Egalitarian vs. Elitist Material Plenitude

Uriah Kriegel

Forthcoming in *Philosophical Studies*

Introduction/Abstract

A number of prominent metaphysicians have recently defended the idea of *material plenitude*: wherever there is one material object, there is in fact a great multitude of them, all coincident and sharing many properties, but differing in which of these properties they have essentially and which accidentally. The main goal of this paper is to put on the agenda an important theoretical decision that plenitudinists face, regarding whether their plenitude is *egalitarian* or *elitist*, depending on whether or not they take all objects that coincide at a certain location to be in some sense ontologically on a par. Many current proponents of plenitude tend toward egalitarianism. But current proponents often also point to an Aristotelian tradition they claim to carry on; indeed, the view is sometimes referred to as "neo-Aristotelian plenitude." By examining some of the historical protagonists of Aristotelian plenitude, however, I show that they defended rather an elitist form of plenitude, wherein a single coincident is ontologically privileged in every occupied region. In the final section of the paper, I also try to articulate the basic motivation for each outlook, by way of initiating discussion of which view plenitudinists should *believe*.

1. Material Plenitude in Recent Metaphysics

The term "plenitude" (in the relevant sense) was introduced by Karen Bennett (2004: 354), in the context of discussing the puzzle of material constitution – more specifically, in the context of responding to the so-called grounding problem for pluralism about material constitution. According to pluralism, the Statue of Liberty is one thing, the lump of copper it is made of is another (even though the two coincide in space, and in other cases we can envisage coincidence in time as well).[1] One standard reason for this is that if we flatten the lump of copper, the Statue of Liberty would go out of existence but the copper-lump would not; against the background of certain relatively innocuous assumptions (e.g., that identity is necessary), it follows that there are two different objects there, with different identity conditions.[2] However, pluralism faces the "grounding problem" (Burke 1992), which may be put informally as follows. Alleged coincidents are supposed to share some properties

and not others. Although it is not straightforward how to characterize in a principled way the difference between the two sets of properties (see Fairchild 2019), we do expect coincidents to share physical properties such as mass and molecular composition, for instance, and *not* to share modal properties such as *being possibly-flat* (the copper-lump has it, the Statue of Liberty does not). The grounding problem is the problem that we also expect an object's modal properties to be grounded in, and hence supervene upon, its non-modal properties. It would follow that objects could not differ *only* in their modal properties. Yet this is exactly what pluralists about coincidents appear to say happens with the Statue of Liberty and the copper-lump. (Sometimes pluralists cite other types of unshared properties, e.g. sortal properties such as *being a statue*, but here too we expect grounding in non-sortal properties – being a statue is not a primitive, ungrounded property. So the problem reproduces for sortal properties, and the suspicion is that it would reproduce for any alleged unshared properties.)

It was to respond to this problem that Bennett recruited the idea of plenitude. Bennett argued that objects *can* differ in their modal properties even when they are indiscernible in their non-modal properties, because a certain principle of plenitude holds:

> [E]very region of space-time that contains an object at all contains a distinct object for every possible way of distributing 'essential' and 'accidental' over the non-[modal] properties actually instantiated there. (2004: 354)

Suppose the Statue of Liberty has n non-modal (and non-sortal etc.) properties. According to the plenitude principle, there is a distinct object in the relevant region for every possible way essentiality and accidentality can be distributed across these n properties. It follows, to a first approximation, that where the Statue of Liberty stands there are not just two but 2^n coincident objects. (This is only a first approximation for reasons that will not concern us here.[3]) Bennett's idea was that once we accept plenitude, we can see why objects can *legitimately* differ in modal profile even when non-modally indiscernible.

Following Bennett, several philosophers employed plenitude in other philosophical contexts: John Hawthorne (2006a), calling it "neo-Aristotelian plenitude," makes it do work in *meta*ontology; Sarah-Jane Leslie (2011) applies plenitude, which she traces back to Aristotle's "theory of kooky objects" (Leslie 2011: 278 – more on kooky objects below) to certain mid-twentieth-century paradoxes; while Shamik Dasgupta (2018) deploys plenitude (under the name "unlimited essentialism") to propose a solution to the so-called nonidentity problem in ethics.

As these recent authors acknowledge, under different names plenitude has been with us since the 1980s. Kit Fine introduced the notion of a "qua object," such as copper-qua-Lady-Liberty-shaped, and argued for a plenitude of qua objects: "Given any object x and description (property) φ possessed by x, we shall suppose there is a new object x *qua* φ"

(Fine 1982: 102; see also Fine 1999: 73). Stephen Yablo, concerned to elucidate the special "identity-like" relationship that the Statue of Liberty and the copper lump bear to each other, developed an apparatus for understanding essentiality and accidentality out of which it *fell* that "every point in the logical space of possible coincidents must actually be occupied" (Yablo 1987: 310).

What I want to highlight here is that at least some of these contemporary defenders of plenitude appear to treat the many coincidents at a region as broadly "ontologically on a par," or as having the same "ontological status," and denying that any of them is "ontologically privileged." (These locutions are admittedly impressionistic; we will get more precise in §3.)

