Richard Brian Davis

THE BRAVE NEW BARE PARTICULARISM

Bare particulars have never had an easy time making philosophical converts. Initially introduced to the philosophical world as elusive, we-know-not-whats—substrata underlying the properties had or exemplified by things, but themselves bereft of properties—bare particulars have been dismissed as unde-tectable, unnecessary, and even incoherent. Hardly a warm welcome. It appears, however, that times are changing. In a recent series of articles, for example, J. P. Moreland has argued that "bare particulars are crucial entities in any adequate overall theory of individuation";' that is, concrete particulars cannot be individu-ated without them. In the same vein, Oaklander and Rothstein,[2] drawing upon ele-ments of Moreland's new theory, have defended bare particulars against Loux's grounding objection'—that if the theory is correct, bare particulars are qualita-tively indiscernible; in which case we either have no basis for saying that they arc numerically diverse, or we must introduce lower-level substrata to ground that diversity, thereby raising the spectre of an infinite regress of individuators.[3]

Oaklander and Rothstein (hereafter, 'O&R') leave the impression that merely attending to the basic features of a theory such as Moreland's is alone sufficient to dissolve Loux's objections to bare particulars. Perhaps so. Nevertheless, I shall argue that O&R overlook a deeper and more intractable problem. For the theory, if true, leads to the following dilemma: either a concrete particular like Socrates includes himself as a constituent (thereby generating one lower-level Socrates after another *ad infinitum),* or Socrates' bare particular is an impotent individuator, powerless to distinguish him from anything else.

Let us begin, then, by asking the question: what *is* the new bare particular-ism[9] According to Moreland, it is first and foremost a theory of individuation. Consider, he says, Aristotle and Plato—

> two red, round spots that share all their pure properties in common. The
> problem of individuation is the problem of offering an ontological assay
> of the situation so as to specify what it is that makes the two spots two
> particular, individual entities instead of one.[4]

Now as it turns out, Moreland's assay of these two spots yields the conclusion that each is a constituted whole 'built up' out of various pure properties—spothood, redness, roundness, and the like.[5] By hypothesis, however, Aristotle and Plato share *all* of their constituent pure properties. So the question arises: what is it that accounts for their numerical diversity? There must be some further constituent of Aristotle, says Moreland, that grounds its particularity and distinguishes it from

Plato. The problem of individuation is therefore said to involve "giving an account of the constituents of an entity that serve to individuate it." [6] And not surprisingly, Moreland's favored candidate for the role of individuator is the bare particular. So the first thing to see is that the new bare particularism is a constituent-whole theory of individuation.

There are, however, further nuances to the theory, which serve to distinguish it from its more easily refuted predecessors. For one thing, on Moreland's view, bare particulars are not completely bare; they possess a range of properties, and thus qualify as at least 'partially clad'. This enables Moreland to dodge the oft-repeated objection that bare particulars are incoherent, since nothing can exist without exemplifying some property or another. In fact, it seems evident (as Loux notes [7]) that if there are any bare particulars, they exemplify such trivially essential properties as *being self-identical, being a number or a non-number,* and *being colored if red,* as these are metaphysically fastened to every object. Moreover, since they are particulars, as opposed to universals, we should find each 'partially clad' bare particular (hereafter, PCBP) exemplifying *being a particular* and *being an repeatable.* In short, "Bare particulars cannot exist without properties." [8] If they exist at all, they must be 'partially clad'.

Nevertheless, there remains a sense in which PCBPs *are* bare. For although they are posited as constituents of the complex particulars they individuate, they themselves are internally simple or constituentless. This marks an important advance of the theory—an advance that, as O&R point out, seems to have escaped Michael Loux's notice. According to Loux, for example, since PCBPs are qualitatively identical, since (very likely) they share the same essential attributes, they can be individuated only by positing *in them* additional lower-level substrata. That is, PCBPs are distinct just in case each contains its own distinct lower-level PCBP. And of course this leads to a vicious infinite regress of individuators. But in fact the regress here need never begin. What Loux has shown, at best, is that we must posit a first, unindividuated individuator in the order of explanation—an individuator that simply comes individuated. And on this point, I believe, O&R are right: it may be that "all ontologies must sooner or later take individuation (whether between two bare particulars, two determinates of the same determinable, or whatever) to be basic." [9] If this is so, then *(contra* Loux) we don't need an account of numerical diversity here; for Moreland's PCBPs, taken as brutely individuated ontological simples, handily terminate the alleged regress before it begins.

