuition to appreciate redness is the appreciation of a real thing a real entity in the world that particulars partake of. As the realist would say?

**Thoth:** one does not use reduction exclusively, Oswy

**Vajra:** Well, Deoridhe, not reductionist to say that qualities exist unless I say that all particulars are made up of them... imo

**Thoth:** it is one tool of many to use to analyze and understand the world and things in it and it is very important to wield it...and others. Structure goes up, down, left, right, forward/back...

**Vajra:** made up of them with no remainder I meant Deo

**Reflection:** well Vajra, I think the problem in believing that universals exist, independently, is that it can make you slow to jettison them when new and better universals appear, which is what happens, in my view, with current moral universals, which are being very slow to be replaced with more accurate and reductionist universals drawn from science

**Deoridhe:** That particular type of redness is an appreciation of the real thing. The second you put the word "redness" to it, however, you've abstracted it away from the original thing which has a particular quality which can be described in various ways.

**Oswy:** Thoth, the tool of reduction can become too powerful. If you reduce all to the physical especially if you reduce mental entities to the physical then I think you go too far?

**Vajra:** Okay, thanks Ref. That is a practical psychological issue imo Very interesting though

**Thoth:** You do not use it exclusively, Oswy, not if you are a reasoning person, anyway...

**Deoridhe:** The redness of a ripe roma tomato is not the same as the redness of a ripe red delicious apple. The redness of a bird's wings is not the same as the redness of another bird's wing at a different time of day.

**Oswy:** Ref what do you mean by more accurate moral universals drawn from science?

**Thoth:** things ARE made up of parts, and things have MANY relationships... things have internal and external relationships... can participate in many contexts...

**Simulat:** just because we say that mental is based on physical doesn't imply that there is no mental - I don't understand your implication that if mental is just the activity of a physical thing that there is no mental

**Vajra:** I wouldn't want to miss the different rednesses in my experience of life, for sure. So, perhaps the nominalist is sort of spiritually motivated? (Quine turning over in his grave)

**Thoth:** I do not understand why one should claim that using reduction is a bad thing. It gives uncomfortable answers at times... but that is not a reason to fear it or belittle it.

**Reflection:** Oswy, this is not about reducing universals to biology, per se (although it may go their finally), behaviorism for example, has nothing specifically to do with biology. To the behaviorist the brain is a black box, and not of fundamental interest. The behaviorist is just using different universals (reinforcement, punishment, stimulus, response)

**Oswy:** Deo It is the common element the redness that we are after when we talk of this universal. It is the common element that we are seeking. What exactly is the common element how does it get there? Many people tonight say it's just a matter of perceptual patterns and that is all there is to it. Many people are not satisfied with that explanation.

**Deoridhe:** Black Box Behaviorism went out in the 70s, actually.

**Deoridhe:** But Oswy, by saying there IS a "common element" that exists "out there" you are reducing the many, many, many, many aspects of the spectrum to a single quality in a way that I, personally, find hugely reductionist in an inaccurate manner.

**Dexter:** I can't believe that anybody still talks about behaviorism

**Marya:** Behaviourism is still studied in modern philosophy of mind

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**Deoridhe:** Behaviorism is hugely useful with clients who have very little internal life or lack the means to communicate their internal life. I use Cognitive behavioural methods at work all the time.

**Dexter:** It's so debunked - Behaviorism is

**Thoth:** so long as people exhibit behaviour, I bet there'll be people studying behaviourism.

**Dexter:** Yes, studied as a curious dead-end

**Deoridhe:** Ah, not so much, Dexter. Some individual theories, perhaps, but I think it's the height of arrogance to claim people don't behave.

**Oswy:** Ref I was just trying to get at your use of the words accurate and reductionist in terms of moral universals.

**Reflection:** Deo, believe me, there are 50 different empirical journals that are filled with it :))

**Thoth:** explain how it is debunked, Dex, beyond simple assertion, please?

**Vajra:** Both Logical behaviourism and scientific behaviourism are conceptually relevant.... to understand their descendants among other things

**Deoridhe:** Ref, it tends to not be black box anymore, unless someone is a died hard Skinnerist.

**Deoridhe:** Black box was because we couldn't observe the brain. Now we can through various methods.

**Oswy:** Deo Redness is a universal and people use it to express a sense an intuition of a common redness a common feature that all red things have. It's what that universal redness represents that we are discussing.

