Ontology from language? Ramsey on universals

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We usually accept there is a distinction between particulars and universals, particulars being individual objects and universals being general concepts, or abstract "objects". Also, we usually accept this ontological distinction to be represented in language by the subject-predicate distinction, subjects being proper names (for objects), and predicates being adjetives and verbs (for properties and relations). Russell defended such a position in some well-known writings, especially his 1911. In a paper published in 1925, and entitled "Universals", Ramsey challenged both distinctions through a variety of arguments. The paper has been mentioned quite a few times and even partially discussed in print, but I think it is not really very well-known and those arguments are usually not clearly identified, separated or assesed. This is the goal of this paper. In the first section I give a summary of each of the four main arguments which I think can be clearly found in Ramsey's paper. The second section is devoted to try to find general patterns and assumptions in those arguments, then to see if all this can be reduced to a simple, common type of argument and to a few assumptions. This is then inserted into a historical context, where Bradley and Moore come to mind. Finally a third section is devoted to a general assessment of Ramsey's arguments, where his main assumptions are discussed and some criticisms are taken into consideration. The general result is that, although Ramsey's paper is brilliant, his position is not very original and his arguments are rather unconvincing.

Arguments

This section is purely expository, so I just offer a summary of the four main arguments against the universal-particular distinction which may be found in Ramsey's paper on universals. The character of the arguments themselves might be controversial, and the paper is very convoluted and the arguments are mixed with discussion of other authors, mostly Johnson and Russell, so I think a section like this is necessary as a useful starting point to the rest of the paper. Needles to say, this summary somehow simplifies some steps of the arguments. Also, I take the liberty to insert a few clarifications in brackets, and give names to the arguments for convenience of further reference.

1. **Symmetry in language**. The universal-particular distinction depends upon the subject-predicate one. But the subject predicate distinction depends on the assumption that they are completely dissimilar categories, which represent completely different entities in the world. Yet we can exchange subject and predicate in our statements, so there is no absolute distinction at all, then no distinction between objects and concepts: "In a sense, it might be urged, all objects are incomplete; they cannot occur in facts except in conjunction with other objects, and they contain the forms of propositions of which they are constituents" (p. 11). This can be illustrated with a particular example of a subject predicate statement: "… in 'Socrates is wise', Socrates is the subject, wisdom the predicate. But suppose we turn the proposition round and say 'Wisdom is a characteristic of Socrates', then wisdom, formerly the predicate, is now the subject." Both sentences express the same proposition, i.e. they have the same meaning, so it is rather a matter of grammarians: "…with a sufficiently elastic language any proposition can be so expressed that any of its terms is the subject. Hence there is no essential distinction between the subject of a proposition and its predicate, and no fundamental classification of objects can be based upon such a distinction. …the whole theory of particulars and universals is due to mistaking for a fundamental characteristic of reality what is merely a characteristic of language" (pp. 12-13).

2. **Complex universals**. It could be assumed that the subject predicate pattern may apply to "compound" propositions, i.e. those propositions containing atomic propositions as constituents through the use of logical connectives, as for instance "Either Socrates is wise or Plato is foolish". Yet this is not the case. If we take a simpler case, "*aRb*", the theory of complex universals will led us to three different propositions: "*R* holds between *a* and *b*", "*a* has the complex property of 'having *R* to *b*'", and "*b* has the complex property of 'having *R* to *a*'". But there is not three propositions, but one, "for they all say the same thing, namely that *a* has *R* to *b*. So the theory of complex universals is responsible for an incomprehensible trinity. As senseless as that of theology" (p. 14). The reason for the view that variable propositional functions have a definite meaning to be generally held is linguistic convenience. But there are ways to dispense with that supposed need: "'*a* has all the properties of *b*' is the joint assertion of all propositions of the form ϕb . . . ϕa, where there is no necessity for ϕ to be the name of a universal, as it is merely the rest of a proposition in which *a* occurs. Hence the difficulty is entirely imaginary" (p. 16). Therefore there is no need to accept complex universals and so the supposed distinction between subject and predicate should be restricted, at most, to atomic propositions.

