The Open Universe and The Fallacy of Absoluteness.

A conceptual error has permeated thought since the beginning of most modern cultures and persists until the present era. It has led to many subordinate but important fallacies, and I name it: the fallacy of the absolute. The fallacy has implications for most areas of philosophical thought, such as: existence, class theory, identity, necessity, philosophy of science, language, religion –to name only a few. In the following essay, I shall address some of these in the light of this recognition.

Commencing with class-theory, we should realise that when the latter is studied symbolically, it has a metaphysical basis-but we are apt to forget this. The central operator, Membership, is often seen as a primitive, two-place predicate; so let us treat it as such and see what emerges.If membership were a property , anything with it could belong to or be a member of any class whatsoever. The class of flowers is as much a class as any other class; but if anything had the property of class-membership, say a star, which is a member of the class of stars , then it could be a member of the class of flowers, which would render it a flower: an absurd proposition. For the criterion of class-membership would simply be to possess the property of membership, because a class-member is as much a member as any other. Therefore, the distinction between specific classes is destroyed, meaning that membership is unspecific. It lacks a determination, a property or a ‘ nature’. Indeed, if class-membership were the requirement for membership of a class, then even the null-class would not be exempt , and the distinction between members, being absent, would allow one to be a member of that class. Because class-specificity would vanish, there would be no distinction between the null-class and the others.

Since members have no ‘ nature’, no determination, a class cannot be formed out of them, and a member is a non-member. It encompasses its own negation. Because there is no class of members, membership is an invalid concept. It creates chaos if seen as a property, and if it is not a property, it is not membership, it is its negation. This is a reductio ad absurdum of the concept of membership, and if members lack a characterization, they cannot be a member of even the universe-class, so cannot be concepts or things.  
 Insofar as something is determinate and specific, it cannot be a member; and if anything is a member, it cannot be specific. This entails that it is not a predicate, two-place or otherwise. It cannot be a relation: that would allow it to have specificity.  
 It is a misconception; it is meaningless and unreal. It produces contradictions where this is not recognised.  
 Ask the orthodox logician what property something has that is called a ‘class-member’. He will want to know what property it has; and that demonstrates that he does not regard membership as a property. Membership evades specificity and has to be transcended in order to attain class- or object-determination.  
 The fact that membership contains its own negation is the essence and origin of contradiction, for it is the widest and emptiest of ‘concepts’.  
 Pure membership is absolute membership and is the first instance of the fallacy of the absolute I shall illustrate in this essay.

The same thing can be said of existence, and this leads us into the assimilation of existence with membership, which is the logico-metaphysical arm of my essay. But before engaging further in these disquisitions, I must note that since members have no determination, no nature, they are utterly distinct, for only in virtue of a nature could they be connected, related, or linked. The members of a class, if thought to have a specific determination, could be related or connected by that nature; so classes seen as a collection of elements, one, with no specificity and two, with a specific nature, would contain a contradiction at its heart. So, the class as collection is an impossible conception. It would consist of items that were both utterly apart and, on the other hand, connected. Such collections are invalid.

Let us turn to the identity of existence and membership. If we can determine this, then everything detrimental to membership is also detrimental to existence. Not only that it is absurd and invalid, but meaningless, leading to paradox and contradiction when employed; and inapplicable at any level, whether it is said of a thing or a predicate.  
 In class-theory, we affirm of the class of non-existent objects that it is ‘empty’, which is to say ‘memberless’. Therefore, to deduce that something exists, we say that its class is ‘not-memberless’. So, membership expresses existence. To say that the yeti does not exist, we allow that the class of abominable snowmen is empty, memberless. To affirm that the yeti exists, we say that its class is not-memberless. By this example, we demonstrate how existence is rendered by membership.  
 The memberless class contains as its defining idea: ‘not-something’. Thus the class containing members has the general idea of ‘some’ thing. So membership expresses the existential quantifier.  
 Some say that asserting something as existent is a way of saying that some predicate is ‘satisfied’. And obviously the synonyms for ‘exists’, namely ‘is satisfied’, said of a predicate, or ‘is instantiated’, said of a concept, equate to ‘is a member’. Existence is not a predicate of a predicate, or a predicate of a thing. Concepts are not instantiated; predicates are not ‘satisfied’. Instantiation and satisfaction are pseudo-relations, not second-order predicates, for they are membership.  
 For something to ‘fall under’ a concept, means for a concept to be instantiated. For nothing to ‘fall under’ a concept, means for that concept not to be instantiated. Both these locutions mean for something to ‘exist’ or for something ‘not-to-exist’, for something to be a member or for something not to be a member. The formulae ‘something’ and ‘nothing’ should not mean ‘there is’ or ‘there is not’ but should be neutral between an existential and non-existential way of thinking; for that they are existential requires one to force upon me a metaphysic I dispute: the existential one.