Some plenitudinists straight-up *say* they shun ontological privilege among coincidents. Consider this passage from Kit Fine:

> I would wish to maintain that the objects we ordinarily recognize – chairs and tables and the like – are not ontologically privileged. Whatever kind of ontological commitment we have to them we should also have to the more bizarre forms of rigid and variable embodiment [i.e., the more bizarre objects the plenitudinist recognizes]. (Fine 1999: 73)

Here Fine plainly *states* that Socrates is not "ontologically privileged" compared to such objects as Socrates-qua-philosopher, Socrates-qua-Greek, and so on (see also Johnston 2006: 296-8 on the "invidious ontological distinction").

More often, opposition to ontological privilege is more implicit in the way plenitudinists *motivate* their view. There is, in fact, remarkable uniformity in the style of argument appealed to in this literature. The basic argumentative strategy may be presented as follows. Call *L* the exact region occupied by the Statue of Liberty. Then, schematically:

1) Either (a) there is in *L* exactly one object, or (b) there is in *L* a plurality of objects that falls short of plenitude (e.g., a handful of objects), or (c) there is in *L* a plenitude of objects;
2) Option (a), call it "monism," has unacceptable consequences;
3) Option (b), call it "non-plenitudinous pluralism," involves unacceptable anthropocentrism and/or arbitrariness; therefore,
4) Option (c), plenitudinism, is to be accepted.

The heart of the argument is the twin cases against monism and non-plenitudinous pluralism (Premises 2 and 3).[4] The case against monism is familiar from the traditional literature on the statue and the clay and will not concern us here.[5] What plenitudinists have brought to the dialectical table is the case against non-plenitudinous pluralism. This case consists sometimes in the accusation that any attempt to draw a line, within the plenitude of *putative* coincidents, between those that are real and those that are not, will be

unacceptably *anthropocentric*; sometimes in the accusation that such a line is doomed to be entirely *arbitrary*; and sometimes in both accusations at once.

It is not our purpose here to evaluate the cogency of this line of argument. What I want to point out is that at least for some plenitudinists, the accusation of anthropocentrism/arbitrariness reflects a commitment to the equal ontological status of coincidents. The anthropocentric accusation was voiced already by Yablo, who argues that what is real or not real is fixed by reality itself, not by how we happen to conceptualize it. In the process, he insists that "in reality itself" all coincidents are ontologically "equally good," and treating some of them as ontologically privileged would be an anthropocentric fallacy. He writes:

> Metaphysics aspires to understand reality as it is itself, independently of the conceptual apparatus observers bring to bear on it. Even if we do not ourselves recognize essentially juvenile or mature entities [e.g., Socrates-qua-juvenile and Socrates-qua-mature], it is not hard to imagine others who would. . . To insist on the credentials of the things we recognize against those which others do, or might, seems indefensibly parochial. (Yablo 1987: 307)

As Yablo sees it, we happen to find Socrates more interesting than Socrates-qua-juvenile (the object that coincides for a while with Socrates but goes out of existence as Socrates matures); but others might find Socrates *less* interesting. As far as reality "as it is in itself" is concerned, neither is any better than the other. They are ontologically on a par (see likewise Johnston 2006: 698 on the "illusion of salience," as well as Dasgupta 2018: 548).

I am going to refer to the kind of plenitude envisaged by Fine, Yablo, and Johnston as "egalitarian plenitude." My impression is that many contemporary plenitudinists have this kind of plenitude in mind, even if this is not explicit in their writings. It is not explicit, I suspect, because the very distinction between egalitarian and non-egalitarian plenitude has not been made explicit in the literature; putting it on the explicit agenda is precisely the aim of this paper. In any case, I am not familiar with a contemporary plenitudinist who explicitly *denies* that coincidents are ontologically on a par – with one exception: Hawthorne's (2006b) distinction between "quality objects" and "junk objects." I will return to Hawthorne's view in §3.

2. Classical Material Plenitude

As we have seen, a number of modern plenitudinists explicitly refer to Aristotle as an intellectual ancestor (Hawthorne 2006b, Leslie 2011, Spencer 2019). In this section, I want to do a bit of history of philosophy by way of bringing out an important difference between plenitude as it appears in that Aristotelian tradition and the kind of egalitarian plenitude discussed in §1. I will look at three important Aristotelian metaphysicians – one ancient

(Aristotle himself), one medieval (Aquinas), and one modern (Brentano) – and show that they very much reject the notion that all coincidents are ontologically on a par.

