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## Is Socrates A Predicate?

### ABSTRACT

In his *Moderate Realism and Its Logic* (Yale, 1996), Donald Mertz argues that the traditional ontology of nonpredicable substances and predicable universals is beset by “intractable problems,” “harbors an insidious error,” and constitutes a “stumbling block” for the ontologist. By contrast, a one-category ontology consisting of relation instances (and combinations thereof) is sustainable, and indeed the only way of avoiding commitment to bare particulars. The success of the project turns on Mertz’s claim that every relation instance has a linking aspect, so that (in a sense) even Socrates is a predicate. I argue that, ironically, it is this very feature of a relation instance that undermines Mertz’s entire theory of predication, effectively preventing any connections from being formed between the instances that allegedly compose an ordinary individual such as Socrates.

One of the deliverances of traditional ontology is that a distinction must be made between *individuals*, on the one hand, and their *properties* or *attributes*, on the other. Consider the proposition *Socrates is wise*. According to the tradition, in asserting this proposition I single out an individual (i.e., Socrates) for attention, and predicate of him the property of wisdom or being wise. And this is as it should be. A property is the sort of thing one predicates of an individual but not the other way round. Surely it would be absurd, for example, to predicate a thing such as Socrates of (say) the property *being wise*, or the set of all Greek philosophers, or indeed anything at all. For Socrates just isn’t the right sort of thing to serve as a predicate. While individuals *have* properties—that is, are property bearers—they aren’t themselves predicative; they cannot be attributed to or characterize anything. Rather, individuals are unique and wholly unrepeatable particulars.

All of this can seem no more than the sober truth. In his *Moderate Realism and Its Logic*, however, Donald Mertz launches a full-scale assault on the tradition, charging that it is beset by “intractable problems,” “harbors an insidious error,” and constitutes a “stumbling block” for the ontologist (1996, 8, 15). Hardly a glowing report. What, precisely, is the

problem? Mertz claims that if facts are assayed into impredicative individuals and the predicative  $n$ -adic universals true of them, then in effect Socrates is a bare (propertyless) substratum. But arguably the notion of a bare particular is incoherent.<sup>1</sup> Mertz's proposed solution is nothing less than a Copernican Revolution in ontology. To avoid the slide to bare particulars, he says, we must indulge in a bit of role reversal. We must hold, first, that it is individuals that are predicative while universals aren't predicates at all. Furthermore, predication involves a single ontological category and not the traditional two. For individuals are substance-like enough to sustain ontological 'attachments', while at the same time (*qua* ontic predicates) effecting those very 'attachments'.

The picture that emerges here is of an interconnected world of individuals predicated of (and only of) other individuals. All of this is made possible, we are told, by an individual extraordinaire—the *relation instance*, at once both ontic (i.e., extra-grammatical) subject and predicate. According to one recent endorsement, “[w]ithout entering into the details” of Mertz's proposal, we can safely assume that it “is a conceptual possibility” even if a bit “unusual” (Morganti, 2004, 98). In this paper I mean to dispute this claim; there are serious problems, I shall argue, precisely *in the details* of the proposal. For the internal resources of the theory, it turns out, cannot assemble an individual such as Socrates solely out of relation instances, thereby triggering an unexpected return to the “insidious” two-category ontology and its commitments.

### 1. Characterizing Instances

Suppose we begin, then, by asking what a relation instance *is* as Mertz sees it. What sort of thing is it? What is its basic nature? The official account goes as follows. Consider a property (i.e., a monadic relation) such as *being wise*. Clearly, we can distinguish between wisdom *in itself* and Socrates' wisdom, his instantiation of it. The former is a relation *universal*. It is universal and thus repeatable in the sense that each individual instance of rationality shares this “common, qualitative content,” which Mertz refers to variously as its “intension, quiddity, or nature” (Mertz 1996, 11, 61). The wisdom of Socrates, by contrast, is neither universal nor repeatable; it

