

## CONCEPT

many properties we must not, ascribe to him; but though we do have that much knowledge of his essence, he has countless attributes we cannot grasp (*ibid.*, vol. VII, p. 46). Clarity and distinctness does imply conceptual possibility, and hence (since the existence of God guarantees that there is a power capable of creating whatever we conceive clearly and distinctly), real possibility (*cf. ibid.*, vol. VII, pp. 71, 78).

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**concept** In the history of philosophy the term “concept” and kindred expressions have been used in a variety of technical senses (e.g., by AQUINAS, KANT, FREGE). The majority of contemporary philosophers, however, use the term in its central non-technical sense, which is exhibited in complex gerundive phrases of the form “the concept of being *F*”. In what follows “concept” will be used in this way.

Concepts are intensional entities in the sense that two concepts can apply to exactly the same objects and nevertheless be distinct. For example, the concept of being a triangle is not identical with the concept of being a trilateral. This example shows that concepts are indeed hyperintensional in the sense that they can be distinct even if they necessarily apply to the same objects. Because concepts are hyperintensional, they are ideally suited to serve as the senses (meanings) of predicates. For example, “is a triangle” expresses the concept of being a triangle; “is a trilateral” expresses the concept of being a trilateral. Since these concepts are not identical, we have a neat explanation of why the indicated predicates are not exact synonyms.

Concepts are a kind of universal, so each of the standard views on the ontological status of UNIVERSALS has been applied to

concepts as a special case. NOMINALISM: only particulars (and perhaps collections of particulars) exist; therefore, either concepts do not exist or they are reducible (in the spirit of CARNAP) to collections of particulars (including perhaps particulars that are not actual but only possible). CONCEPTUALISM: concepts exist but are dependent on the mind. REALISM: concepts exist independently of the mind. Realism has two main versions: *in rebus* realism – a concept exists only if it has instances; *ante rem* realism – a concept can exist even if it has no instances. For example, the concept of being a man weighing over a ton has no instances; however, it is plausible to hold that this concept does exist. After all, this concept would seem to be what is expressed by the predicate “is a man weighing over a ton”.

Perhaps the most perplexing question about concepts is how they succeed in being about objects. On one view, there is a primitive, unanalyzable relation of representation that holds between concepts and objects. This view has the disadvantage of making representation an unexplained mystery. A second view is that the relation of representation is analyzable in terms of resemblance, causation, or some other naturalistic notion. While not mysterious, none of these analyses has, thus far, succeeded in avoiding clear-cut counterexamples. A third view is that what is needed is a certain sort of logical theory, specifically, an intensional logic. An intensional logic promises to provide a systematic account of the logical behavior of intensional entities – properties, RELATIONS, states of affairs, propositions and concepts (*see* PROPOSITION, STATE OF AFFAIRS). The idea is that concepts are logical constructs whose ultimate “constituents” are the real properties and relations of things in the world. A concept is about those objects that have the properties and relations required by the correct logical analysis of the concept. On this approach, the need for a primitive relation of representation thus disappears; at the same time, the easy counterexamples that beset naturalistic analyses (*see* NATURALISM) can evidently be avoided.

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**concrete/abstract** Realists and antirealists presuppose an intuitive distinction between *abstracta* and *concreta* in their debates about the problem of UNIVERSALS (see NOMINALISM; PLATONISM). Evidently, every entity is either concrete or abstract, and no entity is both. Plausibly, the division between *concreta* and *abstracta* is a basic categorial division; on some views, it is the *most basic* categorial division. Examples of *abstracta* are squareness (a property); betweenness (a relation); there being horses (a proposition); the null set; and the number 7 (see CLASS, COLLECTION, SET; PROPOSITION, STATE OF AFFAIRS; RELATIONS). Examples of *concreta* are a stone (a material SUBSTANCE); GOD (a non-physical SUBSTANCE or SOUL); events such as hurricanes (see EVENT THEORY); instants and seconds (times); points and expanses of space (places, see SPACE AND TIME); the particular wisdom of Socrates (a TROPE); the [arbitrary] sum of Earth and Mars; the Earth's surface (a BOUNDARY); and shadows and holes (privations). It is desirable that a philosophical analysis of the concrete/abstract distinction be ontologically neutral, that is, allow for the possibility of entities of any intelligible sort, given some plausible view about the nature, existence conditions and interrelationships of entities of those sorts. This desideratum seems to require allowing for the possibility of entities of the aforementioned kinds. Ten attempts have been made to analyze the concrete/abstract distinction.

- (1) Unlike *abstracta*, *concreta* are in space.

Observe that for the purposes of (1), "*in space*" means *occupying a place*, which is different than *standing in spatial relationships*. A place stands in spatial relationships, but a place does *not* occupy a place. If a place occupied a place, then an absurd infinite regress of places would be generated. It might be thought that, trivially, a place occupies *itself*, but this seems to confuse the relation of *Identity* with the relation of *Occupation*. (Note that, arguably, a parallel line of reasoning applies to times, where being in *time* is *occurring at a time* (or *times*) or *existing at a time* (or *times*)). We can now see that (1) is inadequate because places are concrete, but are not themselves in space; (1) is also inadequate because although a Cartesian soul or spirit would be a concrete entity, such a being would not be in space.

- (2) Unlike *abstracta*, *concreta* are in space or in time.

If absolute time is a necessary being, then (2) avoids the problems pertaining to Cartesian souls and places. For on that condition, necessarily, a Cartesian soul or a place is in time. On the other hand, it might be assumed that, possibly, time is relational. But, on that assumption, (2) does seem to have difficulties with Cartesian souls. Specifically, it appears that if it is possible that time is relational, then there could be a *static* world containing a Cartesian soul engaged in an *atemporal* contemplation of necessary truths. Although such an atemporal, non-spatial, thinking substance would be a concrete entity, it would not stand in any spatial or temporal relationship. Moreover, (2) implies that an abstract entity does not exist in time. As we shall see below, this claim is highly problematic; all other things being equal, an analysis of the concrete/abstract distinction that does not rely upon this assertion is better than one which does.

- (3) Unlike *abstracta*, *concreta* are in space-time.

There are three objections to this analysis. First, like (1), (3) falsely implies that Cartesian souls are abstract. Second, just as places are not in space, so they are not in, that is,