Modern historical scholarship on Aristotle's plenitudinist ideas kicks off with Gareth Matthews' seminal paper "Accidental Unities," which introduced the notion of a "kooky object" (Matthews 1982). These are the objects Aristotle discusses occasionally via such constructions as "seated Socrates" and "musical Coriscus." They seem to be basically the same objects Fine would call Socrates-qua-seated and Coriscus-qua-musical. Aristotle himself did not call seated-Socrates a "kooky object," of course, but an "accidental unity" or "thing that is one in the accidental sense of 'one'." What is that? For Aristotle, there are two kinds of material object: substances and accidental unities. Substances are familiar objects like Socrates and the Statue of Liberty. Accidental unities are more unusual, "kooky" objects, such as seated-Socrates and verdigris-Statue-of-Liberty. In contemporary plenitude, these would typically be characterized as the objects that have essentially all the properties that Socrates and the State of Liberty (respectively) have essentially but also have essentially one property that Socrates or the State of Liberty has accidentally, namely being seated and being verdigris (respectively). Within Aristotle's hylomorphist framework, however, objects are individuated, in the first instance, in terms of their matter-form constituent structure. The distinction between substances and accidental unities thus comes down to different kinds of matter/form structure, notably the kind of matter-constituent involved. In a substance, the matter is some quantity of otherwise undifferentiated stuff – "prime matter" – whereas in an accidental unity, the matter is a substance. Thus, Socrates is the matter-form compound consisting of a portion of prime matter and Socrates' (substantial) form – the form of human being, or (in *De Anima*) rational soul. Seated-Socrates, meanwhile, is the matter-form compound consisting of Socrates as matter and the (accidental) form of seatedness. Although there is a difference here between substantial and accidental forms, even if forms were all of a piece there would still be the difference between objects whose matter-constituent is prime matter (substances) and objects whose matter-constituent is a substance (accidental unities).

Naturally, Socrates, seated-Socrates, Greek-Socrates, mortal-Socrates, etc. all occupy the exact same region of space. Nonetheless they are different objects. The reason they are different is that their matter and form constituents are different – and those constituents are what makes an object the object it is. So although they coincide perfectly in space, their ontological structure is completely different. As a symptom of this, their identity and persistence conditions differ:

> When a simple thing [e.g., Coriscus] is said to become something [e.g., musically capable], in one case it survives through the process, in the other it does not. For the man remains a man and is thus even when he becomes musical, whereas what is not musical [e.g., non-musical-

> Coriscus] or is unmusical [e.g., unmusical-Coriscus] does nor survive . . . (Aristotle, *Physics* I.7, 190^{a}9-12)

Coriscus' persistence conditions are consistent with his becoming musical, because his lack of musicality and even positive unmusicality do not go to his very being; but Coriscus-qua-lacking-musicality and Coriscus-qua-positively-unmusical are different, their identity and persistence conditions *excluding* becoming musical. Compare: an omnipotent god could decide to reward Socrates with immortality, but it is impossible to reward mortal-Socrates with immortality – to reward Socrates with immortality is to destroy mortal-Socrates.

As far as we know, there are no important restrictions in Aristotle on the combination of substances and accidental forms into such "accidental unities" or "kooky objects."[6] Thus for *any* accidental form α of Socrates, there is a kooky object Socrates-qua-α that coincides with Socrates. In the region occupied by Socrates, seated-Socrates, and mortal-Socrates there are also Greek-Socrates, wise-Socrates, wise-mortal-Socrates, and many other objects.

For all that, though, only one of these co-located objects is a *substance*, namely, the one which has the relevant quantity of prime matter as its material constituent – Socrates. This creates an asymmetry between Socrates and the many objects it coincides with. For note that, in this picture, Socrates is a constituent of seated-Socrates, wise-Socrates, and so on, but none of the latter is a constituent of Socrates. In consequence, seated-Socrates, wise-Socrates, and so on could not exist without Socrates existing (Matthews 1982: 224); whereas Socrates could exist without seated-Socrates and wise-Socrates (e.g., by rising from his seat or descending into foolishness). Thus we have an asymmetric ontological dependence of seated-Socrates, wise-Socrates, etc. on Socrates. This is why seated-Socrates and wise-Socrates, despite being *objects*, are not *substances*: they do not enjoy independent existence.

For Aristotle, there is only one substance at a location – because there is only one portion of prime matter at a location. Thus in Aristotle's version of plenitude it is not at all true that all coincidents are "ontologically on a par." On the contrary, one of them is singled out as "ontologically privileged," namely, the one whose material constituent is a portion of prime matter and which does not depend for its existence on any of the other coincidents.

This kind of Aristotelian plenitude persisted into Medieval and Modern philosophy. According to Ross Inman, we find the exact same picture in Aquinas, arguably the leading Medieval Aristotelian:

> For Aquinas, there are two different kinds of hylomorphic compounds – substances and accidental unities – each distinguished by the sorts of entities that are said to play the role of matter and form in their constituent makeup… What plays the matter role for accidental

> unities is not a non-individualized portion of stuff as with substance, but a full-fledged individual substance in its own right. (Inman 2014: 588)

This picture manifestly echoes Aristotle's, including in according ontological privilege to one coincident per location.

A more independent and more recent variant of this classical form of plenitude can be found in Franz Brentano's early-20th-century ontological work. Known today primarily for his work on intentionality, Brentano actually wrote his doctoral dissertation on Aristotle's notion of existence (Brentano 1862) and made important contributions in various areas of metaphysics, notably mereology (Baumgartner and Simons 1994) and topology (Zimmerman 1996). He, too, develops a plenitudinist ontology, but one that departs from Aristotle's in intriguing ways (see Chisholm 1978, Kriegel 2015). The key departure is Brentano's rejection of forms, as part of a nominalistic agenda whereby "there is nothing other than things [i.e., concrete particulars]" (Brentano 1930: 68).[7] There is in Brentano's ontology no "form of humanity" for Socrates to be partly constituted by and no "form of seatedness" for seated-Socrates to be partly constituted by. Nonetheless both Socrates and seated-Socrates exist, for Brentano, and moreover, Socrates is a substance while seated-Socrates is not.[8] What *makes* them different? Brentano's view is that seated-Socrates has Socrates as *constituent* (whereas Socrates does not have seated-Socrates as constituent), even though Socrates does not have any *other* constituent (since he rejects the existence of a form of seatedness).

