

Chapter Three

The 'No Difference' Theory

Some will agree with the result of the last chapter that the existence of a concrete individual cannot be one of its properties, but take this to show that, in R. Grossmann's words,

There is no individual *A* separate from its existence. We cannot oppose *A* to its existence. ...an entity and (its) existence are in a sense one and the same.¹

The Grossmann quotation suggests a view according to which 'existence' can only denote existing things, rather than something distinct from them in virtue of which they exist.² We might call this the 'no difference' theory of existence: There is no difference between an individual and existence or between an individual and *its* existence. Existence on the 'no difference' view divides without remainder into existents; existence just is existing individuals. For each *x*, the existence of *x* = *x*. This radically pluralistic view is superficially very plausible. For if existence is neither a property of individuals, nor (as the next chapter argues) a property of properties, what is left but to agree with Grossmann that the existence of *x* is just *x*? Furthermore, if, as we have insisted in Chapter 2, the existence of a thing pertains to the *whole* of it, as it would not if it were a property of it, what better way to accommodate this insight than by identifying the existence of a thing with the thing? And what better way to accommodate the insight that existence is too ontologically basic to be a property?

Nevertheless, this chapter will argue that this is a mistake, and that there is a real difference between existence and that-which-exists, a difference that obtains independently of our linguistic and conceptual activities. Our task, then, is to defend what might be called, somewhat portentously, the Existential Difference. This is simply the real difference between an existing thing and existence, a difference that is real in that it obtains independently of us and our systems of linguistic and conceptual representation. This chapter argues merely *that* there is such a difference; the precise *nature* of this difference, and of its terms (that which differs in the difference), is left for later determination. One thing, however, is clear about the nature of the Existential Difference from the last chapter: it is not the difference between a property and the individuals that instantiate it, nor the difference between a concept and the things it subsumes, nor the difference between property-instances and the individuals in which they inhere.

There are, however, two aspects of existence that must be distinguished. According to the one, existence is common to existents; according to the other,

each thing has its own existence. This implies that there are two sorts of existential difference. The first, call it the *major* difference, is that between existence as common to existents and existents. The second, call it the *minor* difference, is that between the existence unique to a particular existent and that particular existent. To anticipate a later conclusion, the major existential difference is the difference between the paradigm existent and that which is ontologically dependent upon it. The Paradigm is common to existents in the manner of a common ground or metaphysical cause, and not in the manner of a concept or property. The minor existential difference is the difference within a given individual *a* between *a* and the existence of *a*.

The task of this chapter is to argue for the *minor* difference, the extralinguistic and extramental difference between the existence of *a* and *a*, where *a* is any arbitrary concrete individual. This is a necessary step on the way towards establishing the major difference. It will become clear that the minor difference is equivalent to the distinction in a thing between existence and essence; for there is no difference between *a* considered in distinction from its existence and the essence of *a*. 'Essence' is here employed in a wide sense to denote the conjunction of those properties that make up *what* a thing is, and not in the narrow sense according to which a thing's essential (as opposed to accidental) properties are those it cannot fail to possess. Thus in the wide sense of 'essence' being sunburned now is part of my essence, even though I might not have been sunburned now. Thus narrowly essential and accidental properties (whether monadic or relational) are part of my wide essence.

The plan of attack in this chapter is as follows. First, the difference between eliminativism and identitarianism is explained. Second, the identitarian reading of the 'no difference' theory is examined and refuted. Third, we examine Franz Brentano's theory of existence, perhaps the most interesting of the 'no difference' theories of existence, a theory that is most plausibly interpreted as an eliminativist theory. Brentano is an important transitional figure in the history of philosophy. Although he was steeped in Aristotle and the scholastics, his deflationary linguistic approach to metaphysical questions anticipates 20th century analytic treatments. Indeed, Gustav Bergmann calls him "the first linguistic philosopher."³ A good example of Brentano's deflationism is his theory of existence, which in some ways anticipates the influential theories of Frege and Russell which will be discussed in the next chapter. Fourth, we refute D. C. Williams' eliminativist version of the 'no difference' theory. Finally, we argue that the falsity of eliminativism entails the falsity of nonconstituent ontology.

1. ELIMINATIVISM VERSUS IDENTITARIANISM

The question of this chapter is whether or not there is any difference in reality between an individual and its existence. But there are two ways there might be

no difference. An eliminativist might say that there is no difference between an individual and its existence because there just is no such 'thing' as the existence of an individual. If there is no such 'thing' as the existence of an individual, then of course there cannot be any difference between the existence of *a* and *a*. An identitarian, on the other hand, might say that there is no difference between *a* and its existence, not because there is no existence of *a*, but because the existence of *a*, which is real, is nevertheless identical to *a*. For the eliminativist, there is no difference because one of the terms of the difference does not exist. For the identitarian, there is no difference because both terms, which exist, are identical. Our first task, therefore, is to explain the division of theories of existence into two main groups, eliminativist theories and identitarian theories. Since this is a distinction not confined to the theory of existence, we will begin by characterizing it in general terms.

An eliminativist about *X*, motivated by the puzzles to which *X* gives rise, denies that 'there is any such thing' as *X*. An identitarian about *X*, motivated by the same puzzles, aims to identify *X* with something theoretically more tractable, and less likely to engender perplexity. Clearly, to identify *X* with *Y* is to presuppose that *X* is there to be identified with *Y*. The distinction, then, is roughly this. Faced with a recalcitrant datum, the eliminativist, radical that she is, has no scruples about simply denying the datum and replacing it with something more congenial. The eliminativist is thus a replacement theorist. The identitarian, however, has a conservative nature: he aims to analyze or explicate the datum in question without denying it, distorting it, or changing the subject.

Hume's regularity theory of causation is an example of an eliminativist theory.⁴ On our ordinary conception of causation, causes *produce* or bring into existence their effects. But Hume was famously unable to find any production in the causal sequences he examined. So he threw out causation-as-production and replaced it with something that comported better with his empiricist strictures. He thus proposed a theory in terms of spatiotemporal contiguity, temporal precedence and constant conjunction. Taken as an *analysis* of our ordinary concept of cause, as an unpacking of what we ordinarily mean when we engage in causal talk, Hume's theory is hopeless. When we say, with the vulgar, that an F-event caused a G-event, we mean that the former produced, and in producing necessitated, the G-event. We do not mean that it just happens to be the case that, hitherto, every F-event has been contiguously followed by a G-event. Thus Hume's theory is more charitably interpreted as a replacement of our ordinary concept.

The philosophy of mind provides a second example of the eliminativist/identitarian contrast. An eliminativist about mental states simply denies their existence. He doesn't identify pain, to coin an example, with delta A fiber stimulation (or whatever) as does the identitarian; he holds pain to be a bogus category of 'folk psychology' that in the fullness of time we will learn to do without. (It is to be hoped the manifest absurdity of eliminativism in the



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