

On the Dualism of Larryian Ontological Essences

Council of Upper Red Hook

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This document reports on the discussions concerning Larryian ontology hitherto the 2017 Council of Upper Red Hook.

1 The Words of Prophet Larry

The beloved children's show, *Veggie Tales*, features a cast of vegetable characters who deliver wisdom via parables and dialogue. However, one of the most memorable methods of truth delivery comes via the segment known as *Silly Songs with Larry*. In one particular song, Larry the Cucumber proclaims an answer to a deep metaphysical question: what *is* there? Larry was accompanied by Bob the Tomato in this historical episode. The following, are two notable excerpts from the song. The first is the chorus which holds the main thrust of the thesis while the second provides some examples but also warrant supporting the thesis.

Larry:

If it doesn't have a tail, it's not a monkey
Even if it has a monkey kinda shape.
If it doesn't have a tail, it's not a monkey.
If it doesn't have a tail
It's not a monkey, it's an ape!
If it doesn't have a tail, it's not a monkey.
⋮

Larry:

If it's a nickel or a salad or a pillow
If it doesn't have a tail
It's not a monkey, it's an ape!

Bob: ... I think there's something wrong with your logic, Larry...

Larry:

Well Bob, the lady at the zoo said it, and who am I to tell her that she's wrong? If there's a tail, it's a monkey. No tail; ape. It's easy!

Bob: But Larry... a kite has a tail!

Larry: Then it's a monkey.

Bob: A comet has a tail!

Larry: It's a monkey.

Bob: A bubble doesn't have a...

Larry:

Then it's not a monkey,
If it doesn't have a tail
It's not a monkey...

Bob: It's an ape?
Larry: Exactly! I knew you'd catch on!

A word of caution: Since the song was delivered in vocal form, the text above should not be treated as primary text. The reader is encouraged to examine the original source.

2 Dualism of Ontological Essences

In this section, we present our main thesis which is an interpretation of the words of Larry: *If the words of Larry are authoritative, then there are exactly two ontological essences: monkey and ape.*

Note well that we do not claim that there are exactly two ontological essences. We make the slightly weaker claim that *if* the antecedent holds, then the consequent must follow.

2.1 Equivalence of Having a Tail and Being a Monkey

The following two lines are excerpts from above:

“If it doesn't have a tail, it's not a monkey.”

⋮

”If there's a tail, it's a monkey.”

Here, Larry is predicating that if x does not have a tail, then x is not a monkey. Furthermore, if x has a tail, then x is a monkey. In symbols, letting

$$Tx = x \text{ has a tail}$$
$$Mx = x \text{ is a monkey}$$

1. $(\neg Tx \supset \neg Mx) \equiv (Mx \supset Tx)$ (contrapositive).
2. $Tx \supset Mx$.
3. Therefore, $Tx \equiv Mx$.
4. We may then deduce further that $\forall x Tx \equiv Mx$.

2.2 On Being an Ape

Next, consider the line: “If it doesn't have a tail, it's not a monkey, it's an ape!” Let $Ax = x$ is an ape.

The line may be interpreted as one statement: $\neg Tx \supset \neg Mx \supset Ax$. In this case, we have a hypothetical syllogism and thus, conclude $\neg Tx \supset Ax$. In English, “if x doesn't have a tail, then x is an ape.

However, the question remains whether the implication runs the other direction. Could it be that if x is an ape, then x doesn't have a tail? *Prima facie*, if x is an ape, it might have a tail. In this case, monkeys are merely special cases of ape which means there is only one ontology. We demonstrate now that monkey and ape are mutually exclusive. The statement $\neg Tx \supset Ax \equiv \neg Ax \supset Tx$: if x is not an ape, then it has a tail. Since we demonstrated above that having a tail and being a monkey are equivalent, then x is an example of a monkey which

is not an ape. Therefore, monkey and ape are mutually exclusive. Therefore, there must be at least two ontologies: at least monkey and ape.

One may also interpret the line as two propositions. First, “if it doesn’t have a tail, it’s not a monkey.” Second, “if it doesn’t have a tail, it’s an ape.” The second statement is analyzed above and the same results appear.

We believe these arguments are valid. We will see later that there are many implications which are very strange and may even lead us to reject these arguments. We believe that if one wants to do some rejecting, it is the premise, not the logical structure, which must be rejected.