To understand what Brentano has in mind here, it might be useful to compare Brentanian kooky objects to Armstrongian states of affairs. For Armstrong, a state of affairs (SoA) is a whole which has objects and properties/relations as constituents but, on the one hand, is *more* than just the combination of those constituents, but, on the other hand, has no other supplemental constituent. Thus, the SoAs of John loving Mary and of Mary loving John are distinct, but have all the same constituents: John, Mary, and the loving relation (Armstrong 1993: 430-1, 1997: 118). If John, Mary, and loving were *parts* of John loving Mary, then by extensional classical mereology's axiom of supplementation they would need to be supplemented by an additional part, which would "make whole" John loving Mary (and which would differ from the additional part that makes Mary loving John whole).[9] But there is no such additional part. So John, Mary, and loving are better seen as *constituents* rather than *parts* of the SoA of John loving Mary; and the SoA itself is better seen as a "non-mereological whole" (Armstrong 1997: 122).

Like Armstrongian SoAs, Brentanian kooky objects are wholes you can "look inside of" and find elements (constituents) in, but at the same time you cannot "build up" from those elements. That is, they are wholes with a *constituent structure* but not a *mereological structure*. Because there are no properties or relations in Brentano's ontology, however, the only constituents of Brentanian kooky objects are *other concrete particulars*. Thus, seated-

Socrates has Socrates as constituent, without having any other constituent that supplements it.

It is not our purpose here to *evaluate* Brentano's ontology. What matters for our purposes is only this: although Brentano departs from Aristotle in important ways, he retains two key ideas. The first is that where Socrates is, there is a plenitude of objects coincident with him. The second is that within this plenitude only one coincident is a *substance*. This substance is very much ontologically privileged as compared to all other coincidents, as they are all asymmetrically ontologically dependent on it (Kriegel 2015: 167). The underlying reason for this asymmetric dependency is asymmetric *constituency*: Socrates is a constituent of seated-Socrates, philosopher-Socrates, Athenian-Socrates, and so on, without any of the latter being a constituent of *it*.

3. Egalitarianism and Elitism

There is clearly an important difference between the kind of classical plenitude we find in Aristotle, Aquinas, and Brentano, and the contemporary egalitarian plenitude we find in Fine and Yablo. Put intuitively, the latter treat all coincidents at a location as "ontologically on a par," erasing any "ontological privilege" among them, whereas the former designate one coincident as an ontological special snowflake and see all others as ontologically dependent on it.

How should we understand the notions of "ontological privilege" and "ontological parity" that mark the difference between elitist and egalitarian forms of plenitude? Perhaps *x* and *y* are "ontologically on a par" just if neither is ontologically privileged relative to the other. But what does it mean exactly to say that *x* is ontologically privileged relative to *y*?

One straightforward sense in which *x* might be ontologically privileged relative to *y* is when *x* exists whereas *y* does not. But this cannot be the notion relevant to plenitude theory, since the whole point of plenitude is that all those coincidents do exist. If one believed in *degrees of being* (McDaniel 2013), one might propose that *x* is ontologically privileged relative to *y* just if *x*'s degree of being is higher than *y*'s (if *x* is "more real" than *y*). But few metaphysicians believe in degrees of being, and anyway, when we examine the phenomena of ontological privilege that were operative in our discussion of classical Aristotelian plenitude, they seem to concern something else.

What ontological privilege seems to amount to there is *asymmetric ontological dependence*: *x* is privileged relative to *y* just if (i) *y* ontologically depends on *x* and (ii) *x* does *not* ontologically depend on *y*. Whether ontological dependence should in turn be understood in modal terms, in ground-theoretic terms, or some other way, need not detain us here. However understood, asymmetric ontological dependence suffices to draw the

distinction between the classical plenitude we found among Aristotelians and the egalitarian kind we found among some contemporary plenitudinists.

Suppose that in some location *L* there is a material object, and call the plurality of *n* coincidents the plenitudinist posits there the *coincident-plenum* in *L*. Plenitudinists are agreed that wherever there is one material object there is a coincident-plenum. The historical Aristotelians further maintained that:

[**A-Elitism**] For any coincident-plenum of coincidents C_1, …, C_n, there is among C_1, …, C_n a unique coincident C_u, such that for any C_i ($i \neq u$), C_i asymmetrically ontologically depends on C_u.

The complete opposite of this kind of Aristotelian Elitism would be a thesis we might call "dependence egalitarianism":

[**D-Egalitarianism**] For any coincident-plenum of coincidents C_1, …, C_n, there is not among C_1, …, C_n a single pair of coincidents C_j, C_k, such that C_j asymmetrically ontologically depends on C_k or vice versa.

