

Not in DMA's file

Armstrong

28 October 1994

Dear David,

The once-frequent train service to Lancaster has declined to such an extent that I can't get to either of Kim's talks on Thursday 1 December without cutting my 9 am class! So I'll be arriving on Friday after all.

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Thank you for your paper honouring Donald Williams. I much enjoyed it. (May I make a copy for Mark Johnston, please?) Two comments.

First, concerning the star of Quine in the ascendant (page 1). I don't see Quine as part of a climate altogether hostile to systematic metaphysics. In fact, I see Quine as himself being, among other things, a systematic metaphysician -- with a system in some respects allied, in some respects opposed, to Williams'. This goes better for 1953 than for later: I'm thinking, above all, of the Quine of some of the less-known papers in From a Logical Point of View, and not of the Quine of the parts of Word and Object that argue for indeterminacy of translation and inscrutability of reference. When I took and failed my metaphysics exam as a Harvard graduate student in 1963, it was mostly Quine I'd studied in preparation. Certainly that was too narrow a plan of study. But I don't think I was studying the wrong subject altogether!

Second, concerning trope theories and states of affairs (page 11). You'll remember that years ago I passed on to you Mark Johnston's good question: what's the difference between a non-transferable trope and a state of affairs? Suppose we believe in both. If a is F we have the non-transferrable F-ness of a and we have the state of affairs of a's being F. Both exist contingently; both depend for their existence on whether a is F; both are located just where and when a is; both are particulars. So at least they have that much in common. You might say: the difference is that the trope is a constituent of a, whereas a is a constituent of the state of affairs. In other words: the trope is less inclusive than a, the state of affairs is more inclusive. But the trope is a mereological constituent of a, whereas a is an unmereological constituent of the state of affairs. It's two different kinds of inclusiveness, two different kinds of constituency. So maybe these two different constituency relations run in opposite directions between the same two things. At the time, you found the question puzzling: who would ever think a trope was anything like a state of affairs? But now it seems that the doctrine of supervenient free lunches, has brought you around, or much of the way around. 'The states of affairs...may be plausibly argued to be ontologically nothing over and above the [non-transferable] tropes.'