2.3 What *is* there? vs. How do we identify?

In the second excerpt from Section 1, Larry says that “If it’s a nickel or a salad or a pillow, if it doesn’t have a tail, it’s not a monkey, it’s an ape!” In the United States and also many other places, it is common to say that a nickel has a heads and a tails. Of course, one may say that this is merely figurative convention. However, perhaps, according to Larry, a nickel is a monkey because it has a tail. The line opens this up as a possibility for there are two provisions required. First, we need to check if x is a nickel, salad, or pillow. Then we need to check whether it has a tail. Thus, a nickel may be a monkey while salads and pillows are apes. Other examples of monkeys are kites and comets. Bubbles are apes.

The above example of the nickel lends itself to this important distinction. We are concerned with the metaphysical question of what there *is*. Present us with an object and we cannot always tell you whether it is a monkey or an ape (we will presently rule out any sort of polychotomy beyond two). However, everything hinges on whether a thing has a tail. If we had an infallible tail-possessor detector (which in itself, is a monkey or ape), then we could identify the object. Until then, we only say, “it is either a monkey or an ape.”

3 Defeating Trichotomism and n -chotomism, $n \geq 3$

It is quite clear that Larry the Prophet posits *two* ontological essences from our analysis above. However, there is a heresy which posits three ontological essences: monkeys, apes, and tails. The concern is that since tails have a prominent role in whether a thing is a monkey or an ape, then a tail should be essential.

We do not contest that a tail is essential. However, that does not make “tails” an essential *category*. It is the “having a tail” which is essential. This is a predicate, not an object. This is akin to the way that it is essential that a bachelor be unmarried does not make “unmarried” an ontological essence. Thus, suppose a tail is a monkey. Then, for something to be a monkey, it must have a particular type of monkey, namely a tail.

Therefore, a tail in isolation must be a monkey or an ape. There are only two choices: a tail can have a tail or it can’t. It seems plausible that a tail can have itself and is thus a monkey. However, this is not answered by Larry. On the other hand, that is not part of our thesis and need not worry us.

4 Potential Concerns with Dualism

We address some concerns which are raised from the question of whether tails are also an essence. Below are some objections.

1. It seems that a monkey can lose its monkey nature by losing its tail. Thus, losing a tail fundamentally changes ontology which is no small feat.

2. However, it doesn't seem like a tail should be able to lose itself. It may be annihilated but short of being destroyed, it doesn't seem to make sense that a tail can be essentially separated from itself. Thus, monkeys have a property that tails do not have: the property of losing monkey nature. This suggests that perhaps tails are apes but apes too can become monkeys by gaining tails (it need not concern us how; it is logically possible). But should we say that a tail can gain a tail? It already is a tail so it doesn't seem like it should be an ape either.
3. Suppose a tail is a monkey. Then a monkey must have a particular type of monkey nature, namely a tail. This seems recursive. A similar case can be made if tails are apes.
4. If a monkey loses its tail, then from one ontological essence, namely a monkey, comes a tail and an ape. Whether or not the tail is a monkey or an ape, we have one essence producing another. Furthermore, it seems like we're saying that x being a monkey is comprised of a tail and an ape. Thus, a monkey, being comprised of ape seems to violate the mutual exclusivity of monkey and ape.

As a first response to these objections, we say this: when treating Larry's words as authoritatively true, we must then discard contrary metaphysics which lies external to the primary text. What everyday instinct tells us is at most, phenomenal and does not necessarily penetrate into the fundamental features of reality. Thus, these concerns are immaterial to our thesis which does not outright claim an ontology, only that Larry, if taken as an authoritative emissary representing the Lady at the Zoo, must be right. In fact, all other concerns, such as epistemological or ethical concerns are also irrelevant. A metaphysical proposition, if true, stands true regardless of its implications or whether we like the implications.

The author will, at this point, concede however that these concerns may suggest that Larry is not authoritative. It is of course also possible that we have not deduced his meaning correctly.

5 Responses

Now, for detailed, unordered responses.

- The third objection can at least resolve an infinite regress if we allow that tails can have themselves. In that case, a tail is a monkey which has itself as a tail. A single layer of recursion seems unsatisfying still but this dissatisfaction is more of a semantical dissatisfaction. The metaphysics may hold despite our confusion. At worst, this is a metaphysical mystery concerning the implications of dualism but does not refute it. But perhaps, an answer hinges on how the first objection is resolved.
- With respect to the first objection, if there is no particularly pressing reason why the property "able to lose monkey (ape) nature" should be an essential property, then the concern is allayed immediately. If it is an essential property, then it must be the case that tails can lose themselves and become apes. We will consider this possibility later when we consider an alternative dichotomy of tail and no-tail. The objection also expresses discomfort with the idea that these supposedly *essential* properties can be lost. How can an essential property be lost? We can only give an analogy. It is essential that a living creature be living. But upon death, something has changed fundamentally on the biological level and many other levels at that. Changes on the fundamental ontological level are mysterious but are logically possible. It is a doctrine of Christianity that the second person of the Trinity *became* flesh and dwelt among us. This appears as a fundamental change in being, within time. This example also shows that what we posit here is not that novel of an idea.

