

INSTANCE IS THE CONVERSE OF ASPECT

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Abstract

According to the aspect theory of instantiation, a particular A instantiates a universal B if and only if an aspect of A is cross-count identical with an aspect of B. This involves the assumption that both particulars and universals have aspects, and that aspects can mediate between different ways of counting things. I will ask what is new about this account of instantiation and, more importantly, whether it is an improvement on its older relatives. It will turn out that the part of it that is new is the notion of cross-count identity among aspects. As I will show, this notion is both dubious and unnecessary. I will end by presenting a simplified aspect theory of instantiation that does not involve cross-count identity.

Keywords

Instantiation, Universals, Aspects, Cross-count identity, Indifferentism, Donald Baxter.

1. Preliminaries

There have been two main theories of predication in the history of philosophical semantics: the scholastic copula theory and Frege's functional analysis of predication. More recently, scholars have identified a third alternative in Aristotle, which might be called the *aspect theory of predication*. This theory is partly motivated by an observation that Mohan Matthen made a couple of decades ago [1983: 126]: that in Ancient Greek, simple sentences of the form 'A is B' may always be read as 'A-B is'. For instance, 'Plato is pale' may be read as 'Pale-Plato is'. The second formulation may be understood as 'Plato qua pale exists' [Bäck: 2000], so that the 'is' in 'A is B' is an existential 'is', not a copula [De Rijk: 2002].

Corresponding to the aspect theory of predication, there is an aspect theory of instantiation. Among its proponents are Donald Baxter [2001], Ian Underwood [2010], and, in some respects, a temporal part of David Armstrong [2004; cf. 2005: 317].¹

¹ Armstrong embraces the idea that instantiation is a kind of qualified identity, but he does not actually use, or understand, the notion of an aspect [2004: 142 fn. 3].

According to Baxter, an aspect of a thing is this thing in a respect. For instance, *Socrates insofar as he is seated* is an aspect of Socrates. This aspect comes into existence when Socrates takes a seat and it ceases to exist when he stands up. It corresponds to the complex entity that exists, according to the aspect theory of predication, when ‘Seated-Socrates is’ is true. Baxter argues that when a particular instantiates a universal, there are two such aspects: (1) the particular insofar as it instantiates the universal, and (2) the universal insofar as it is instantiated by the particular. When Plato instantiates the universal paleness, for instance, there are the following two aspects: *Plato qua pale* and *paleness qua exemplified by Plato*. According to the aspect theory of instantiation, these two aspects are in some sense the same.

In this paper, I will focus on Baxter’s version of the aspect theory of instantiation. To keep things simple, I will ignore relations and relational predicates. Further, I will only deal with *kind instantiation*. (I will thus use ‘universal’ and ‘kind’ interchangeably.) Kind instantiation differs from *property instantiation* as follows. When Plato is pale, he instantiates the property, paleness, but he is not a kind of paleness. By being a mammal, in contrast, Plato instantiates a kind. He does not have a mammal as one of his properties, he is a kind of mammal. This is a difference on the level of linguistic expressions, and I don’t know whether this difference implies an ontological one. All I propose here is to stick to one set of expressions, namely the ones that classify things as specimens of kinds, as opposed to those that attribute properties to things. I do this mainly because it makes it easier to state the main idea of the aspect theory of instantiation: that universals are in some respect the same as their instances. For grammatical reasons, Plato cannot be the same as paleness. Plato is a particular human being and paleness is a property, and there is no way in which particular human beings are the same as properties. In contrast, there are no grammatical reasons against identifying, in some sense to be specified, Plato and the kind *mammal*. After all, whereas Plato is not a paleness, he *is* a kind of mammal.

I will not, by the way, be interested in the distinction between natural and non-natural kinds. As far as I am concerned, *item on my desk* is a perfectly good kind. Readers who think otherwise may be better able to follow my argument by replacing all references to kinds with references to what they take to be *natural* kinds.

So much for preliminaries. Let me now outline Baxter’s version of the aspect theory of instantiation. After presenting it in rough outline, I will further explain and discuss some of the details.

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