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**Substance Among Other Categories.** Joshua Hoffman and Gary S. Rosenkrantz. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994. Pp. ix, 198. ISBN 0-521-46101-4.

The aim of this book is to provide a philosophical analysis of the category of substance. Hoffman and Rosenkrantz take commonsense or folk ontology as their starting point, although they are willing, if forced by the argument, to revise that ontology along the way. The first chapter provides, among other things, a long list of the features individual substances are intuitively supposed to have. Some of these are fairly straightforward and uncomplicated. For instance, necessarily, all substances can persist through time and, necessarily, all substances have features (p. 26). Others are both more complicated and more controversial, such as the claim that being three-dimensional applies necessarily to all material substances and is such that it applies possibly to some nonmaterial physical substances. (Examples of three-dimensional non-material physical substances are: “‘ghostly’ objects which...can interpenetrate or exhaustively coincide in space” (p. 27).)

This highlights a recurrent feature of the book. Throughout, Hoffman and Rosenkrantz explicitly identify their assumptions and the premises of their arguments. (The premises are often complicated and sometimes controversial.) And this book is almost entirely one argument after the other. All of this makes for admirable clarity and rigor. But it also means that the book is a difficult read. And I suspect that in at least some places it is more complicated and dense than is necessary to make the point.

After presenting their detailed account of what they see as the intuitive features of substances, Hoffman and Rosenkrantz examine accounts of substance offered by others. The second chapter is a critical survey of historically prominent accounts of substance, the third examines collectionist theories of substance. Among the philosophers they discuss are Aristotle and Descartes, and although they reject the specific proposals of each, they find in each a kernel of truth around which they build their own account. A substance is an independent entity.

But it is no mean task, as Hoffman and Rosenkrantz's criticisms of Aristotle and Descartes emphasize, to say just what this independence amounts to and to do so in a way that makes plausible the claim that substances are independent. It cannot be, for instance, that to be an independent entity is to be an entity whose existence does not depend on, or require, the existence of other entities. For no substance can exist without the existence of some properties.

With this and other pitfalls in mind, the authors offer us an account of independence designed to avoid counterexample and absurdity (Chapter Four). To understand their account, we must first say something about a "level C category". The most general category, according to Hoffman and Rosenkrantz, is that of entity. Entities are divided into those that are abstract and those that are concrete. And the first division of the category of concrete entities is into the categories at level C: events, times, places, substances, limits, collections, privations, and tropes. I won't say anything here about their actual definition of a level C category (pp. 17ff.), other than to note that it does not make use of the notion of a substance. (So there is no circularity in their using the idea of a level C category in defining substance.)

Armed with the notion of a level C category, Hoffman and Rosenkrantz offer two closely related analyses of the category of substance.

The first analysis is that a substance is that which is independent in the following ways (pp. 93ff):

- A. Independent-within-its-kind: An instance of category C1 on level C does not entail that there are other instances of that category other than the proper parts of the first instance.
- B. Independent of any other entity that is independent-within-its-kind: its existence does not entail the existence of any other entity that is in a non-C1 C level category that is independent-within-its-kind.

C. Finally, “if it is impossible that a level C category, C1, be instantiated by an entity having as parts entities instantiating another level C category C2, then this is a sense in which an entity of category C1 is independent of such entities of category C2” (p. 96).

The second analysis that they offer is like the first, except that clause A, being independent within its kind, is replaced with the claim that, possibly, an instance of C1 exists throughout an interval t, and it’s the only instance of C1 (pp. 124ff). They note advantages and disadvantages of each analysis as compared to the other, but don’t come down definitively in favor either. (They seem to think that both analyses of substance could be correct.)

Obviously, Hoffman and Rosenkrantz’s analyses of substance trade on claims about the levels of categories, specifically about those categories at level C. Why not spell out the notions of independence in a way that does not rely on levels of categories? For instance, why not say that an entity is independent-within-its-kind if the existence of that entity does not entail that there are other instances of the category to which that entity (and its proper parts) belongs?

The answer has to do with the fact that each entity is a member of many kinds. For instance, every person is not only a substance but also an entity. And if the relevant kind here were that of entity, no person would be independent within its kind. For if I exist, so do some properties. And those properties are kindmates of mine at the level of entity.

So which kinds are of interest here when we speak of an entity’s independence within its kind? It is the kinds at a certain level of specificity. More specific, at least, than entity. Hoffman and Rosenkrantz think the right level is level C.

It is worth noting that if Hoffman and Rosenkrantz’s analysis of substance is successful, then they have also done something else. They have shown that some real work can be done by understanding the categories in a certain sort of hierarchy, a

hierarchy which includes their level C. This might come as a surprise to readers who, like myself, are skeptical that there really is a “right” way of structuring the categories, readers who are left cold by questions like “Does the highest division of entities divide them into universals and particulars, abstracta and concreta, or necessary and contingent entities?”.

So this book can, I think, be seen as a defense of two claims: first, that there is a coherent notion of the category of substance; and secondly, that the categories themselves, including their interrelations and overall hierarchy, ought to be the objects of serious ontological investigation. The implicit defense of the second claim is that a particular framework of categories is used to defend the first claim.

Chapter Five contains a very nice defense of the coherence and possibility of non-physical substances such as souls. There are two appendices, one on the concrete/abstract distinction, and another defending continuous space and time.

So now for the Big Question. Do Hoffman and Rosenkrantz get it right? Have they given us the true and correct analysis of substance?

I don’t know. I have some minor concerns. For example, at one point in the argument they have to make a questionable claim about events, if events are not to come out, according to their first analysis, as substances. The claim is that—given that a persisting event entails the existence of some instantaneous events that are limits of the persisting event’s parts—those instantaneous events are not parts of the larger persisting event (p. 114).

But the real reason I don’t know how to answer the Big Question is simply that I don’t know how to decide whether the complicated account of the category of substance they give is correct. Hoffman and Rosenkrantz might say that I could judge that their analysis is the right one by seeing that it gets the cases right. But I don’t know what to think of all the cases they start with, such as the purported possibly three-dimensional nonmaterial physical substances mentioned above. And although I agree that people and

trees are substances if anything is, I don't think this is true of rocks. For, I am reluctant to admit, I don't believe in rocks.

Of course, Hoffman and Rosenkrantz should not be blamed if I can't recognize the truth when I read it. This should not keep them from going about their business of explaining substance and placing it within the categories. And let there be no doubt that they are very good at their business. The book is rigorous and its arguments valid. It shows a wide-ranging grasp of the literature, both current and historical. Anyone who is seriously interested in the categories and the place of substance within them must read this book, and will certainly profit from it.<sup>1</sup>

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