3. **The felt difference**. We feel there is an important difference between particulars and universals: while a particular is independent, a universal depends upon something else. I.e. in "Socrates is wise", "Socrates" is independent but "wise" is just a quality of "Socrates". The reason for us to see this difference at all can be explained by noticing that, although they both are not names for genuine objects but incomplete symbols [Those in need of something else to reach true meaning, according to Russell.], "Socrates" gives only one collection of propositions, but "wise" gives two. In the first case, by collecting all the propositions where "Socrates" takes place we get "ϕ Socrates", where ϕ is a variable, e.g., "Socrates is wise", "Socrates is neither wise nor just", and so on. In the second, we not only get "ϕ wise", i.e. the collection of all propositons where "wise" occurs, but also a narrower collection of the form "*x* is wise". Thus, while "Socrates is wise" and similars are values of "*x* is wise", "Neither Socrates nor Plato is wise" and similars are not values of "*x* is wise", "but only of the different function 'ϕ wise', where ϕ is a variable" (p. 20). Is this a real difference between both cases or just an apparent one?

The answer explores the distinction between properties and qualities, the simplest kind of properties, to try to reach the two former collections of propositions for the first case as well, the "Socrates" case. In the end this line of thought would make sense only for genuine objects, but not for "Socrates", which is a logical construction, or incomplete symbol. The new question then is whether a similar distinction can be made for incomplete symbols. The answer is yes: any incomplete symbol "α" "will give us two ranges of propositions: the range αx obtained by completing it in the way indicated in its definition (i.e. in conjunction with another symbol *x* for reaching a "complete" meaning together); and the general range of propositions in which α occurs at all, that is to say, all truth-functions of the propositions of the preceding range and constant propositions containing α" (p. 23). And this is essentially the same situation we formerly got for predicates or adjectives, especially if we notice that the distinction is the same than the one existing between primary and secondary occurences of a symbol. [In a primary occurence for a symbol, the existence of a referent is asserted, while in a secondary occurence it is not, which takes place because in primary occurence the symbol is free of the scope of a wider proposition than the one it belongs to. As Russell wrote in his famous 1905: “A secondary occurrence of a denoting phrase may be defined as one in which the phrase occurs in a proposition *p* which is a mere constituent of the proposition we are considering, and the substitution for the denoting phrase is to be effected in *p*, and not in the whole proposition concerned”.]

Thus "any incomplete symbol is really an adjetive, and those which appear substantives only do so in virtue of our failing whether through

inability or neglect to distinguish their primary and secondary occurences" (p. 23). This can be illustrated with Whitehead's analysis of material objects, where they are regarded not as substantives, but as mere adjectives of the events where they are located, as in the proposition "*A* is situated in *E*". This is done precisely by showing that the primary occurrence of the symbol for an object, a substantive, can be converted into the symbol in secondary occurence: "Thus '*A* is red' will be 'For all *E*, *A* is situated in *E* implies redness is situated in *E*" (p. 24). Therefore, the fundamental distinction for incomplete symbols is not between substantives and adjectives, but between primary and secondary occurence, so that a substantive is just a logical construction, then a subjective property. Then there is just one thing left: to see whether genuine objects (not incomplete symbols) can be divided into particulars and universals, and this can be seen by looking at logical notation.

4. **Symmetry in logic**. The subject-predicate distinction is underlying the objetc-function one. But logicians could have developed alternative systems in which there were a complete symmetry between objects and functions, so the distinction depends just on the convenience of logicians. Where ϕ stand for complex compounds of logical relationships it is an incomplete symbol, so it cannot be defined in isolation or stand by itself. Yet when "ϕa is a two-termed atomic proposition, 'ϕ' is a name of the term other than *a*, and can perfectly well stand by itself" (p. 26). [This is supposed to be the case of "atomic facts", formed by two "objects" in Wittgenstein's jargon.] Mathematical logic is extensional, and so mostly interested in classes and relations in extension, so the distinction between functions as names and functions as incomplete symbols is irrelevant for logicians.

To get complete symmetry between functions which are names and other names, in a way that not only functions determine two ranges of propositions, but also names [see the former argument], we just should develop a new logical notation for functions which are names as follows: "if we called the objects of which they are names qualities, and denoted a variable quality by *q*, we should have not only the range ϕa but also the narrower range *qa*, and the difference analogous to that between 'Socrates' and 'wisdom' would have dissapeared. We should have complete symmetry between qualities and individuals; each could have names which could stand alone, each would determine two ranges of propositions, for *a* would determine the ranges *qa* and ϕa, where *q* and ϕ are variables, and *q* would determine the ranges *qx* and *fq*, where *x* and *f* are variables" (p. 28).