In order to secure this move, however, the new bare particularism deploys a peculiar account of predication. Moreland actually distinguishes between two modes of predication: the 'rooted-in' and 'tied-to' modes. Consider, for example, the proposition

(1) Socrates is human.

On Moreland's view, (1) presents us with a typical case of predication; it tells us that a certain property, *being human,* is rooted-in a concrete particular, Socrates. Thus Moreland advises us to read (1) as

(1') Socrates has *being human* as a constituent.

Now clearly, if this were the only mode of predication at our disposal, we couldn't ascribe a property to a PCBP without that PCBP being transformed into a complex entity. Moreland therefore invokes what he calls 'tied-to' predication, whereby properties may be externally 'glued' or 'tied-to' PCBPs without entering *into* them as constituents. This move is crucial to the theory not only because some properties (the essential ones, say) must be ascribed to PCBPs *qua* PCBPs, but also because each PCBP must ground the internal constituents of the complex particular it individuates. Thus, for example, we are told that (1) is "grounded in"[10]

  (2) This (bare particular) is human

which is just to say that while (1) roots the property of being human *in* Socrates, (2) ontologically grounds it, tying it down (as it were) to Socrates' bare particular. And this is as it should be; for unless his internal constituents were tied-to a PCBP, Socrates would amount to little more than a compresent bundle of pure properties.

In light of these theoretical virtues, it is safe to say, I think, that Loux's criticism of bare particulars loses much of its persuasive force. For once it is seen that PCBPs are presented to us as brutely individuated individuators, having properties tied *to* them but not rooted *in* them, there is no longer any justification for demanding an account of their numerical diversity on pains of spiraling into an infinite regress of substrata. But does it follow, as O&R seem to suggest, that 'partially clad' bare particulars are therefore in the clear? Sadly, it does not. The basic thrust of the theory is that what makes a complex particular what it is, what distinguishes it from everything else, is one of its constituents. So consider an object—Socrates, let's say—and let b denote his bare particular. Like any constituent of Socrates, b will stand in the *is a constituent* of relation to Socrates. This much, I should think, is unexceptional.

Now either standing in this relation is essential or accidental to this pair. Suppose, first, that it is essential. Then given the plausible assumption that there is (at most) one bare particular per customer, it follows that in every possible world in which Socrates exists, he (and he alone) is individuated by b. Furthermore, there is no possible world in which anything else is so individuated. For suppose otherwise; that is, suppose there is an object x distinct from Socrates and such that it could have included b as a constituent.. Then note that (necessarily) if x had included b, x would have been identical with Socrates. (Presumably, this is what Moreland is getting at when he says that a bare particular "makes" a thing the "particular, individual" entity that it is and not something else.) It now follows that x could have been identical with Socrates—a conclusion which, together with

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the necessity of the law of identity ("x = y $\supset \Box$ x = y"), entails that *x* is Socrates-identical. But of course this is absurd, since (by hypothesis) *x* is *not* Socrates. Thus *being the individuator of Socrates* is essentially unique to *b;* it expresses what Plantinga calls its essence—a property *b* could not exist without, and nothing else could possibly have.[11] Herein there lies trouble. For if this property individuates *b,* then (given Moreland's constituent-whole ontology) it must be counted among *b*'s internal constituents. I take it, however, that the constituency relation is transitive. Accordingly, if *b* is a constituent of Socrates and *being the individuator of Socrates* is a constituent of *b,* then on the assumption that Socrates is a constituent of this latter (impure) property, it follows that Socrates is a constituent of himself.

None of this, of course, is heartening. Socrates is supposed to be the metaphysical 'end product' of having been assembled out of certain appropriately related constituents. So if we include Socrates himself in this metaphysical recipe, then either something must *already* individuate him ontologically prior to his being a constituent of himself, or he must simply arrive on the scene pre-individuated. In the former case, we confront the rather deflating prospect of individuating constituent-Socrates by appeal to (presumably) yet another bare particular. And then, of course, the present objection simply applies all over again. In the latter case, we eliminate the need for bare particulars altogether; indeed, if constituent-Socrates (that is, Socrates) just comes individuated, there really is no problem of individuation to speak of.