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<sup>1</sup> See Mertz (1996, 72–73). See also Mertz (2001, 2002). For recent attempts to rehabilitate bare particulars by investing them with at least some properties, see Moreland (1998), Moreland and Pickavance (2003). For replies to Moreland's refurbished theory, see Mertz (2003b) and Davis (2003, 2004).

is a relation *instance*, individuated specifically to Socrates. Now of course there are countless other wise instances—Plato’s, for example, Aristotle’s, and even (if you happen to be wise) your own—but each of these belongs exclusively to the particular instancing it; each is utterly distinct from the wisdom of Socrates. To capture this distinction, Mertz introduces a helpful subscripting notation. Thus we might stipulate that ‘wisdom<sub>1</sub>’ denotes Socrates’ wisdom, ‘wisdom<sub>2</sub>’ that of Aristotle, while ‘wisdom’ (without the subscript) stands for the relation universal common to both.

This much, I should think, is relatively unexceptional. What makes Mertz’s view so intriguing (not to mention controversial) is his unique assay of the relation instance. Some theorists in this area—for example, Moreland (2001, 98–102)—have argued that a relation instance such as red<sub>1</sub> is a complex entity: the by-product of predicating *redness* of an individuator (e.g., a thin or bare particular). Mertz rejects this move outright. Relation instances are simple entities; they have no internal constituents at all. What they do have, however, are discernible *aspects*. How something could possess multiple aspects and yet remain internally simple is then explained as follows. Consider an ordinary circle  $\bigcirc$ . Although this figure is undeniably simple in that it is continuous and unbroken, it appears that we can discriminate between at least two of its aspects (curves):  $\frown$  and  $\smile$ , let’s say. These aspects are “‘in’ the circle” (Mertz 1996, 75), but are separable only by an act of mental abstraction, that is, by forming a mental image of the circle’s being divided in half. But surely this in no way implies that *in reality* the circle is a complex whole, consisting of two connected halves. The separability of the halves here is purely epistemic.

In the same way, says Mertz, we can hold that a relation instance has differing aspects but no internal complexity. Suppose we agree to go along with this idea—at least temporarily. The question naturally arises: What *are* these aspects? And what, specifically, are they for? In each relation instance, we are told, there is first of all “a *nexus, linking, or tie*” (Mertz 2001, 53)—a selectively ‘sticky’ aspect—whose purpose it is to combine an *n*-tuple of specific relata, resulting in a unified complex. Relation instances are therefore predicative; they attach themselves to specific ontic subjects, which they necessarily presuppose. Thus, for example, wisdom<sub>1</sub> can attach itself to Socrates (and Socrates alone) in virtue of its linking aspect, thereby generating a unique complex that we can represent as follows:

- (1) Wisdom<sub>1</sub> (Socrates).

Now it turns out that this instance of wisdom, in addition to being ‘sticky’,

also has a content (a ‘stuff’ aspect, if you will), namely, the universal *wisdom*. Its job is not to qualify Socrates; indeed, it is wholly impredicative. Rather, what *wisdom* does is to regulate the predicational ‘ties’ forged by the linking aspect of  $wisdom_1$ . In effect, this universal places restrictions on the “the nature, number, and order” (Mertz 2001, 54) of  $wisdom_1$ ’s attachments. For example, it requires (one would think) that the attachment here be a person and exactly one in number.

What we have before us, therefore, is an ontology of relation instances and their inseparable (yet discernible) aspects. But is that really all there is—just a ponderous list of mundane instances: PrimeNumber<sub>2</sub>, PartOf<sub>4</sub>, PrimeMinister<sub>6</sub>, and the like? That seems a bit unstylishly sparse. In a certain respect, of course, we’ve got everything we need. Since instances are unrepeatable particulars, they are individuals; and every ontology needs at least a few of those. Furthermore, they all have an attaching aspect, and that qualifies them as ontic predicates, without which there would be nothing except *bare* individuals. Still, what shall we say about individuals of the more robust variety—Socrates, for example? How are we to account for him? Is *he* a relation instance?