Unity

In this section I offer some comments about the *nature* of each of the former arguments, trying to emphasize their main assumptions. Also, I make an attempt to unify those assumptions to see if a common, general pattern can be found for the whole argumentation. Finally, I insert some of these assumptions into the more general framework of classical analytic philosophy.

The symmetry in language argument, based on a form of reversion, or transposition, of subject and predicate, seems to depend on a formal way to understand language. This is made in the Bradley style: we do not have to look for grammatical analyses, because we are not interested in sentences but "in what they mean, from which we hope to discover the logical nature of reality" (p. 13). So it seems to me that for Ramsey the inference from language to reality is acceptable, just it should be made not from the language as it is, i.e. ordinary language, but from ideal language, or even better, from language expressing its genuine logical form.

Even arguments based upon space and time were seen by Ramsey to be dispensable from the viewpoint of logical form. Thus, when he briefly considers the argument according to which it could be said that objects can only be in one place, while properties can be in many, he however does not develop a full reply to it (that is why I did not include his "argument" in the former section). Rather, he just says that this way to see the problem is not leading us to reach "the essence of the matter", because when two people discuss if a table is an adjective or a substantive, they "are not arguing about how many places the table can be in at once, but about its logical nature" (p. 9).

Complex universals are rejected through a form of reversion as well, by extracting three different propositions from *aRb*. Then by saying that there is just one, not three, because all three have the same meaning. This is similar to the symmetry in language argument, as it shows that different apparent propositions are one and the same, so it seems to insist that there is no essential difference between subject and predicate. Now predicates are more complex, because they involve relational properties, but the nutshell seems to be the same again. Then Ramsey explicitely resorts to the logical form line: "*a* has all the properties of *b*" is *really* the joint assertion of all propositions of the form "ϕb . . ϕa", so the original expression vanishes, and the *true* logical form remains, not giving place to apparent, complex universals any longer. Besides, as long as he implicitly maintains that there is just one true analysis of a proposition, and therefore all other analyses are wrong, he is also defending the idea of logical form underlying gramatical appearance. (Anscombe 1959, p. 96, already pointed out to Ramsey's belief that one analysis of a proposition excludes all other

analyses, yet she did not link that belief to the logical form line of thought.) So finally we have here symmetry and logical form: together they show complex universals to vanish. Thus the complex universals argument can be reduced to the deep belief in logical form underlying linguistic appearance. (Yet the argument can be developed in itself, as shown in Oliver 1992 and Mellor 1992.)

In the felt difference argument Ramsey uses first a symmetry line, by showing that subjects and predicates can be both reduced until giving rise to two ranges of propositions. This could be a sort of logical form argument as well, for it is designed to show that names are different from qualities (predicates) just apparently. Then by declaring both to be incomplete symbols it is shown that they are actually adjectives in the same way, in spite of the "felt" difference. This seems to be clearly based again in logical form, which should be "seen" underneath the gramatical appearance. Finally logical form is used explicitely, both by resorting to a clearly formal category, the division between primary and secondary occurence, then by applying it to the Whitehead example: starting from "*A* is situated in *E*", "*A* is red" can be transformed into "For all *E*, *A* is situated in *E* implies redness is situated in *E*", so the true logical form is now apparent and the pseudo-problem dissolved. The incomplete symbols line of thought seems to depend upon formalization as well, as can be seen in the concept of incompleteness itself, in the classic, Fregean style of predicates/functions as "unsaturated entities". Also, it clearly depends on formalization in the way how Whitehead's manoeuvre is accepted without discussion. In the end we have here simmetry and logical form to show that there is no essential difference between substantive and adjective.

I see the symmetry in logic argument to heavily depend on the former symmetry in language one: logicians *could* have developed a logical notation where subject and predicate *could* behave symmetrically, i.e. where reversion between names of objects and names of concepts were possible. This is facilitated by the fact that the functional language of predicate logic was literally taken from the ordinary language pattern. Therefore the main argument is still the same: symmetry in language.