**Deoridhe:** Oswy, redness is not an universal, especially considering there are culture who have as colors "dark" and "light".

**Vajra:** We should distinguish logical behaviourism from skinner /scientific behaviourism Different aims. One is a metaphysical view about the mind; the other advocates a methodology in science

**Marya:** The problem I'm seeing is categorising certain relevant things, such as behaviour, into a set concept and calling it 'behaviourism' - there are some valid aspects of behaviour that ARE relevant to psychology and philosophy, that should not be ignored - however, traditional 'behaviourism' as a so called answer to the mind body problem (which is another matter) has been essentially disregarded as a good theory

**Deoridhe:** And not all reds are the same. My dress has approximately a hundred reds, some distinct enough to be visible to the naked eye. Maybe a thousand reds.

**Marya:** Yes, exactly Vajra

**Reflection:** actually the synthesis of behaviourism and neuroscience is still in its infancy, and behaviourism continues apace in hundreds of academic departments around the world :)), Certainly it is not debunked, because it is mostly founded on replicated empiricism.

**Thoth:** I couldn't have said it better.

**Dexter:** Well, all that could be said about universals - we should reject some aspects and keep others, it's valid, it's this and that. Only, you felt like slamming universals and you like behaviourism

**Deoridhe:** Who are you talking to, Dexter?

**Deoridhe:** In a more complex culture, some of these reds would be considered different colors - and thus different 'qualities'. In others they would not.

**Oswy:** Well all I can say Deo is that in nearly everything I have read on the subject pardon the pun. Redness is used as an example of a universal. The whole point is that there are vast numbers of reds and there is a single concept redness. Surely that is the whole point to the debate. The Nominalist want to say it's just a convenient figure of speech and all you have is a red this and a red that and so on.

**Dexter:** That's not so. Each single hue of redness has its own universal. As I said, you don't seem to understand the problem

**Deoridhe:** There is a vast number of reds and a single concept of redness, which means there are a vast number of QUALITIES of red, and one describer in English which takes in many of them and fades off on the edges of "pink" and "purple" and perhaps "violet".

**Reflection:** as I said, Dexter, the universals of behaviorism are also constructs of thought, and do not have independent existence. So for example, I do not believe that something called "reinforcement" exists independently in nature

## Second Philosophy

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**Deoridhe:** Which points to humans making patterns. In a different culture, "pink" would be a lighter form of "red".

**Thoth:** but Dexter - then all those hues share another, more general, 'redness' universal, no?

**Dexter:** There is a vast number of redness, but that has nothing to do with universals

**Oswy:** Dexter I would say that behaviourism is a pretty debunked way of approaching human behaviour from a philosophical point of view. It's another one of these played out reductionist methods.

**Thoth:** it's just another way of categorizing things into sets, subsets, and supersets.

**Dexter:** There also is a vast number of chairs. But each empire chair has its own universal; otherwise you could not distinguish it from a baroque chair

**Thoth:** another fuzzy word to use.

**Deoridhe:** And don't even get INTO the difficulty of deciding where colors like peach and magenta "belong" when you start distilling down colors. Or cyan. or Azure.

**Vajra:** Functionalism is just logical behaviourism including a larger class (ranging over different categories of) events in the input domain and the output range.

**Reflection:** Oswy, I guarantee you that all specialists in advanced mental health training are educated in the basics of behaviorism, because it is simply quite functional and useful as is not debated seriously in that field

**Deoridhe** grins. "As a specialist trained in that field, yup. You also need to know how to twist more useful things into that kind of language in order to get paid."

**Dexter:** well, mental health . . .

**Reflection:** agreed Deo (it is pretty dry stuff;-))

