

The Problem of Character

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At least one of the things metaphysicians are up to is explain. Among other things, we want to find out *why*—even *how*—the ‘Moorean’ fact that concrete objects (entities like individuals, computers, tables, mountains and atoms) exist and have the character they do, obtains. One explanation of this state of affairs—one that I have previously defended in a trope-theoretical context—claims that concrete objects exist and have the character they do *in virtue of* the existence and nature of whatever constitutes, grounds or in some other way makes them up. According to critics of this view, however, although it may look as if pointing to whatever makes up the object also explains its nature and existence, in most cases (perhaps all) this is in fact not the case (a fact that, some of those same critics claim, can be seen to constitute a *reductio* against the very idea that concrete objects are ‘made up’ from other (kinds of) things). This is because—for some reason—pointing to whatever makes up the object *cannot* explain what it purports to. What is less clear is why that is. Clearly, it is not for the more obvious (although debatable) reasons that—others have argued—the view that we can explain the fact that concrete objects exist and have the character they do by saying that ‘it’s primitive!’ fails to explain. The explanation at hand is not (objectionably) reflexive, and it is certainly informative in a way that primitivist explanations are not. In this talk I want to explore the idea that what is objectionable—if anything—about explaining the existence and character of concrete objects in terms of what constitutes them has to do with *resemblance*, or, rather, a lack thereof. Concrete objects are simply too dissimilar from the sorts of things—properties, normally—of which they are supposed to be made up, for the existence and nature of the latter to enlighten us about the nature and existence of the former. Accepting this interpretation of the objection gives rise to a number of interesting yet thorny follow-up questions. Does resemblance play this role in all (metaphysical) explanation? What role, more precisely, is that? Resemblance with respect to what, and to what degree? These, and related, questions have so far been little discussed, but I think they deserve closer scrutiny. This talk takes a first step in that direction.