Again, asserting predication entails presupposing or presuming existence. But asserting determinate membership is also predication and presumes simple or pure membership in general. So, membership and existence identify.  
 Returning to the earlier paragraph, instantiation is membership seen from the concept’s point-of-view, whilst membership is instantiation seen from the object’s point-of-view.  
 To resume, ‘membership’ and ‘is’ both lack a characterization or ‘nature’ and for this reason when used on their own after the subject of a sentence they fail to be predicative. But otherwise, both have a copulative function.  
 As I said, if membership is the widest and emptiest concept then the same can be said of existence. Ontologists have often said that pure existence is nothing; and we see why if it is membership. Members have no ‘nature’ , so do not belong to any class and thus are not members of anything; so, they are nothing.  
 But maybe most paradoxically, existence and reality cannot identify. For we would think that existence makes something ‘real’, and if real, things could be relatively real to each other. They would impinge upon or affect one another. But since existence lacks a specific character or nature, this implies a lack of connection or relation to other existing things. Therefore, existence results in a reductio ad absurdum of itself, and cannot be the origin of reality in the world. Something else must be.  
 Of course, both existence and nothing are absolutes, and thus examples of the fallacy of absoluteness. In my thesis: The End of Existence: Membership and Metaphysics, I reject the concept of existence and equate it ‘membership’, both being susceptible to what I call, the Existential Fallacy, and the logical basis of it, The Membership Fallacy. The two concepts of existence and membership lack a ‘nature’, a character or determination; and this implies that, especially in the case of membership, they cannot ‘attain’ themselves, be predicates or be self-predicated.   
 Since both membership and existence are the same, with membership the wider concept, and lack a nature, they are identical to their ‘negations’. They lead to them and encompass them because non-existence and non-membership also lack natures. Only in virtue of their possessing a nature could they be distinct from each other. This is the essence of contradiction: the cause and origin of it.  
 The universe should not be seen as a collection of atomic individuals as a result of the invalidity of the notion of ‘collection’, therefore.  
 Because membership and non-membership or existence and non-existence are invalid, the postulates of arithmetic, which require the concept of nothing, or non-membership, are invalid as well at bottom. In addition, the possibility of the class-as-collection is not possible, and this is also requisite for the postulates of Dedekind and Peano, and the number logic of Russell.  
 Numbers appear to be based on the concepts of existence and nothing, these last being no different, as I said. The concept of nothing, especially as it applies to mathematics, emerged from the East, and was adopted into Western quantitative arithmetic later on. Because of the foregoing, pure numbers are in the end invalid. Russell called them ‘logical fictions’; he was right, but not as completely as he hypothesized. His number series is a house of cards built on the sands of nothing.  
 Pure numbers have been thought to be based on the concept of membership, which, as I have said, is fallacious. So pure numbers and the associated arithmetic, are basically invalid. Though they may be in a limited way applicable to the universe, sooner or later the quantitative mathematics breaks down into inconsistencies. That is, if we apply them too strictly.  
 Proof is something introduced into Western thought through mathematics, which was the paradigm of reason and necessity. But this kind of modality is abstract, metaphysical, and unreal, as may be said of pure mathematics, thus not exactly applicable to the world.  
 Analytic and rationalist philosophy, though it has to be metaphysical and abstract, has to recognise its incompleteness as a result. This does mean though that we adopt the opposite of rationalist philosophy, but we recognise the lack of applicability of absolute and abstract necessity, or of absolute lack of necessity in the world. This is a situation we arrive at through that very seemingly absolute and abstract necessity, which we see is insufficient in itself.