D-Egalitarianism forbids *any* asymmetries of dependence. Note that this tolerates two very different kinds of symmetries: where C_j and C_k are mutually ontologically *independent* and where C_j and C_k are mutually ontologically *dependent*.[10]

A-Elitism and D-Egalitarianism are not contradictories but opposites, with various epistemically possible options lying in-between. It is a complicated question just how to "measure" a plenitude thesis' respective proximity to A-Elitism vs. D-Egalitarianism. For one thing, there are different dimensions along which versions of plenitude might depart from these two extremes. There is, of course, the dimension of number of ontologically independent coincidents: a version of plenitude that allowed for two mutually independent coincidents on which all others depended "approximates" A-Elitism in one way. But there is also the dimension of quantification: A-Elitism is a universally quantified thesis, and so a plenitude thesis that read like A-Elitism but for replacing "any plenum" with, say, "98% of plenums," or "any plenum of type T," would approximate A-Elitism in a different way. There are likely other dimensions of relevance (e.g., pertaining to the division of grounding labor among ontologically independent coincidents inside a plenum). The space of elitist plenitudes is thus multidimensional and structured, making it exceedingly difficult to draw with any precision an intuitive line between broadly elitist and broadly egalitarian forms of plenitude. All this is potentially significant material for future work within the material-plenitude research program in metaphysics.

In addition, however, ontological dependence is not the only way to mark a difference between intuitively elitist vs. egalitarian plenitudes. Consider the parallel case of

properties. Following Armstrong (1978) and especially Lewis (1983), many philosophers embrace an abundance of properties but designate a compact subset as elite. In Lewis, who identifies a property with a class of (actual and/or possible) concrete particulars (as per his class nominalism), there is a property plenitude – i.e., a property for *every* class of particulars, however miscellaneous and gerrymandered – but there is also a small elite of "perfectly natural" properties. Now, *one* way to understand what makes a property perfectly natural, and hence elite, is in terms of ontological dependence. "The guiding idea," writes Lewis (1983: 346), "is that the world's [elite properties] should comprise a minimal basis for characterizing the world completely." The notion of "minimal basis" may then be understood in grounding terms – e.g., the elite properties are those (instantiations of) which ground (instantiations of) all other properties – or it may be understood, in a more "Australian" vein, in terms of conceptual-analysis-mediated entailment relations (Jackson 1998). But either way, the (instantiation of) non-elite properties would *ontologically depend* upon the (instantiation of) elite properties. What I want to point out is that this is not the *only* way to draw the line between Lewisian elite and non-elite properties. As Schaffer (2004) shows, another way is in terms of causal powers: elite properties are those which figure in causal laws of nature (see Lewis 1983: 367-8).[11] Thus, within Lewis' property plenitude, only a tiny subset figure in such laws: the property constituted by the set of all objects with negative charge does, the property constituted by the Eiffel Tower, the moon, and this here bottle of tequila does not. So figuring in laws also defines a certain elite status for properties – though not (not immediately, at any rate) *the same* elite status as the one defined by being part of the minimal basis for a complete description of the world. Lewis appears to assume that a characterization of the elite/non-elite distinction in these terms will be co-extensive with the "minimal base" characterization. This is what Schaffer argues against, essentially on the basis of multiple realizability and anti-reductionist considerations (Schaffer 2004: 94-5).

For our purposes, it does not matter whether or not the two characterizations are co-extensive. They are different characterizations, so each could inspire a different characterization of elitist vs. egalitarian material plenitude. The elitist plenitude we found in historical Aristotelians was framed in terms of ontological dependence. But it is also possible to formulate an elitism based on figuring in laws. I mentioned in §1 that among contemporary plenitudinists, John Hawthorne stands out in expressly *not* treating coincidents as ontologically on a par, but on the contrary as dividing into "quality objects" and "junk objects."[12] What distinguishes the former from the latter, for Hawthorne (2006b: 111), is that the dynamical laws (the laws governing forces and therefore motion) apply to them. As Hawthorne points out, these laws apply to a lump of brick and mortar but not to the restaurant coincident therewith, since the restaurant can move across town in the time it take to sign a legal document, but brick and mortar cannot move this fast (2006b: 112-3). Now, Hawthorne's own problem is how to draw in a principled way the distinction between

quality and junk coincidents. But that there is such a distinction he does not question. And so in Hawthorne we find a version of elitist plenitude, but where the elite designation is not dependence-based but law-based.

Hawthorne focuses on *dynamical* laws, and does not commit to there being exactly one object in every occupied region these laws apply to. To simplify things, however, let us formulate the following Hawthornesque form of elitist plenitude:

[**H-Elitism**] For any coincident-plenum of coincidents C_1, …, C_n, there is among C_1, …, C_n a unique coincident C_u that the laws of nature (e.g., dynamical) apply to.

H-Elitism differs from A-Elitism in framing object elitness in terms of laws rather than dependence. What H-Elitism has *in common* with A-Elitism is that both designate a single coincident as in some way elite. If we want to formulate a *generic* elitism, we might try:

[**G-Elitism**] For any coincident-plenum of coincidents C_1, …, C_n, there is among C_1, …, C_n a unique coincident C_u, such that C_u is an elite object.

Different versions of G-Elitism would be distinguished by the way they unpack object eliteness. We have seen two such ways – an Aristotelian dependence-based one and a Hawthornesque law-based one – somewhat paralleling the two ways Schaffer distinguished of unpacking property eliteness. There may be other ways to draw a bright line between elite and non-elite coincidents within a plenitudinist ontology; these could be leveraged to formulate other versions of G-Elitism.

