NON-ARBITRARINESS OF COMPOSITION
AND PARTICULARISM

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Summary

Non Arbitrariness Of Composition delivers a general and principled answer to the Special Composition Question. Horgan also embraces the extension of particularism into the domain of ontology. But particularism as meta-ontological guideline denies applicability of any general principles. So Horgan’s overall meta-ontological project both invites and rejects generality. The resulting tension may be aufgehoben however if the distinction is made between ontological commitments and their accompanying principles at the levels of ultimate and regional ontology.

Introduction

When do several entities compose another entity? Special Composition Question (SCQ) as basic ontological and mereological quest invites two kinds of answers. Either we assume correctness of common sense, or we go for some principled answer that may be incompatible with it. But there are doubts as to the ontological viability of common sense posits. So a principled answer to SCQ seems preferable. The Non Arbitrariness Of Composition (NAOC) delivers a guide here, being a kind of meta-ontological principle that urges you not to posit a multiplicity of independently existing and individually unexplainable facts. NAOC requires generality and systematicity as the basis of ontology.

Horgan argues in favor of NAOC as a sound meta-ontological principle. NAOC delivers a general and principled answer to the SCQ. This answer is opposed to acknowledging the existence of a
plethora of independent compositional facts.

On the other hand, Horgan lately endorsed particularism, a meta-ethical principle that denies any crucial role to generality in matters moral. He also would embrace the extension of particularism into the domain of ontology. If this is accomplished, then particularism offers a meta-ontological guideline which denies applicability of any general principles in the area of ontology. This invites a picture containing multiplicity of sui generis compositional facts.

If all of this is true, then Horgan’s overall meta-ontological project is in trouble. For it leads into contradiction by both inviting and rejecting generality as its guiding principle. The view seems to deconstruct itself.

However, the tension between accepting and rejecting generality may be aufgehoben, i.e. both rejected and preserved at the qualitatively higher level, if the distinction is made between ontological commitments and their accompanying principles at the levels of ultimate and regional ontology. Whereas NAOC proposes a sound requirement of generality for the case of ultimate ontology, this same requirement would not come through in the area of regional ontology. Regional ontology does not aspire towards the ultimate truth, for it is a product of what is posited by language and thought. Particularism with its rejection of generality is an appropriate meta-ontological principle for the regional ontology.

1. Non Arbitrariness Of Composition (NAOC)

a. How does NAOC come about?

Special composition question and the answers that it implies are reconstructed according to Horgan’s (1993) guidelines, building on work of Peter van Inwagen (1990). Desiderata of a theory delivering an answer to the special composition question are then surveyed. The requirement for a theory to respect a systematic answer is found to dominate compatibility with posits of common sense. This is brought into discussion by the principle of the Non Arbitrariness Of Composition (NAOC).