## 2. *Constructing Individuals*

He is indeed—albeit a highly complex one. For an individual, Mertz tells us, is simply an “integrated network” of relation instances: “These networks or complexes are themselves individuals, nonrepeatable, and bearers in turn of (instances of) properties and relations and thus possible relata in higher-level relations and structures” (1996, 76). Thus in (1) a relation instance,  $wisdom_1$ , is combined with the “integrated network” of relation instances that is Socrates. Notice that this treats Socrates as an ontic predicate—at least in a derivative sense—since instances are predicates. Acting on the principle that the devil is in the details, I want to raise some problems for this proposal; I’ll argue that on principles internal to the theory itself, these networks resist construction, so that there really are no ordinary individuals.

Two principles for constructing individuals drive the theory. The first has to do with the mechanics of ontic predication. According to the *Connection Principle*, as we might call it, a set of instances counts as an individual only if it is

‘connected’ by means of strategically shared relata...a complex [e.g., Socrates] is a network of relation instances where as such each instance is

*joined to one or more other instances via shared relata nodes, all in such a way as to yield continuous connectivity, analogous to that facilitated by the sharing of vertices in a lattice (Mertz 2002, 195, emphasis added).*

Predication is therefore to be understood as a kind of *connection* or *joining*, where two relation instances are connected just in case they share the same relata. (Here then is another reason for thinking that Socrates is a predicate: he can be connected to other instances.) But there is an initial difficulty here. On Mertz's view relation instances are the "subsumed constituents" (1996, 25) of the complexes they compose. They are also "individuated to the specific relata" (ibid, 32) they join. An instance such as  $wisdom_1$  therefore owes its uniqueness and unrepeatability—its particularity—to Socrates, its relatum. Presumably, however, Socrates can determine the particularity of  $wisdom_1$  only if he is fully particularized, that is, only if his "constituent instances" (Mertz 2002, 195) are all particularized. But then it looks as though  $wisdom_1$  must already *be* particularized (*qua* constituent instance) prior to its *being* particularized (by Socrates *qua* whole). And that certainly seems to get the cart before the horse.

One way of remedying this defect might be to divide networks into what J. van Cleve calls "an inner core and an outer fringe" (1985, 99).<sup>2</sup> Socrates' 'inner core', we might say, consists of all and only those instances that are essential constituents of the Socratean network: constituents in whose absence Socrates simply wouldn't exist. His 'outer fringe', then, is all his contingent instances: those instances that Socrates—more specifically, his inner core—is connected to *in fact* but needn't have been connected to at all (e.g.,  $Wisdom_1$ ). It is easy to see, I think, that if we proceed to identify Socrates exclusively with his inner core, we can judiciously avoid the problem of  $wisdom_1$  contributing to Socrates' particularity prior to being particularized by him.

As clever as this solution is, though, it is only a partial fix; for it does nothing to alleviate the circularity problem for Socrates' essential constituents. For example, consider an instance of Socrates' rationality:  $rational_1$ . Its particularity will still depend on Socrates' inner core—Socrates(c), for short—whose own particularity must depend on *its* essential constituents, which of course include  $rational_1$ . Moreover, what are we to make of

(2) Socrates(c) is connected to  $rational_1$

which presumably expresses the idea that Socrates is rational? Here the in-

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<sup>2</sup> This distinction is echoed by Peter Simons, who distinguishes between the *nucleus* or essential kernel of a trope bundle and its *periphery*. See Simons (1994, 567–569).

stance being joined *to* the Socratean core is already duplicated *in* it,<sup>3</sup> so that (2) actually expresses a falsehood. Strictly speaking, we can say that the essential constituents of an inner core are *included in* it but not that they are *connected to* it. Only contingent instances can be connected to cores, not being included in them. Therefore, statements involving the essential connection of relation instances must be governed by the *Duplication Principle*:

A single subject *a* can have predicates as constituents—the cross connecting relation instances making up *a* as a complex are such predicates—but...none of these predicates can have emergent *a* itself as a relatum (Mertz, 2002, 195).

