

Answer (vi) *Universalism*

It is impossible for one to bring it about that something is such that the χ s compose it, because, necessarily (if the χ s are disjoint), something is such that the χ s compose it.

According to this answer, one can't bring it about that the χ s compose something because they already do; they do so "automatically." Just as, according to the theory of sets, there has to be associated with the χ s a certain abstract object, a set that contains just the χ s, so, according to the theory we are considering, there has to be associated with the χ s a certain concrete object, a sum of the χ s. Universalism corresponds to a position about sets that almost everyone holds: In every possible world in which, for instance, Tom, Dick, and Harry exist, there also exists a set that contains just them. Nihilism corresponds to nominalism (about sets): In no possible worlds are there any sets. Some philosophers who accept Universalism accept it because it is entailed by a certain stronger thesis, which they accept on grounds that are, in theory, independent of their views about material things. This stronger thesis, which we may call Super-universalism, is the thesis that any objects whatever have a sum. According to Super-universalism, for example, if there are such things as the color blue and the key of C-sharp and I, then there is an object that has the color blue and the key of C-sharp and me as parts. I do not understand Super-universalism because, though I think that the color blue and the key of C-sharp and I all exist, I am unable to form a sufficiently general conception of parthood to be able to conceive of an object that has these three rather diverse things as parts.²⁴

Whatever problems Super-universalism may face, however, it is Universalism *simpliciter* that is our present concern. In my view, Universalism is false, since there are disjoint objects that compose nothing whatever. My conviction that Universalism is false rests on two theses that, on reflection, seem to me to be correct. First, Universalism does not seem to force itself upon the mind as true. A theory that denies Universalism is not in *prima facie* trouble, like a theory that denies the reality of time. (There is, however, a difficulty facing the denial of Universalism that we

are not in a position to discuss at this point, a difficulty that may seem to many to constitute a knock-down objection to that thesis. In Sections 18 and 19 we shall see that if we reject Universalism, then—unless we embrace Nihilism—we shall be forced to conclude that there is vagueness “in the world,” that there are cases of vagueness that do not derive from language.) Secondly, Universalism is in conflict with certain plausible theses (which I shall presently lay out). Now these two judgments are highly subjective ones. Many philosophers for whom I have the highest respect not only accept Universalism but, apparently, regard it as just obviously true. And these philosophers will (I suppose) say that some of the “plausible theses” I shall lay out are obviously, or at least demonstrably, false. Well, I shall have to do the best I can. Here are the theses I regard as plausible and which entail the falsity of Universalism.

- (A) I exist now and I existed ten years ago.
- (B) I am an organism (in biological sense), and I have always been an organism.
- (C) Every organism is composed of (some) atoms (or other) at every moment of its existence.²⁵
- (D) Consider any organism that existed ten years ago; all of the atoms that composed it ten years ago still exist.
- (E) Consider any organism that exists now and existed ten years ago; none of the atoms that now compose that organism is among those that composed it ten years ago.
- (F) If Universalism is true, then the χ s cannot ever compose two objects. That is, the χ s cannot compose two objects either simultaneously or successively. More formally, if Universalism is true, then it is not possible that $\exists y \exists z \exists w \exists v$ (the χ s compose y at the moment w , and the χ s compose z at the moment v , and y is not identical with z).

It is pretty evident that propositions (A) through (F) entail the denial of Universalism. Here is the argument in outline: assume the truth of Universalism; consider the atoms that composed me ten years ago; if (F) is true, those atoms compose me now; but those atoms obviously do not compose me now, and Universalism is therefore false. But let us set out the argument in pedantic detail to make sure that nothing has been overlooked.

It follows from (A) and (B) that I existed ten years ago and was then a biological organism. It follows from (C) that ten years ago that organism—I—was composed of certain atoms. Let us use 'T' as an abbreviation for 'the atoms that composed me ten years ago'. By (D), all of T still exist.

Now assume that Universalism is true. Then T now compose something. Call it 'the thing that is at present the sum of T' or '+T'. From Universalism and (F) it follows that T composed +T ten years ago. But, by definition, T composed me ten years ago. Therefore, by (F), I was +T ten years ago. But then I am +T now. If ten years ago a certain object and I were such that there was only one of us, then there is only one of us still: A thing and itself cannot go their separate ways. But I am not now +T. At present, +T, if it exists at all, is (I would suppose) a rarefied spherical shell of atoms, about eight thousand miles in diameter and a few miles thick; in any case, +T is now composed of atoms none of which are now parts of me. Our assumption of Universalism has, therefore, led us to a falsehood, and Universalism must be rejected.²⁸

We must conclude that Answer (vi), Universalism, is incorrect: disjoint objects do not necessarily and automatically compose anything. (The

Úkoly

1. Charakterizujte text.
2. Zařadte diskutovanou problematiku v rámci ontologie.
3. Popište problem, jednotlivé strany debaty.
4. Parafrázujte a vysvětlete prezentovaný argument.
5. Zhodnoťte a okomentujte argument.