The deduction that collections are not possible implies that both pluralism and monism are to be rejected, as being two sides of the single atomic and collectivist coin.  
 Logical Positivists asserted the meaninglessness of metaphysics on the proposition that universal statements could not be enumerated. For them, the universal quantifier, expressed by the locution ‘all’, was essentially numerical. ‘Some’ which was thought to be an expression of the existential quantifier, again was numerical. But neither of these quantifiers can be so expressed. Both are seen to be in the end as collections.  
 In the fourth chapter of my book, The End of Existence, I designate worldly things as being both particular and non-particular, with neither being separable in the worldly item. This apparent tension is resolved when, at the end of the fifth chapter, I see objects as being finally relative, or a matter of relativity. Non-particularity is a matter of how everything in the universe is contextual, with, as I put it, the nature of the universe not being generated from the thing ‘upward’, but the nature of the thing being generated from the universe ‘downwards’. So, things are non-particular: and each object contains a universal dimension.  
 Likewise, since no object has exactly the same relation as anything else in the world, each item is unique and particular. The nature of each thing is caused by the relativity that is the universe. So particularity and non-particularity are aspects or dimensions of relativity. The latter lies at the bottom of both.  
 Particularity and non-particularity capture more exactly than do the quantifiers the universal’s and the singular’s effects.  
 ‘Existence’ is a metaphysical paradigm and the ‘End of Existence’ is a metaphysical paradigm shift. The theories of Forms, Universals and Classes suffer from the mischaracterisation of abstraction as a ‘one-over-many’. Also they are iterations of the fallacy of absoluteness.  
 All through the thesis, The End of Existence, I conclude that relativity requires that nothing be absolutely asserted or negated. Absolute assertion and absolute negation pertain to existence and non-existence, when we contemplate the world. I hold that relativity pervades change, identity, persistence, and I may also add, necessity. Relativity pertains to reality, which is not the same as existence, as I have earlier argued. Therefore, necessity too, cannot be absolutely asserted or negated in the world. There is modified necessity and modified freedom. Each modifies the other. This means that all we can allow is the most possible. Quantum mechanics postulates probability and this mirrors the modification of necessity by freedom and freedom by necessity. Here we see a possible indication of a basis for non-absolutism,that is, through relativity.  
 The point that this reality, which is a relativity, replaces to a large extent absolute necessity, means that the world is not a machine, but an organism, for it is free but necessary. This implies purpose, will, direction, life, spontaneity. The universe is a living thing; my doctrine is pan-animist.  
 Things that live should not be seen as alien grafts onto a dead, mechanical, clockwork environment, but as outcomes of a system which is also living, purposeful, directed; these features are the result of the limited freedom and limited necessity in the world.  
 Descartes drew a distinction between matter, which was primarily extended, dealt with by the mathematics of geometry, and mind or consciousness, which was non-geometrical, non-extended. As philosophy developed even down to the present day there seemed to be an opposition, a mismatch between the two.  
 But with both seen as an expression of life, of organism, in and of the universe, with the world being also alive, it is no longer a mystery that the phenomena co-habit. The universe and the consciousness it maintains and exhibits are one and the same, or at least, very alike, and not alien to each other. The world is neither dead nor is it chaotic.  
 The future is open; the universe is open. There is no total determinism, but there is direction.All this is because necessity, and its negation, are not absolute with the real world, but limited. Only an incomplete, abstract, metaphysical imposition on the world results in absolute necessity or freedom.  
 Because of the impossibility of ‘collections’, atomic elements coupled with connected elements, that was originally seen because of the membership fallacy, we know that this conception cannot be applied to the physical universe, where existence, membership, initially required that things be both atoms and relationships. The universe without membership, in the form of existence, must consist of things that are physically particular– but not utterly separate– and physically non-particular. This implies the connectivity of physical things, and as a result, the sensitivity of physical things to each other. They have a particular sensitivity– a sensitivity that no other thing in the universe has because no two things have the same relation in the world– and a non-particular sensitivity– an outcome of the general lack of utter atomic separation that applies to all the items in the world. Things are particularly sensitive to every other thing and generally sensitive to everything. This sensitivity is the origin of ‘consciousness’, especially the particular consciousness things have: the ‘what-it-is-like-to-be-X’.  