In other words, an ontic predicate such as  $\text{rational}_1$  cannot be tied to  $\text{Socrates}(c)$  *simpliciter*, since it is duplicated in the Socratean core. Instead,  $\text{Socrates}(c)$  should emerge from this predicational linking. Thus the ontic subject in (2) requires adjustment. Mertz is a little shy on the details; however, the most natural thing to do, I suppose, would be to attach  $\text{rational}_1$  not to Socrates' essential core, but rather to that core *diminished with respect to*  $\text{rational}_1$ . If this move is in order, then perhaps there is a way for Mertz to dismantle the circularity objection: simply hold that the particularity of  $\text{rational}_1$  isn't determined by  $\text{Socrates}(c)$ , which includes it, but rather the complex  $\text{Socrates}(c)$  *diminished with respect to*  $\text{rational}_1$ , which does not.

But the fact is this move doesn't help. We can see this by probing the matter a bit further. Let's focus our attention on Socrates' essential core; and for ease of illustration, let's assume that this core is comprised of two essential instances:  $\text{animal}_1$  and  $\text{rational}_1$  (or more simply,  $A_1$  and  $R_1$ ). Then given our two principles, each of the following simple statements is true:

(3)  $\text{Socrates}(c)^{-A_1}$  is connected to  $A_1$

(4)  $\text{Socrates}(c)^{-R_1}$  is connected to  $R_1$

where '- $A_1$ ' and '- $R_1$ ' indicate the respective 'deletions' of  $A_1$  and  $R_1$  from the Socratean core. The first thing to see here is that if  $\text{Socrates}(c)$  consists of  $A_1$  and  $R_1$ , then it looks as though  $\text{Socrates}(c)^{-A_1}$  *just is*  $R_1$ , and  $\text{Socrates}(c)^{-R_1}$  *just is*  $A_1$ : in which case (3) and (4) entail

(3\*)  $R_1$  is connected to  $A_1$

and

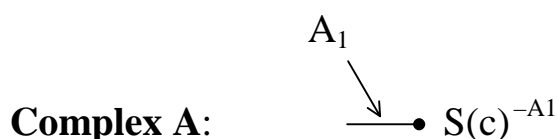
(4\*)  $A_1$  is connected to  $R_1$

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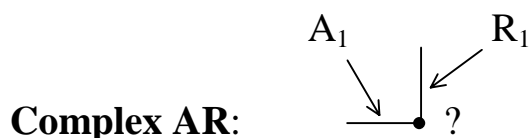
<sup>3</sup> This point is a variation on what W. F. Vallicella aptly calls the 'duplication objection'. See Vallicella (2002, 174–175).

which are obviously equivalent on the plausible assumption that *is connected to* is symmetrical. Furthermore, according to the Connection Principle, if (3\*) or (4\*) is true, then  $A_1$  and  $R_1$  must share the same “relata node.” Of course, this raises the question: what is it to share a relata node?

Mertz has suggested that we think of connections between instances in terms of spatial, ‘road/node’ diagrams. Let a line segment (a road) stand for an ontic predicate (relation instance), and let a solid dot (a node) attached to such a line stand for a single ontic subject (Mertz, 2003, 146). A proposition such as (3) might then be diagrammed as follows:



In this complex, the horizontal line segment represents the instance  $\text{animal}_1$ , and is labelled by means of the arrow. The dot or node labelled ‘ $S(c)^{-A1}$ ’ stands for the ontic subject: Socrates’ core diminished with respect to  $A_1$ . And now consider this node for a moment: isn’t it simply the Socratean instance,  $\text{rational}_1$ , as we pointed out above? It can seem reasonable to think so. But if so, then Complex A is somewhat misleading; it should show us *two* line segments attached at a single relata node:



It is this complex (and not Complex A) that is the more accurate way of diagramming the state of affairs represented in (3\*) and (4\*). It turns out that it is also the more revealing; for it exposes what I believe is the Achilles heel of Mertz’s ontology. For of course one wants to know what this node *is* that  $A_1$  and  $R_1$  share. To be sure, it is the relatum through which they are connected. But what, precisely, is that?