Thus, the deep unity of all these arguments is based upon symmetry of subject and predicate (object and function/concept) and upon the idea of logical form underlying ordinary language. Besides, there is the idea that we should not make inferences from the structure of language to the structure of reality. Yet, what is the relation between symmetry and logical form? One relation could be that apparent asymmetry is possible because we are not aware of the true logical form of the expression considered, so once the genuine logical form is clarified, the full symmetry between subject and predicate is unveiled, against the gramatical, superficial form. In the end, Ramsey was convinced about this long before he developed

these technical arguments, as can be seen in the Tractarian thesis he maintains in the beginning of the paper, when he says that objects are all essentially incomplete: "they cannot occur in facts except in conjunction with other objects, and they contain the forms of propositions of which they are constituents." (p. 11) But no argument is given to the reader to support this very strong "conclusion".

Also, what is the relation between logical form and the arguments based on a reversion? The logical form arguments are a way to dispense with a given expression, so showing that this expression is not really needed, as we can say essentially the same thing without it. Thus no ontological inference can be made on the basis of that expression. The reversion arguments used in the symmetry line have the same implicit structure: by showing that a reversion is possible, essentially leading to the same meaning, it is shown that the former ontological inferences were unnecessary. The main difference between the two cases is that while in logical form we are suposed to reach the truth, in symmetry we just reach an alternate way to say the same, possibly as wrong as the original one, at least from the viewpoint of the genuine logical form, which is always unique.

Finally, what is the relation of all this to the rejection of any language - reality inference? Well, it seems to me that for Ramsey ordinary language cannot be used as a guide for ontololy because it is misleading, but through the logical form transcription devices we could manage to make some assumptions about reality based on a somehow regimented, formalized language. Based on this there is no distinction between object and concept, because logical form shows that there is no distinction between subject and predicate, and this is an inference from language to reality, but from regimented language! Thus the end is like the beginning: objects are as incomplete as concepts, so they are as needed of completion in the same way, as can be "seen" in facts.

So it seems that Ramsey is building his whole position on a Tractarian base: everything is an object, there are no concepts *prima facie*, or perhaps concepts should be taken as apparent results of the combination of objects.

I'm not implying that Ramsey is somehow denying the existence of concepts, to affirm the existence of objects, as he is obviously denying the whole object-concept distinction. Like the first Wittgenstein, he seemed to be convinced that there is just a kind of ultimate constituents of facts in the world, no matter the way we use to call them. This is not the place to discuss whether ot not Ramsey was right in his implicit interpretation of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, but Anscombe (1959, pp. 98 ff.) took him to be clearly wrong.

Curiously enough, Moore defended a similar ontology in his 1899, being the main difference that then Moore believed there are only concepts: everything is a concept. However, the main consequence is the same: there is no essential difference between subject and predicate. For Moore 1899, propositions are just complex concepts, and any other distinction between concepts, apart of the simple/complex one, is of no importance. Finally, Moore came to reject this simple ontology because he wanted to accept some additional ways to divide concepts into several classes, and so the original plan was abandoned, and the original object-concept distinction accepted again in the papers he wrote from 1900 onwards. His final position, including the thesis that names cannot be predicated from anything else, can be clearly seen in Moore 1923, published just a couple of years before Ramsey's paper. We can speculate about Moore's having somehow triggered Ramsey's, in the sense that Ramsey may have thought of showing a way for names to be somehow converted into predicates just after having read Moore's paper. In the same way, we can speculate about the Ramsey way to transform names into predicates as having somehow influenced Quine's more famous thesis according to which names can be treated as predicates, e.g. "Pegasus" as "Pegasises".

Moore's modified position was used by Russell for his ontology in *Principles of mathematics* (1903), where he considered some symmetry arguments very similar to Ramsey's (1903, §48). However, he finally rejected any strong form of symmetry and based his whole logico-ontological system on the subject-predicate distinction, and all his logic on the concept of propositional function: a version of Frege's concepts. Even more curiously: for Bradley the distinction was to be rejected as well, and although he used some symmetry arguments (1893, chapter 2), they were always directed against any genuine conceptual distinction between terms, qualities and relations: there must be just some sort of ultimate material in the world, and the subject predicate distinction is to be rejected. Obviously, Moore tried to preserve some of those ideas in his first 1899 ontology, although he failed to develop it out in a convincing way. (For more details about this see my 1999a and chapters 2, 3 and 5 of my 2002.)

Assessment

In the following I will make some comments about what I pointed out to be the two most important ideas underlying Ramsey's set of arguments:

(1) the ultimate identity between subject and predicate (substantive and adjective), as involved in the symmetry arguments, either in language or in

logic (including the logical form assumption here), and (2) the rejection of any legitimate inference from language to reality.