 Things are free in a limited way and determined in a limited way: that is the reason for their organic nature as a whole: their aliveness. This is pan-animism; it includes levels and an element of consciousness in every universal item, consistent with their levels of complexity and development.  
 Purposefulness in the universe is endowed by mitigated necessity through time. Spontaneity by freedom but not complete chaos and accident.  
 Freedom seems to be an outcome of the innate complexity of all the individual items in the universe: each thing has a relationship no other thing possesses. Things are also necessary for the reason that there is a general, non-particular connectivity for all the items in the world. This means each thing is originated in its nature by the communality, the relativity in general, of the environment to the individual. Thus, the nature of the world is not generated from the individual ‘upwards’; the nature of the thing is generated from the universe ‘downwards’. This complexity and physical relativity, cohabiting as they do simultaneously, seems to originate freedom and necessity: both impinging upon and affecting, thus limiting, the other.  
 Reality as well as being a matter of transcendent relativity, penetrating to the complex and general levels of the universe, is at the bottom of physicality. It explains and implies sensitivity; and is the origin of the qualitative nature of both the world and the individual constituent of that world. This individual qualitative nature, which is a special kind of sensitivity, a physical sensitivity, creates an individual ‘consciousness’ that each thing has of the world it inhabits and has a special place within. This, I infer, as I have previously intimated, is the ‘what-it-is-like-to-be-X’.  
 We must not think that particular sensitivity confronts the universe alone; it is inextricably mingled with overall connectivity, sensitivity or sensibility the universe has. This is a consciousness which the universe and each individual unit has: in the first case, a self-consciousness, for there is nothing else but the universe to be conscious of except itself internally; and in the second, the primitive, or limited consciousness each item has of the world around it. We are part of self consciousness maybe; and we also exhibit our own particular forms of sensitivity or consciousness.  
 Every part of the world is never in isolation from all other parts, so things are never isolated but world centred. Everything has a communal, non-anarchic, universal dimension as a consequence. This is the origin of physical necessity, that is, the transcendental universality of each part of the world. But it is mitigated by the world’s limited complexity: the complexity limited by universality. The world is shot through by universal law or communality. So is each thing.  
 The necessity in the world is not absolute because it is influenced by complexity, which endows an amount of freedom; the freedom in the world is limited by necessity, resulting from non-particularity, universality, the non-anarchic nature of the world, and its communality. The latter results in the innate self-ordering of the universe.  
 Necessity cannot be the necessity to exist any longer, for we have rejected existence in application to the world. It must now be the need to be how-one-is, or the necessity to be one’s nature, which all relativities conform to. But the complexity of the world imposes itself detrimentally on the universal necessity that pervades the world, thus diminishing that necessity, though not in a decisive way, only in a modified way.  
 I said that relativity is necessity; and relativity translates into ‘nature’, for it endows form, determination, variety. ‘Nature’ is also necessity, for it requires that the necessity to be one’s nature means that if one has a certain determination, one cannot but be that determination. For instance, a circle cannot be otherwise, say a triangle; likewise a nature, a relativity, cannot be other than it is: so it is necessary.  
 It is not mysterious when I say that necessity and its negation are not absolute. They are not absolute because they modify or impose their characteristics on each other. But they only do so in a limited manner. Each limits the other, defeating the absoluteness of themselves.  
 From the above considerations I derive the openness of the universe: its purposefulness and its spontaneity.  
 So there seems to be two sources of physical necessity: the universal, communal, non-anarchic dimension that pertains to every part of the world; and the necessity to be one’s nature, which replaces the necessity to exist. But since the nature of everything is an expression of, and outcome of, relativity, relativity lies at the bottom of necessity in the end: it is its source. And really necessity pervades finally every part of the world, and is more fundamental than its apparent negation. The complexity of the world is not at the bottom of physicality, for things are in the end related physically. And each thing has a determinate nature: the final source of necessity in the non-existential world.  
 In the history of philosophy, the fallacy of the absolute is all-pervasive. For example, the Cartesian hyperbolic or global doubt– coming from an urge for totally indubitable knowledge– led to complete scepticism, as we can see is only to be expected. On the contrary, we must reject absolutism in all its forms. And we must recognise the incompleteness of academic philosophy.

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