Well, we know what it can’t be. It can’t be either  $A_1$  or  $R_1$ , as these are the instances connected by way of this node. Nor can it be Socrates’ core; for our mystery node is but a part of Complex AR and by no means the whole. But then what *is* it? There are at least two live options here. The first is that this node is, ironically, the very thing Mertz is loathe to embrace—the dreaded bare particular, an individual distinct from all the instances connected to it and yet not itself a relation instance. (If it were a



relation instance, it wouldn't be bare given that instances are dual-aspected.)

The second option is that our mystery node is in fact a disguised relation instance, in which case (given the Connection Principle) additional mystery nodes shall have to be summoned to effect the appropriate connections with  $A_1$  and  $R_1$ . And of course if these nodes also turn out to be disguised instances, then we must face the specter of a vicious infinite regress of instances, which would effectively prevent us from ever completing the job of constructing Socrates. Indeed, if it is related nodes 'all the way down', there can be no ordinary individuals.

### 3. *Circular Inter-Predication*

Still, perhaps a linear regress of instances isn't inevitable. Perhaps, instead, we can substitute in its place a *circle* of predication between ground-level instances. As Mertz says: "it is possible for there to exist only a web of predicative relation instances among other such instances" (1996, 77). At this base ontic level, all we have is a chain of inter-predicated instances, establishing a ground-level compound out of which other individual complexes can then be 'built up' or derived.

Now Mertz says that such a web "is possible." But why should we think so? Here, surprisingly enough, we are invited to consider the Christian doctrine of the Trinity:

Medieval theologians proposed that the best way to understand the doctrine of the Trinity was in terms of pure relatedness, each Person being understood as a relation to the other two. Since each Person is an individual, this would presumably require that the respective relations be individuated—that is, be instances (Ibid).

It is indeed true that medieval theologians believed that certain relations held between Trinitarian members. They thought, for example, that the Son—the Second Person—is eternally and necessarily begotten by the Father—the First Person. Thus the Son stands in the *is begotten by* relation to the Father. Did they make the further claim that the Son is to be understood *as a relation* or *as a relation instance*? Certainly not. What relation, for example, is the Son supposed to be an instance of? The *is begotten by* relation? That hardly seems to make sense.

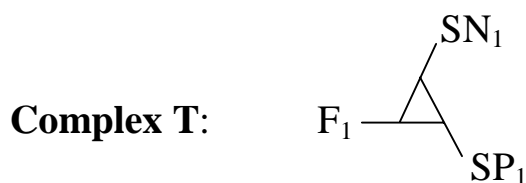
In any event, Mertz goes on to say that if Trinitarian members are understood as "pure relatedness" (whatever that comes to), then

they would together constitute the inter-linking, self-containing whole described discursively as :Father<sub>1</sub> (Son<sub>1</sub>, Spirit<sub>1</sub>), :Son<sub>1</sub> (Father<sub>1</sub>, Spirit<sub>1</sub>), and :Spirit<sub>1</sub> (Father<sub>1</sub>, Son<sub>1</sub>)...In the resulting Divine Complex *all* constituents are predicative relation instances...this state of interwoven connectedness [is] possible logically (Ibid).<sup>4</sup>

Now the question here is not whether three individuals (even divine individuals) can stand in relations to one another. Of course they can. The question, rather, is whether the essential constituents of a complex individual can be connected without generating even lower-level complexes (and the specter of an infinite regress) or ground-level substances (and the threat of bare particulars). And it isn't clear that this is possible within Mertz's theory. Consider, for example, the list of complexes allegedly composing the Trinity:

- (5) Father<sub>1</sub> (Son<sub>1</sub>, Spirit<sub>1</sub>).
- (6) Son<sub>1</sub> (Father<sub>1</sub>, Spirit<sub>1</sub>).
- (7) Spirit<sub>1</sub> (Father<sub>1</sub>, Son<sub>1</sub>).