As for symmetry, the fact that we *could* exchange subject and predicate most of the time (which is by no means clear after all) does not mean they are the same. All it should prove is just this: we always need some subject and some predicate. So the distinction seems to survive anyway, at least as a relative one. True, this already would undermine the universal-particular distinction as an absolute one, but I cannot help believing there is something more on it than a mere arbitrary, conventional trick, like it seems to be presented in Ramsey's paper. In the end, if this is so, we can always try to see if the distinction conveys some ontological assumptions under it, and also if these assumptions may have some independent value.

On the other hand, when we play with those examples, as for instance with the "Socrates is wise" one in the symmetry in language argument, we may be forgetting that "wisdom" and "wise" are not identical. “Wisdom” is a substantive and “wise” an adjective, so we can apply here an old distinction used by Russell to point out a difference between "relating" relations and relations in themselves: while "wise" would be a "predicating" predicate, "wisdom" would be the predicate in itself, so not actually predicating. Therefore, even if we succeed in showing some symmetry as actually working, we can always argue that there is a *natural* way for substantives and adjectives to occur in sentences, and that exceptions do not involve any ultimate destruction of a deeper distinction. (For more arguments on the essential asymmetry of subject and predicate see Strawson 1970. Strawson 1954 is also interesting to explore some lines of argumentation not considered by Ramsey.) Ramsey was not ignoring the distinction, but trying to show that it is just a grammatical one through the symmetry arguments, leading us to logical form, where the distinction vanishes. Curiously enough, the Russell arguments try to show that, even if we can artificially dispense with the distinction through the symmetry manoeuvres, the true logical form of predicating predicates and predicated predicates is ultimately different. Thus, the logical form arguments can be used to prove contradictory assertions.

Also, the symmetry argument might be formulated in alternate ways, which may be closer to Ramsey's original intentions. For instance, instead of reversing "Socrates is wise" into "Wisdom is a characteristic of Socrates", we could reverse it into "Wisdom is Socratic", by taking advantage of the fact that some names can be converted into adjectives in a natural way. I.e. from "metal" we obtain "metallic", and from "analysis" we get "analytic". In the case of Socrates, "Socratic" usually means a follower of Socrates, rather than something exhibiting properties typical from Socrates, but if we can somehow force ordinary language in the way

pointed out by Ramsey in his usual symmetry arguments, why not forcing it in ways supported by ordinary use? (Strawson 1959, p. 174, already mentioned the "Wisdom is Socratic" possibility, but he did not develop it in my, or any other, way.)

At any rate this is deeply linked to the incompleteness argument, according to which names (objects) are as incomplete as predicates (properties and relations), as they need completion in a sentence (in a fact) to reach full meaning (existence, or at least a place in a state of affairs). For if the symmetry argument is right, then there is no especial incompleteness in names or objects; and the reverse is also true: if the essential incompleteness argument is true, then a full symmetry is reached. But we can also assess the incompleteness argument by itself: it seems to me obvious that predicates are incomplete in a very different sense than names. As it has been pointed out before (Strawson 1959, p. 153; Dummett 1973, pp. 61 ff.), the incompleteness of predicates is a just propositional one, but we can imagine more than one sort of "incompleteness" for names, as they can be used into a variety of linguistic constructions not necessarily propositional. That is, the predicative incompleteness suggests by itself an assertive completeness, which is totally absent from names. However, this argument could be objected that, if we convert names into predicates, by any of the possible symmetry manoeuvres, then even this sort of propositional incompleteness could be found in names. So in the end we are left with the symmetry line as the main argument again.

MacBride 1998a can be regarded as a more modern way to attack the incompleteness argument, then to defend the symmetry line, and ultimately the non-distinction between particulars and universals. He efficiently analyzes Armstrong's realistic position on universals by providing counter-arguments to that position, especially concerning Armstrong's inability to give convincing arguments that universals and particulars are really different kinds of entities. This is particularly related to Ramsey when MacBride criticizes Armstrong's current conception according to which universals are "unsaturated" entities, because MacBride does so by pointing out that particulars, like universals, "occur only as the constituents of states of affairs" even in Armstrong's metaphysics (p. 34). Yet I cannot help seeing the Ramsey connection as a rather loose one, as MacBride does not resort to any of the particular arguments actually used by Ramsey, who is not even mentioned in that paper. Therefore we can say just that, although he is somehow "inspired" in Ramsey's general rejection of the distinction, his arguments do not constitute an improvement of Ramsey's *actual* arguments. This has been somehow admitted by MacBride in his 1998b, where he writes that the rejection of the particular-universal distinction "cannot be substantiated on the basis of the arguments that Ramsey provides" (p. 203). Thus, for the same reasons, MacBride's attempts to