- As for the fourth objection, this is put to rest when we see that a monkey is not really comprised of a tail and an ape. As Aristotle would say, having the potential to become an ape is different from *actually already being* an ape or having a constituent which is an ape. In fact, it may be that a monkey doesn't even have a tail as one of its parts, only that it has a tail. For instance, we wouldn't say that the car Smith owns is a part of him, yet we do say that Smith has a car.
- One might follow up and say something quasi-Kantian: "How can we predicate the property of having a tail to a monkey without having a monkey first? Is it not akin to needing a sandwich before one can describe it as grilled?" This is a fallacious introduction of temporal concepts which do not belong and also a confusion between essential and accidental properties. We would not say that first, we need to have a bachelor, before we say he is unmarried. He was unmarried all along by analyticity.

6 Defeating Monism

From the analysis above, we have shown that monism is not viable simply because monkeys and apes are mutually exclusive. There is however, a heresy known as *Cauda Sua* which posits that there are only tails. The reasoning is again that everything seems to hinge on tails so it ought to be an essential category. This is mistakenly viewing essential property as coinciding with essential category as we discussed earlier. However, this does raise a question about tails.

Forgetting our previous discussion, if some tails have themselves while others do not, then perhaps *cauda sua* is more plausible. For perhaps monkeys are just tails which have themselves and apes are tails which don't have themselves. Of course, when we remember the arguments for dualism, any monism is ruled out. But this does lead to an interesting thought about tails.

7 An Alternative Dichotomy: *Cauda quoque Non Cauda*

As the formidable metaphysician David Lewis once suggested, perhaps a non-thing, can be considered as a thing. We do not mean Pegasus' or round squares. We mean something like this. We refer to "holes" as things even though they are by definition, a lack of something. We say, "Stanley Yelnats dug himself into a hole" or "There's a hole in the bucket, dear Liza" as if holes have ontological status. We do not mean that there are air molecules where there should have been dirt or bucket. Thus, Lewis argued that holes deserve ontological status. Suppose then that the privation of a tail is granted ontological status. We define this essence as no-tail. Then, there are two essences: tail and no-tail. Is this tenable?

It seems that this discussion hinges on the following question: Can a thing have itself? Let us suppose so: a thing can have itself and possibly, cease to have itself. From earlier, anything that has a tail is a monkey. It follows that if a tail has *itself*, then it is a monkey. Could it possibly be that monkeys are equivalent to tails? Our earlier analysis was that *having a tail* is equivalent to being a monkey. If tails and monkeys are equivalent, then it seems to follow firstly that *having* a tail and *being* a tail are the same property. Secondly, it's likely that no-tails are equivalent to apes.

In this case, perhaps tails and no-tails as a dichotomy is isomorphic to a dichotomy of monkeys and apes. What we mean is this: whether we use the vocabulary of monkeys/apes or tails/no-tails, the structure of the ontological essences is the same. Monkeys and apes are mutually exclusive but can transform into each other while tails and no-tails are mutually exclusive but can transform into each other via tails (again there is an innate circularity which puzzles us but if Larry's words are authoritative, then this implication has less relevance).

However, it does appear that the set of all tails is a proper subset of monkeys ($T \subsetneq M$). For a monkey is something which has a tail but might not be a tail in itself while tails are only tails which are monkeys. If this is so, then the alternative dualist has some issues to address. The author, from a purely meta-metaphysical standpoint, prefers the original dualism as it has fewer metaphysical commitments.

8 Faith in the Lady at the Zoo

In this paper, we've presented a case for Larryian dualism before addressing contending views and objections to our own. We believe that the contending views are not true to the words of Larry and thus, in previous councils, such as the Council of Knollcrest, have deemed these views heretical. We also hinted above that if the implications of this dualism are too strange for someone, then rejection of the premise is in on the table but one cannot contend the consequent of our thesis if the antecedent is granted. Thus, it is a matter of faith whether Larry is a true prophet and delivers the message of the Lady at the Zoo. Such is the nature of metaphysics. Though metaphysicians attempt to be impartial and present innocuous premises that seem free of any prior metaphysical commitment, many in fact, already are committed to various theses. Thus, the role of faith is of no small importance.

“Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen.” — Ludwig Wittgenstein