Faced with these *three* complexes, how shall we represent the Trinity which, I take it, is supposed to be *one* sort of thing—a Divine Complex? What we need is a chain of three instances each “circularly predicated of one another” (Mertz 2003a, 149). So let the following set of abbreviations hold: F<sub>1</sub> = Father<sub>1</sub>; SN<sub>1</sub> = Son<sub>1</sub>; and SP<sub>1</sub> = Spirit<sub>1</sub>. We can then diagram Mertz's three Trinitarian facts as follows:



In Complex T, you'll notice, each line segment intersects (is predicated of) the other two. Further, there are no relata nodes at the intersection points. The reason for this, we are suggesting, is that nodes only appear in non-basic, derived complexes, indicating that there are lower-level complexes out of which they are constructed. By hypothesis, however, Complex T is basic or non-derived; consequently, since it has no nodes, it is impossible for a regress to ever get started.

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<sup>4</sup> Mertz uses a colon locution “:” for the operator “It is a fact that”. In the interests of economy, I have dropped its use in the discussion that follows.

Alas, however, all is not (ontically) well. And the root of the unwellness stems from the diagram itself; it actually misleads us in our thinking about how relation instances are connected. For it leaves the impression that the Trinity diminished with respect to  $F_1$  (hereafter,  $T^{-F_1}$ ) is simply the appropriately connect ordered pair  $\langle SN_1, SP_1 \rangle$ . It turns out, however, that the intersecting line segments actually conceal the fact that the links between Trinitarian members aren't just brute instances of the *connection* relation. For *this* relation instance supervenes on more basic ones. For example, according to standard formulations of Trinitarian doctrine, the Son is *begotten by* the Father; and further, the Spirit *proceeds from* the joint causal activity of Father and Son.<sup>5</sup> Now if this is so, then these divine relation instances are connected by virtue of their standing in what look to be (instances of) more basic causal relations.

The intersecting line segments therefore mask the fact that there are cross-connecting relation instances between  $F_1$ ,  $SN_1$ , and  $SP_1$ . And this seems problematic, since if we 'delete' the instance  $F_1$  from the Trinitarian complex (taken as a whole), we will be left with more than what our diagram leads us to believe are the sole remaining instances:  $SN_1$  and  $SP_1$ . For there are these *other* instances at work here—instances that ground the interconnectedness of  $F_1$ ,  $SN_1$ , and  $SP_1$ . Thus, for example, we should expect to find (at the very least) the complexes

(8)  $\text{Begets}_1(F_1, SN_1)$

and

(9)  $\text{ProceedsFrom}_1(SP_1, F_1, SN_1)$

as "subsumed constituents" of  $T^{-F_1}$ . No doubt there are many more such complexes. That needn't trouble us. The important thing to see is that both of these complexes are constituents of  $T^{-F_1}$  and both necessarily incorporate  $F_1$ . But once again, this is to get the cart before the horse, since then the ontic predicate  $F_1$  is *not* external to its subject,  $T^{-F_1}$ ; rather, it is included in it, thereby violating the Duplication Principle.

Still, perhaps Mertz is not entirely without reply. Perhaps he could re-trench somewhat and claim that the subject of predication here,  $T^{-F_1}$ , excludes not only  $F_1$  itself, but also *any* instance having  $F_1$  as a relatum. In other words, to avoid the charge of duplication or circularity, we 'delete' (8) and (9) from the content of  $T^{-F_1}$ . The principle objection to this move is that it results in the ontological disintegration of both  $T^{-F_1}$  and  $F_1$ , that is, the whole of Complex T. For on Mertz's theory, a relation instance necessarily presupposes the  $n$ -tuple of entities it *does* relate (1996, 26; 2003a,

<sup>5</sup> See R. Swinburne (1994, 180–191).