"improve" on Ramsey's arguments in his 1998b and 2001, in the context of more contemporary discussion on universals, should be regarded rather as very loosely inspired in Ramsey. Thus, although MacBride's work is very valuable in itself, I think it cannot be used to vindicate Ramsey's arguments but, at most, his general, skeptical position about the celebrated distinction. However, as we have seen, skepticism over that distinction was already present in Bradley, the first Moore, and even the first Russell.

The "is" of predication was taken by Peano to involve membership, and it was clearly distinguished from inclusion by himself and his followers. In our case it seems that if we say "Socrates is wise" it is membership what is involved, because we think Socrates to be a member of the set of the wise people. Yet when we try to do the same with "wisdom", e.g., to convert a property term into a subject, we may instantly be involved with inclusion rather than with membership. If we say "Wisdom is a quality" or "Red is a colour", it seems that what we are really implying is that everything exhibiting the first order property is also exhibiting the second order one: every wise entity is also an entity with a certan quality, and every red thing is also a coloured thing. Agreed, we can also say that in these examples *both* wisdom and red are also members of certain sets (so seeing them as "objects"), but it is also true that this twofold possibliity is not open to "Socrates", unless we make rather strange manoeuvres, so if this is so then the distinction between substantives and adjectives will be a well-supported one from our usual conceptual system, as it underlies ordinary language. Thus, although probably for Ramsey there was no essential difference between "Socrates is wise" and "Red is a colour", as both were examples of instantiation between particular and universal (for those accepting the distinction), the truth is that the mere distinction between different "logical forms" underlying each of them (membership and inclusion) may lead us to completely different treatments of their philosophical consequences.

In the whole symmetry arguments line, for Ramsey the relation of characterizing is exactly equivalent to "is" (1925, p. 29), so it cannot be used to make a difference between subject and predicate: it is a "verbal fiction". But we could use the symmetry argument under the characterization form in a way which cannot be done by using "is", like this: "Wisdom characterizes Socrates" and "Socrates characterizes wisdom". In this way we can see that the characterizing relation might work even as a symmetrical relation. Yet one problem could be that, while it is clear how wisdom could characterize Socrates, i.e. by being a property of Socrates, it is unclear how Socrates might characterize wisdom. Unless we admit wisdom, as equivalent to a set of individuals (the wise people), to be characterized by those individuals, in the sense that perhaps the "type" of wisdom could be different according to the particular membership of the

set. Of course if we take a purely extensional viewpoint then the whole approach is useless, but in a rather natural way we usually characterize properties by the individuals exhibiting them, as it takes place in the language of colours and other empirical qualities.

Dummet criticized the symmetry arguments by writing that, while with properties we get a contrary, as when we say "wise" and "not wise" (or foolish), this does not take place with names: we do not say "non-Socrates" (1973, 61 ff.). (In doing so, Dummett probably followed Anscombe and Geach, as both authors had been previously defending a similar position; see Strawson 1970 for quotes and comments.) Sahlin already took care of this criticism efficiently (1990, p. 200), based on the Tractarian thesis that there are no negative properties, just positive ones, so the argument does not seem to work against him, at least if we assume Ramsey to follow Wittgenstein once again. Yet if the symmetry argument is to be taken seriously, another response could have been that, if not wise is a property, then in a sense non-Socrates would be one as well. As we saw above, if we take "Wisdom is Socratic" as a valid proposition (by reading "Socratic" as "metallic", "solid", or any similar adjective) then not Socratic could be a property as well. This might be also used to meet a criticism by Simons (1991, p. 152), according to which in "Wisdom is a characteristic of Socrates", the actual predicate is not "Socrates" but the whole expression after "Wisdom". If we use "Wisdom is Socratic", the criticism is no longer valid, so we need deeper criticisms.