But what about this assumption I make: that *being the individuator of Socrates* is a property of Socrates' bare particular and, further, that Socrates is a constituent of this property? Is this at all plausible? Moreland's response, I think, would be that if there were such a property, Socrates would surely be among its constituents. For example, he points out that "if one does a constituent assay of the entities that compose [the property of] being identical to Socrates, one will have to include the individual Socrates in that assay."[12] Like concrete particulars, impure properties also have constituents; and an impure property such as *being identical to Socrates* has Socrates himself as concrete constituent. But why should we think so? For the simple reason that this property must be individuated, and the theory requires that what individuates *being identical to Socrates* be a constituent of it. And what better constituent for present purposes than Socrates himself? Still, one wonders, if we need a constituent-individuator here, why not simply call on a PCBP? This is, after all, what we have been doing with ordinary particulars all along; it is by appeal to their constituent PCBPs that we have said they are to be individuated.

Well, on Moreland's theory, as it happens, "when bare particulars individuate, they turn their individuated states of affairs into concrete particulars."[13] And the problem is that *being identical with Socrates* just doesn't seem to be a concrete particular; there is obviously an enormous ontological difference between

Socrates—as fine a particular as one could hope to find—and the property of being identical with him. Thus we cannot rely on PCBPs to individuate impure properties; it must be the concrete individuals these properties 'incorporate' that do the job. On Moreland's view, then, Socrates will indeed contain himself as a constituent provided that *being the individuator of Socrates* is a property of his bare particular. It seems to me, therefore, that what Moreland must deny here is that *being the individuator of Socrates* really is a property.

But how is this supposed to work? Let's agree, for the moment, that no such property exists; still, it seems undeniable that *being the individuator* of *Socrates* will at least characterize Socrates' PCBP. Indeed, if this were not true, how could *b* individuate Socrates at all? If being Socrates' individuator isn't a characteristic of *b*, then surely *b* isn't Socrates' individuator. But now consider: this characteristic must be connected with *b* in some fashion. And given Moreland's theory, this connection can only be forged by way of the 'tied-to' or 'rooted-in' relations. (What other possibilities for connection are there?) However, *if being the individuator of Socrates* is merely tied-to *b,* then what we're saying is that individuators needn't be constituents of the things they individuate, which contradicts the very heart of the theory. There is no other alternative, therefore, but to root this property directly in *b,* so that we are once again saddled with the unwanted conclusion that Socrates is a constituent of himself.

But perhaps things will fare better for the theory, if we abandon this idea that *b* essentially stands to Socrates in the *is a constituent* of relation. Suppose this relation holds only contingently. That is, suppose that Socrates and *b* could have existed but without the latter's being a constituent of the former. What follows? Simply that having *b* as a constituent does not individuate Socrates. Perhaps we can see this as follows. It is obvious that no PCBP can exist apart from being a constituent of some concrete particular or other. PCBPs are not 'stand alone' entities; they are ontological parasites. Something similar goes, too, for concrete particulars; they depend for their existence on having one (and only one) PCBP as a constituent. But then to say that Socrates and his PCBP might have co-existed without standing in the constituency relation is to say that there is a possible world *w* in which Socrates is individuated, not by *b,* but rather an entirely *different* PCBP. Since *b* also exists in *w,* it must individuate something other than Socrates therein. An object's having *b* as a constituent is therefore no guarantee that it is Socrates. And what this suggests, in general, is that PCBPs of distinct concrete particulars are intersubstitutable *salva distinguo;* they can replace each other without altering the distinction between the particulars containing them. In other words, they are impotent individuators, if they are individuators at all.

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Perhaps someone might object that Socrates needn't have *b* as a constituent essentially, that is, in every world in which he exists. For the purposes of individuation, it is enough, rather, that any world enjoying Socrates' existence is one in which Socrates contains a unique PCBP. But the important thing to see is that this PCBP needn't be the same from world to world. So perhaps in the actual world, it is *b* that individuates Socrates; in another world *w,* however, a wholly different PCBP individuates him. Still, as long as that PCBP is distinct from each of its fellows in *w,* it looks as though there should be no problem in saying that, in *w,* Socrates is individuated.