143); they come as an ontological ‘package deal’, so to speak. Consequently, if *per impossible* we somehow managed to ‘delete’  $F_1$  from (8), then  $\text{Begets}_1$  wouldn’t exist; in which case neither would any complex of which (8) is an essential constituent. But now consider: (8) essentially connects both  $F_1$  and  $\text{SN}_1$ ; hence if  $\text{Begets}_1$  did not exist, then neither would our predicate  $F_1$  (since it is a relatum of (8)) nor our supposed subject of predication,  $T^{-F_1}$  (since it exists or is available to us as a subject of predication only if  $\text{SN}_1$  exists; and the latter doesn’t exist unless  $\text{Begets}_1$  does).

Someone might object that the ontological disintegration I speak of is only a problem if the individuation of a relation instance is (as I assume) the result of an external relation it bears to its (essential) relata. But what if the individuation of such an instance is given prior to the formation of any predicational ties between ontic subject and predicate, say, in the very fact of instantiation? To be sure, being instantiated and being instantiated with such-and-such relata coincide in reality; however, from a logical point of view, we might be tempted to see the former as prior to the latter. But then why not say that  $T^{-F_1}$  and  $F_1$  enjoy an ontological integrity and individuality prior to any ontic links obtaining between them? Hence my criticism fails.

Unfortunately, there is really only one way for Mertz to avail himself of this proposed escape route, and that is by abandoning his account of individuation altogether. The principle difficulty with adopting the proposal lies in the fact that Mertz has explicitly stated that relation instances are “individuated to the specific relata among which they are ontically predicative” (Mertz 1996, 32). He even calls these “individuating relata” (ibid, 28). Moreover, contrary to what our objector contends, predication (at least for Mertz) is prior to individuation, not the other way around:

predication is the principle or cause of individuation...an  $n$ -tuple of subject relata,  $\langle a_1, a_2, \dots, a_n \rangle$ , is the secondary cause of the individuation of a predicate  $R_i^n$  [i.e., a  $n$ -placed relation instance], but it is the internal combinatorial aspect among these relata...that is the primary cause of the predicate’s individuation (Mertz 2002, 193).

A bit more simply: what makes  $R_i^n$  unique and unrepeatable, in the first instance, is the combinatorial activity of its linking aspect. Even so, this isn’t nearly sufficient to account for the full individuality of  $R_i^n$ ; for *every* ontic predicate has such an aspect. Something more is needed, something that could serve to distinguish between linking aspects (and hence the instances of which they are aspects): specific  $n$ -tuples of relata. It is by

means of these relata that individuation is ultimately effected; apart from them, linking aspects are simply bare individuators.

Given the nuts-and-bolts of Mertz's view, therefore, we cannot say that either  $T^{-F_1}$  or  $F_1$  has any sort of ontological integrity (or individuality) prior to its predicational ties with the other. Indeed, things are quite the reverse; it is the ontic connections holding between these instances that cause (and so explain) the individuality of each. And thus our original problem remains. The individuation of  $F_1$  is caused by its predicational linkages to  $T^{-F_1}$ , its individuating relatum, whose own "subsumed constituents" presuppose  $F_1$  as a fully individuated component.

This conclusion generalizes to all alleged chains of circular predication at the lowest ontic level. Each of these is composed of its essential relation instances. In order for there to be connectedness in the circular chain, however, there must be cross-connecting instances: instances that connect the predicate instance to its subject instance. Now if we include these in the subject instance, we end up predicating an instance of a complex in which it's already included. If we don't include them, then we have no available ontic subject to predicate anything of. In the end, a predicative claim (involving relation instances) can be true only if its subject is available for predication; and this is the case only if that subject exists. But the point is this: it is simply not possible—ontologically—to present a subject of predication *diminished with respect to one of its essential relation instances*. A 'diminished ontic subject' (DOS) is no better than those "fraudulent" (Mertz, 1996, 23) bare particulars Mertz is so anxious to abandon.