As for the logical form line, this is not explicitely mentioned by Ramsey on this paper, but it may well be the general framework of the whole paper, as I said in the former section. The closest statement for a typical logical form theory which can be found in Ramsey's paper is this: "we are… interested not so much in sentences in themselves, as in what they mean, from which we hope to discover the logical nature of reality. Hence we must look for senses of subject and predicate which are not purely grammatical, but have a genuine logical significance" (1925, p. 13). As a matter of fact Ramsey wrote in 1929 a short paper on philosophy, where he reduced the role of philosophical analysis to build up a sort of axiomatic system based on logic and definitions. In his own words: "In philosophy we take the propositions we make in science and everyday life, and try to exhibit them in a logical system with primitive terms and definitions etc. Essentially philosophy is a system of definitions, or only too often a description of how definitions might be given" (1931, p. 263). In writing this he was following rather closely what I have described as Russell's method of constructive definitions, so it is not strange that in 1925 he was trying to apply this method to reconstruct some problematic concepts and distinctions to get a cleaner, new presentation of them. (I have studied Russell's method, as applied to mathematical philosophy, in my

1991. Also, a more general description of the method, as applied to many other fields of philosophy, can be found in my 1999b.)

Ultimately, when Ramsey holds that "Socrates is wise" and "Wisdom is a characteristic of Socrates" he is assuming that both statements express the same proposition, so they presumably assert the same fact. Therefore, he is also assuming that both linguistic expressions are alternate ways to express one and the same logical form, which should closely correspond to the genuine constituents of that fact, where no objects or concepts could be found. Those true constituents can be unveiled just when we develop a logical way to dispense with purely linguistic categories, like subject and predicate, and this is the main goal of the different logical manoeuvres he suggests in his paper.

Thus, all the arguments of the paper on universals would presuppose that, in transcribing ordinary language into logical form, we are getting the true meaning, then the true form of facts, then somehow dissolving purely apparent philosophical pseudo-problems, based on grammatical, misleading forms. Yet logical form is language, the language of a especial sort of logic, or logical calculus; a language which is built up by taking advantage of a formal structure previously created with definite, technical purposes, which may survive by itself as a part of mathematics. So if we maintain that there is a strong link between this language and the form of facts, this should be guaranteed through some dedicated arguments. Instead, Ramsey takes it for granted without any explicit argument. In the end of the day, if any inference from language to reality is prohibited, while arguments based on logical form are allowed, we are facing a vicious circle: how could we know the way to extract the logical form from ordinary discourse, which is the only one from which we can draw conclusions as for the form of reality, without knowing in advance how reality is? I think this is a problem underlying the whole logical atomism line, from Frege to Russell and the first Wittgenstein.

The symmetry in logic argument is once again based on a formal way to understand language. One problem about this argument is that talk about functional symbols as names of properties is presupposing that properties can be regarded as objects. If they are not objects but concepts, the fact that we modify our way to talk about them cannot lead us to transform them into objects. Apart from pure mathematics, in the context of the relation between logic and language, logic seem to use functions because language is conceptual, and language is conceptual for some reason. As Quine used to recall us, the objects of a theory are the objects this theory talks about. So it makes no much sense to maintain that predicate logic says nothing about reality: it is an instrument to be applied very usefully to reality, which tremendously help us to understand reality thanks to *assuming* objects and functions to exist. As it happens in

empirical science, where we apply models to reality in order to conceptualize –then understand– it, the same seems to be true with logical models, which are used with the same purpose.

Another problem is second order logic, as involved in the argument that we could deal with predicates (functions, relations) as mere objects. By the time "Universals" was written, second order logic was still obscure and not clearly distinguished from first order logic, as can be seen in *Principia mathematica*, so it is easy to understand that Ramsey did not see any problem in converting predicates into subjects. Yet *if* this implies that we can quantify over predicates, then the argument fails: second order logis is a very different animal, and behaves weirdly. For once, in first order predicate logic we cannot quantify over predicates, and these are seen in the usual, extensional way as functions and relations, i.e. subsets of the universe. Second order logic allows us to do so, but at a price: the usual, well-established metatheoretical results for first order logic fail for second order logic, and model theory become extremely difficult. On the philosophical side we could even see second order logic rather as set theory in logical disguise, as Quine used to say. Yet here I'm neutral on the present controversy about the nature of second order logic. All I'm saying is that Ramsey's argument may be committing him to second order logic, then to all the technical and philosophical problems involved, so the original argument may not be worth to be maintained at so expensive a price.