As before, G-Elitism can be approximated in various ways, giving various plenitude theses a "broadly elitist" flavor if they sufficiently approximate it. For example, if a plenitudinist held that at most only *a handful* of coincidents in any occupied region are elite, hers would be a broadly elitist form of plenitude. Of course, the more coincidents have whatever feature F allegedly makes for eliteness, the less aristocratic a distinction the having of F becomes – and the deeper we shade into egalitarian territory. The purest form of egalitarian plenitude is this:

[**G-Egalitarianism**] For any coincident-plenum of coincidents C_1, …, C_n, there is no coincident C_i, such that C_i is an elite object.

According to G-Egalitarianism, *no* coincident object is elite in *any* occupied region. As noted, of course, G-Elitism and G-Egalitarianism are not contradictories but opposites, and many plenitude theses will fall somewhere between them, including, presumably, in some gray area between "broadly elitist" and "broadly egalitarian" plenitudes.

4. Basic Motivations

The main goal of this paper is just to put on the plenitudinist agenda a decision point that has not been explicitly appreciated to date, namely, between egalitarian and elitist plenitude. For this purpose, it is necessary to articulate the two options in a way that makes clear they are two; that was the charge of §§1–3. But the fact that two different options are internally coherent does not yet make for a compelling topic of debate; each must also be in some way *motivated*, so that one can see what the appeal of each might be. I thus close by trying to articulate the basic motivations for the two versions of plenitudinism.

To be clear, by the "basic motivation" for *p* I have in mind something very different from the *all-things-considered case* for *p*. The latter is what a complete inquiry into whether *p* should yield. The "basic motivation" is something more germinal that captures rather an intuitive attraction one might bring *to* the inquiry – something about *p* that speaks to one's antecedent philosophical sensibilities. In what follows, I try to put in words the intuitive attraction some metaphysician may feel toward egalitarian or elitist plenitude. The full case for each I leave for future work. The purpose of the discussion to follow is after all just to show that each view has *some* motivation for it – some potential antecedent philosophical sensibilities it speaks to.

I start with elitist plenitude. If you point to the Statue of Liberty and ask an innocent friend (read: a non-philosopher) how many things are there, your friend is liable to answer "one." And later at dinner, noticing the wooden figurine at the corner of your restaurant table, you yourself might say to your friend, in all innocence, "Could you pass me that thing" – as though there was just one. This seems to be in some sense the commonsensical, pre-philosophical way we count material objects – our *folk ontology*. If plenitude is true, this folk ontology is radically mistaken – a grand illusion, in a way. We live in a reality thoroughly different from what we take it to be in our innocent state. The intuitive attraction of elitist plenitude, it seems to me, is that it has the resources to recover *something* about the way we represent the world in our capacity as folk ontologists. There may be very many things at the table corner, but there is only one *substance*, or only one *quality object*, or otherwise only one elite coincident. There is, in any case, only one of *something* – some special type of concrete particular. This, at least, would be something that folk ontology gets right.

In this way, elitist plenitude provides a partial vindication, and rationalization, of our folk ontology. With this comes a series of benefits. First, when we make such utterances as "Pass me that thing" (or form the kinds of thoughts expressed by such utterances), we can rely on the elite coincident in the relevant region to function as a reference magnet that resolves any referential indeterminacy we might otherwise face. If egalitarian plenitude is right, there is a live question as to which of these objects "that thing" picks out. Elitism resolves, or evades, that looming problem.

Secondly, from a metaphysician's perspective, one of the deepest and most intuitive motivations for monism about the statue and the copper is the way monism respects the traditional principle of the *impenetrability of substance*: the idea that two material substances cannot penetrate each other in the strict sense of ending up occupying the very same space. Indeed, this principle was the framing topic of Wiggins' original paper that launched the contemporary debate on material constitution, and the official climax of that paper was the formulation of an acceptable *approximation* of the traditional impenetrability principle (Wiggins 1968: 94). An elitist need make no concession whatsoever here, however: as long as each coincident-plenum hosts only one *substance*, there may be no impenetrability of material *objects*, but there is still a full-blown impenetrability of material *substances*.

Aristotle himself, in the context of arguing that space cannot be a body, points out that if space *were* a body, then a material body and its place or location would have to exclude each other. Thus "the place cannot be body; for if it were there would be two bodies in the same place" (Aristotle, *Physics* IV.2, $209^{a}5$-7). Clearly, Aristotle here must be thinking of bodies specifically as substances, and finds it unthinkable that there should be two bodies in that sense in the same place. All this is more explicit in Brentano, who speaks plainly of "the fact that two substances cannot penetrate each other spatially" (Brentano 1933: 154). We may reasonably surmise that historical plenitudinists have adopted elitism in part in an attempt to respect the intuitive force of the impenetrability principle.