I think this reply leaves a good deal to be desired. In essence the objector is saying that having a PCBP *simpliciter* does not individuate an object, but having a world-indexed PCBP does. Socrates is not individuated, then, by *having b as a constituent,* but rather by *having b as a constituent in* **a** (where 'α' rigidly designates the actual world). Indeed, on this way of thinking, individuation itself is a world-relative affair. But how is this supposed to help? After all, it seems all too clear that having *having b as a constituent in* **a,** if it characterizes Socrates at all, does so essentially and uniquely, thereby serving (like it or not) as a transworld individuator (and constituent) of him. Consequently, if *b* is a constituent of *having b as a constituent in* **a,** every world in which Socrates exists is a world in which he contains *b* as a constituent. The objection we are considering, however, insists on there being possible worlds (other than α**),** in which Socrates contains an individuating PCBP wholly distinct from *b.* But if so, then these are worlds in which Socrates actually contains two PCBPs! The objector is therefore committed to the possibility of Socrates both being and not being the particular individual that he is. And this is simply too much to take.

What all this shows, I believe, is that while the new bare particularism surely does possess the resources for turning back Loux's grounding objection, its Achilles heel lies in its constituent-whole account of individuation. A close and careful look at 'partially clad' bare particulars reveals that they are ill suited for the role of individuators. The fundamental problem is that once bare particulars are 'dressed up'—invested with properties or characteristics—introducing them into the 'inner nature' of ordinary particulars only results in an internal ontological crisis. For if the connection between PCBPs and their associated particulars is essential, then ordinary particulars end up containing the very thing that needs to be individuated: themselves. This is hardly good news. And yet if this connection is non-essential or contingent, the news doesn't get much better. For then it turns out that ordinary particulars can remain the same even if we 'switch' their constituent PCBPs. But in that case, what use is it having a PCBP? The verdict, therefore, is this: bare particulars, even 'partially clad' ones, are barren individuators; they cannot perform the individuative work required of them.'[4]

[1]*Universals* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), p. 149. See also his 'Theories of Individuation: A Reconsideration of Bare Particulars," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 79 (1998): 251-63; issues and Options in Individuation," *Grazer Philosophische Studien* 60 (2000): 31-54. Moreland's views are echoed in Gregg A. Ten Elshof, "A Defense of Moderate Haecceitism," *Grazer Philosophische Studien* (2000): 55-74.

Donald Mertz has been a persistent critic of Moreland's theory. See D. W. Mertz "Individuation and Instance Ontology," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy 79* (2001): 45-61; "Combinatorial Predication and the Ontology of Unit Attributes," *The Modern Schoolrnan,* 79 (2002): 163-97; "Against Bare Particulars: A Response to Moreland and Pickavance," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 81 (2003): 14-20. For replies to Mertz's objections, see J P. Moreland and Timothy Pickavance, "Bare Particulars and Individuation: A Reply to Mertz," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 81 (2003): 1-13; and Richard Brian Davis. "'Partially Clad' Bare Particulars Exposed," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 81(2003): 534-548.

[2]See L. Nathan Oaklander and Alicia Rothstein,

"Loux on Particulars: Bare and Concrete," *The Modern Schoolrnan* 78 (2000): 97-102.

[3]Micliael Loux, *Metaphvsics: A Contemporary Introduction,* 2nd. ed. (London: Routledgc, 2002), pp. 122-123.

[4]Universals, p. 140.

[5]Following Loux, we can define a pure property (vercy roughly) as a property that doesn't 'incorporate' a contingent concrete particular. Further, to say that a property 'incorporates such a particular just means that (necessarily) anything having that property stands in some relation or another to that particular. Thus *being red* and *being round* are pure properties, while *being identical with Quine,* obviously enough, is impure. See Loux, *Metaphysics,* p. 115-116.

[6]*Universals,* p. 145.

[7]See *Metaphysics,* pp. 121-122.

[8]Universals, p. *157.*

[9]"Loux on Particulars," p. 98.

[10]*Universals,* p. 146.

[11]See Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 70-77.

[12]*Universals,* p. *145.*

[13]Ibid., p. 149.

[14]Thanks to Georges Moyal, Doris Olin, and Ron Weed for helpful comments and suggestions.

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