But isn't there a problem with this objection? A DOS, you might say, isn't nearly so elusive as all that; for just as we can discern various inseparable aspects of a circle by mentally 'carving' it into segments, so also we can isolate a DOS by mentally 'deleting' an essential instance from its associated inner core. (A DOS, on this way of thinking, is simply an aspect of an individual's complete inner core.) Now if we can secure a DOS by this method, then surely we have an ontic subject at our disposal. Call this inferential move the *Ontic Inference*. Does it help to extricate Mertz from the present snare? Well, I don't think so. For one thing, if there are these DOSs, then (given the Duplication Principle) notice that each instance in Complex T will be particularized by a different DOS:  $F_1$  by  $T^{-F_1}$ ,  $SN_1$  by  $T^{-SN_1}$ , and  $SP_1$  by  $T^{-SP_1}$ . But then (5)–(7) all express falsehoods. For they assign the *same* subscript to each divine instance, whereas each should have its own unique subscript, since each is particularized by a different

complex. And what this means, of course, is that these instances cannot be ground-level constituents of the *one and the same* complex. Hence the inner core of the Trinity—indeed, every inner core whatsoever—utterly disintegrates. Accordingly, there are no ordinary individuals.

Secondly, the mere fact that we can *mentally* isolate a DOS shows only that a DOS could exist in the mind, that it could be thought of. It does nothing to show that it has any real, mind-independent existence; and yet this is precisely what is at stake here. A DOS, if anything, is an *ontic* subject, and Mertz's principles for constructing individuals invoke *ontic* predication—predication at the extra-grammatical, extra-mental level of being. But clearly, the fact that I can think of a DOS scarcely shows that it exists on the ontic level. The Ontic Inference is therefore invalid. And just suppose, for a moment, that it were not. In that case, a curious sort of problem would emerge. For then from the fact that we could discern a linking aspect in a relation instance, it would follow that this aspect was itself an ontic subject. But if aspects are ontic subjects, then (on Mertz's one-category ontology) they must be relation instances—an unhappy conclusion in that it collapses the all-important distinction between *aspects* and the *things of which they are aspects*. In the final analysis, therefore, we are left with no adequate reply to the charge that DOSs are impossible objects.

For these reasons, Mertz is committed to the falsity of the Ontic Inference. Notice, however, that this is something that can be exploited by the traditional ontologist. For if this inference *does* fail, then she can justifiably claim that while a purely mental 'separation' between Socrates and his properties is possible (something even Mertz is willing to grant), it doesn't mean that at the ontic level there is, on the one hand, the properties of Socrates; and then, on the other, underlying them, Socrates—that embarrassing bare substratum. Borrowing a chapter from Mertz, she can rightly say that Socrates' properties are epistemically distinguishable (but really inseparable) aspects of him.<sup>6</sup> Whence, then, this alleged slide to bare particulars? It seems a mere strawman. Socrates is no more a bare particular than is a relation instance; both are aspected simples. But then what attraction remains for Mertz's "unusual" ontology? Its lure has surely all but vanished.

The conclusion to be drawn, I believe, is that there are insufficient resources here for constructing an ordinary individual such as Socrates. The Connection Principle leads us to an infinite regress of relation instances inside Socrates' core, or (as Mertz thinks) a commitment to bare particulars. In neither case do we 'get' Socrates. Furthermore, Mertz's proposed

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<sup>6</sup> See Plantinga (1983, 44).

escape route—to posit a circular web of inter-predicated instances—flies in the face of his Duplication Principle, and inadvertently reinstates the alleged ailing two-category ontology for which his theory was supposed to be the remedy. So, in the end, I cannot see that the theory *is* conceptually possible. It seems to me, therefore, that Socrates is in very little danger of jumping ship and joining the ranks of ontic predicates.

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