Contemporary egalitarians recognize the salience of a single *something* in every occupied location. But my sense is that they hope to offer a broadly pragmatist explanation of this salience that would obviate any commitment to an *ontological* privilege inhering in some coincidents but not others. Consider again the analogy of property-eliteness. Folk ontology recognizes a property of being green but not a property of being grue. Lewis (1983: 349) vindicated this by positing a primitive attribute of naturalness that inheres in green but not grue (or, more accurately, is present in green to a much larger degree); and many metaphysicians have of course followed him on this. But many others have found objective naturalness mysterious and attempted to offer more subjectivist accounts of the intuitive difference between green and grue. Thus, in an early critical discussion of Lewis, Barry Taylor (1993) tried to show that he could replicate what is worth replicating in Lewis' picture with the notion of a "cozy predicate" instead of a natural property. Taylor's reason for even *trying* to do this is that he found property naturalness "utterly mysterious" (1993: 88). What *makes* it mysterious Taylor doesn't say, but the following considerations seem relevant. Like the notorious ether, naturalness has no taste and no smell and is invisible and inaudible in all circumstances. Indeed, it is empirically barren in that it lacks *in principle* any observable consequences. Electrons are unobservable, but some of their causal effects are observable – or we would have no reason to believe in them. Naturalness is otherwise. It is not itself observable and it does not cause anything observable. In

consequence, two worlds are epistemically possible which are qualitatively indistinguishable and differ *only* in that naturalness is present in one but absent in the other. Why on earth should we believe that *our* world is the one *with* naturalness? Better to account for the intuitive difference between green and grue in terms of the greater usefulness of the predicate "green" to creatures in our life situation – so goes, at any rate, the anti-elitist's reasoning when it comes to properties.

It is a similar sensibility, or perhaps a parallel one, I suspect, that drives contemporary plenitude egalitarians. The idea is to account for the intuitive difference between the Statue of Liberty and the Statue-of-Liberty-qua-verdigris, not in terms of some empirically intractable ontological eliteness inhering only in the former, but in terms of the realities of cognitive-resource management of creatures in our life situation. The metabolic cost of producing a mental representation for each Statue-of-Liberty-coincident is astronomical, after all, while the benefits of doing so are minuscule (if you have seen with one, you have seen with them all!). Given this cost-benefit ratio, it is no surprise that creatures in our life situation produce a single object-representation (or "object-file," to use more fashionable jargon) for whatever occupies the relevant region.

We find this attitude fairly explicit in the quotation from Yablo in §1. For Yablo, thinking that Socrates is *ontologically* privileged relative to seated-Socrates or mature-Socrates is "indefensibly parochial" (1987: 307). Socrates is certainly *psychologically* privileged *for us*, but for creatures with a sufficiently different psychology it might be mature-Socrates who is privileged. In a similar vein, Mark Johnston (2006: 698) claims that the "distinction [between Socrates and mature-Socrates, say] was the product of an illusion of salience" having to do with the fact that "from the point of view of our conceptual scheme, the enormous majority of [coincidents] will be idle items, beneath or beyond our habits of thought and reference."

These types of consideration may be seen to lead to a sort of "debunking explanation" of the impression of ontological elite status among coincidents (compare Goldman 1987: 543). What explains the theist's belief in God is not the existence of God, according to one debunker, but the theist's emotional needs and social expectations. Likewise, what explains the belief in a single object where the Statue of Liberty is, according to another debunker, is neither the existence of a single object there, nor even the eliteness of a single object there, but the usefulness of forming a single object-representation for whatever is there. It is, in short, "something about us" rather than "something about the world," that explains the phenomena that support elitism.[13]

As I see it, the basic motivation for egalitarianism is that the phenomena supporting elitism can be explained without introducing object-eliteness as an objective aspect of reality. We do not need to encumber our ontology to explain phenomena that cognitive

psychology can explain. In contrast, the basic motivation for elitism flows from a desire to create a certain continuity with our intuitive, pre-philosophical way of thinking about the world. We do not need to completely revolutionize our conception of reality when a more modest modification will suffice to "restabilize" it once we realize the case for plenitude.

To repeat, this is not intended to capture the *case* for egalitarianism and elitism; merely to bring out the intuitive attraction each may hold for some metaphysicians. The real work in this area is to develop sustained *arguments* for one view or the other. The point in this section has only been that *something* motivates each view, so this is not a case where two incompatible positions are internally coherent but one of them is entirely unmotivated. No, both egalitarian and elitist plenitude are motivated, though motivated in different ways (and in ways that speak to different antecedent philosophical sensibilities). Since both are motivated, we now face a substantive philosophical decision: if we are convinced by the arguments against monism about the Statue of Liberty and the copper lump, as well as by arguments against any stable position in-between monism and all-out plenitude, we must decide whether one (or relatively few) of all coincidents at a region is (or are) ontologically privileged, or on the contrary all are ontologically on a par.[14]

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[1] For the sake of simplicity, we may imagine a scenario where the Statue of Liberty was created by a god ex nihilo and destroyed ad nihilum a day later, so that the Statue and the copper it is made of are perfectly coincident both in space and in time. This gives us a philosophically "cleaner" case than the one messy actuality offers.

[2] Another standard reason has to do with slow replacement scenarios. Suppose every night I secretly replace a fistful of copper from the Statue of Liberty with some other copper, and after many nights have all the original copper, which I use to build an enormous statue of the backward E in my (also enormous) backyard. Intuitively, it is not the case that the Statue of Liberty is now in my backyard and looks like an existential quantifier. It is still on Liberty Island and still looks like Lady Liberty. But the lump of copper *is* in my backyard and *does* look like the existential quantifier. Ergo, they are two – even though we have not supposed that either has gone out of existence.