A further problem with the symmetry in logic argument is that it seems to somehow involve the *Tractatus* thesis according to which we do not know anything about atomic propositions, so they cannot be instanciated. Then how could we tell the way to deal with them in logic? Are we talking about actual language or about ideal, formalized language? This seems to me to be a further, vital problem in dealing with logical form as a way to dispense with philosophical problems involved in language, and it was also present in the whole logical atomism project (see above). Anyway, Ramsey seemed to finally believe that it is not impossible to discover atomic propositions by actual analysis (1926, p. 31), yet this would be a further sign of his deep belief in logical form as reached by linguistic analysis! And this, again, should be a problem for his belief that no inference can legimately be made from language to ontology.

Finally, what about Ramsey's most important assumption, rejecting inferences from language to reality, as considered in itself, independently from the other arguments? If we are not allowed to draw ontological consequences from language, then applying them to reality, what is left? Is there any other means to especulate about the structure of reality than studying the ontological structure of language, i.e. its ontogical implications? What is ontology? It cannot be based on empirical theories: if so ontology would be like physics or astronomy. If we cannot use language

as a guide, how could it be possible for us to try to determine what there is? As Quine used to say, it is not that language creates reality, e.g. what there is does not depend upon our language, just what we can say about what there is *does* depend upon our language. Thought, in the end, is linguistic, even for the *Tractatus*, a particularly important source of inspiration for Ramsey. So by resorting to "pure" thought nothing is gained after all. Agreed, it seems that there is some thought which can be produced independently of language, but ontology is a very complex philosophical theory, so if should depend of language in important, deep ways.

Ramsey says: the universal-particular distinction is just a result of the subject-predicate distinction, so in accepting it for reality we are taking a linguistic distinction to be an actual, ontological distinction. As we have seen, his main argument is the symmetry one. Yet the symmetry argument is a linguistic argument, so he is anyway taking a trait of language to be a trait of reality! I.e. if subject and predicate are but symmetric then there is no real distinction even in language, so there is no distinction in reality either. True, this was not what Ramsey seemed to have in mind, but it could be said anyway by strictly following the logic he was raising.

Language contains the conceptual apparatus with which we approach reality to perceive, conceive, and handle it, so we might only find in reality that what language *allows* us to find. Language is very similar to a mycroscope, or a telescope: it is also an instrument. But language has evolved, so it is to be hoped that it has been approching reality progressively, until being much more closery linked to it that in the beginning, as it happens with technical instruments. Reality shows itself according to the instruments we use to approach it. It is *us* who, by applying different categories of instruments, obtain different pieces of different information from our research. We must use *some* instrument to approach reality from the ontological viewpoint, we just cannot do it without any conceptual means.

Therefore, if language is the conceptual structure through which we understand reality, so it should be closely related to reality, then there must be something about reality in the structure of language. And this seems to be especially true about the subject-predicate distinction, which could be pointed out to be undeniable from a naturalistic viewpoint, as can be seen in the context of the origin and evolution of language. Concepts seems to be constructions out of reflection because they represent properties of objects, which seem to be prior for ordinary life, then for evolution. It can even be said that the subject-predicate distinction might well be on our genes (rather than a "universal grammar"), because it is ready for being an hereditary property of our global human culture, then of our language (Deacon 1997).

As a matter of fact, interesting experiments with just thirteen months old infants have shown that they can already differentiate between nouns and adjectives as a way to start categorizing the world (Karmiloff and Karmiloff-Smith 2001, p. 68), so the subject-predicate distinction may well be a trait incorporated to our conceptual apparatus by means of genetic assimilation because it somehow shares with reality something which was objectively important for survival in the past. Therefore the right way might not be from subject-predicate in language to object-concept in ontology, but from object-concept in behaviour *and* culture to subject-predicate in language, then in ontology. If this is so, Ramsey was mistaken in believing that the distinction was a contingent one accidentaly incorporated into language, withoug reflecting anything real.

I think at least a moderate form of linguistic relativity against cognitivism can be defended. In my 2003? I give more details of a general position against cognitivism, together with a series of arguments based on important empirical findings concerning a variety of scientific fields. However, I am no pragmatist. I am not saying that by obtaining efficient, useful results you are somehow guarateeing the truth of the theories or assumptions you are making or applying. All I am saying is that language is already a part of reality (behaviour, culture, evolution), so it must share some traits with it, mostly because it was first used precisely to conceive and handle reality successfully. There is no other way to built up an ontological system but regarding language as a conceptual structure to be searched, and this can be clearly seen in most philosophical systems and theories.

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