[3] One issue is that some properties that coincidents do share (e.g., determinable properties) cannot vary in the distribution of essentiality and accidentally over them independently of the variation across other properties (e.g., maximally determinate properties) – see Bennett 2004: 357-8 and Leslie 2011: 279. And there are other complicated cases, such as Fairchild's (2019) "bad eggs" cases. See Fairchild's paper for an attempt to provide a stable and principled formulation of plenitude.

[4] Strictly speaking, another live view here is that neither the Statue of Liberty nor the *lump* of clay exist, say because only mereological simples exist (and neither of these is such), as per mereological nihilism (as in Rosen and Dorr 2002 and Sider 2013). However, the dialectic around material plenitude is not – not immediately, at any rate – restricted to composites, and a plenitudinist could very well hold that there is a great multitude of coincident mereological simples in every region occupied by one. So nihilism is not directly pertinent to the dialectic (unless one is a plenitudinist only about composites), and is relevant here only because of a distracting feature of the example (i.e., the fact that the Statue of Liberty is a composite).

[5] The basic story is this. If there is only one object in *L*, and assuming for simplicity that the Statue of Liberty and the lump of copper coincide perfectly not just in space but also in time (see Footnote 1), then there are three possibilities. One is that the Statue of Liberty does not exist, and only the relevant lump of copper exists in *L*; but this is too eliminativist. A second possibility is that it is the lump of copper that does not exist in *L*, which seems plainly false. The third possibility is that the Statue of Liberty and the lump of copper are *contingently* identical. On this view, although there is a possible world where the Statue of Liberty goes out of existence but the lump of copper does not, all this shows is that in *that* world the Statue of Liberty is not identical to the lump of copper; but in *our* world they are identical. However, this idea, of contingent identity, is notoriously paradoxical: if Phosphorus is Hesperus, we can see how there could be a world where the description "the evening star" did not apply to anything even though the description "the morning star" did, but it is harder to make sense of there being a world where Phosphorus exists but Hesperus does not. After all, if they are in fact identical then for Hesperus to exist *just is* for Phosphorus to exist. The only way the Statue of Liberty and the copper lump could be identical, then, is if objects had their identity and persistence conditions only relative to a description, but this makes the existence of objects unacceptably language-dependent and entrains a variety of technical problems (see Fine 2003).

[6] To say that we do not know of such restrictions in Aristotle is not to say that there should not *be* some restrictions. Unless Aristotle can somehow distance his accidental *forms* from what we call accidental properties, placing no restriction the formation of accidental unities will lead Aristotle into trouble in cases of the kind Fairchild (2019) calls "bad eggs," such as the property of being Joe's single favorite object or the property of being an *x* that is identical to Aristotle and sitting. Socrates is contingently Joe's single favorite object, but there could not be a *distinct* object that is *essentially* Joe's single favorite object, for then there would be two objects each of which is Joe's *single* favorite. This shows that the property of being Joe's single favorite object must be excluded from the domain of properties on which plenitude operates (see Fairchild 2019 for discussion). Aristotle does not discuss his "accidental unities" at this level of granularity, though.

[7] Brentano himself did not identify as a nominalist, but this is because he was working with the Medieval understanding of "nominalism" as the rejection of *three* kinds of universals: not only Plato-style *ante rem* universals and Aristotle-style *in re* universals (both of which Brentano did reject) but also Boethius-style *post rem* universals, that is, universal *concepts* that apply simultaneously to different particulars (with this Brentano had no problem).

[8] Somewhat oddly, Brentano calls objects such as seated-Socrates and wise-Socrates "accidents." Evidently, he wishes to preserve the substance/accident terminology, albeit transformed: within his nominalistic framework, accidents are not properties, but objects. Accordingly, "accident and substance are things in the same sense" (Brentano 1933: 48).

[9] The supplementation axiom is the idea that if *x* is a proper part of *y* then there must be a *z* such that (i) *z* is a proper part of *y* and (ii) *z* does not overlap *x* (read: if a part is a *proper* part it must be supplemented by *another* proper part).

[10] We may therefore distinguish three kinds of D-egalitarian plenums: a *loose* D-egalitarian plenum is one where every pair of coincidents are mutually independent; a *dense* D-egalitarian plenum is one where every pair of coincidents are bilaterally dependent; a *mixed* D-egalitarian plenum is one where some pairs are mutually independent and some are bilaterally dependent.

[11] More precisely, Schaffer notes that on one conception elite properties (i) ensure that objects instantiating them will resemble and (ii) are causally efficacious. But the resemblance-making role of elite properties will have no analogue for us in the case of material *objects* and (ii) assuming nomic subsumption causal efficacy implies figuring in laws.

[12] It should be noted, at the same time, that Hawthorne allows that "what counts as junk from then purview of dynamics might not count as junk from some other perspective" (2006b: 111). So his quality/junk distinction is not *immediately* intended to assign *ontological* privilege. Still, it may plausibly *lead* to ontological privilege when coupled with certain assumptions about the connection between physical laws and ontological elite status.

[13] It remains something of a mystery to me why contemporary metaphysicians have been so amenable to eliteness-within-plenitude for properties but not for objects.

[14] For comments on a previous draft, I would like to thank two anonymous referees for *Philosophical Studies*.