On Property Self-Exemplification: Rejoinder to Miller

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My defense of the divine simplicity depends crucially on the possibility of property self-exemplification. Barry Miller, though a friend of the simplicity doctrine, rejects the possibility in question. This note provides some considerations in favor of property self-exemplification as well as a response to Miller's objection.

Are there any self-exemplifying first-level properties? If there are, then some properties are both first- and second-level. According to Barry Miller, "no first-level properties at all can be self-exemplifying..."[1] If so, my attempt to make sense of the divine simplicity by construing the attributes of God as self-exemplifying properties whose self-exemplification entails their identity with an individual is mistaken.[2]

Miller's view is not merely that there are no first-level self-exemplifying properties, but that there are no self-exemplifying properties at any level. Moreover, his view is that this can be established on purely logical grounds. Here are three considerations that speak against his view.

a. The first-level property of being blue exemplifies the second-level property of being a property, and this latter property exemplifies itself: the property of being a property is itself a property.

b. The first-level property of being unextended is itself unextended, and so exemplifies itself.

c. One may prove that not every predicate picks out a property in a manner analogous to the way Russell proved that not every condition specifies a set. If every predicate picks out a property, then 'is non-self-exemplifying' picks out a property. But there is no such property P as the property of being non-self-exemplifying. For P is either self-exemplifying or it is not. If P is self-exemplifying, then P is not self-exemplifying. But if P is not self-exemplifying, then P is self-exemplifying. This is a contradiction; hence P does not exist.

This quite lucid piece of argumentation presupposes that it at least makes logical sense to say of a property that it is self-exemplifying. But if Miller is right, this does not make sense. So if Miller is right, our beautiful piece of argumentation is senseless. This indicates that Miller is wrong.

All of this suggests that the idea of self-exemplification is quite unproblematic; so any argument against it will have to be impressive indeed.

Miller approaches the issue of self-exemplification linguistically via self-predication. Let us take as our example the sentence, 'Being unextended is unextended.' Miller denies that this is an example of self-predication, and thus denies that it expresses property self-exemplification. What is the argument?

    1.   Being unextended is unextended

may be expressed, according to Miller, as

    2.   What '_____is unextended' stands for is unextended.

Now what is the logical form of (2)? Is it of the form, singular term/1st-level predicate? No, according to Miller, since 'What "_____is F" stands for' involves second-level quantification, quantification over properties. To see this, consider

    3.   Tom and Mary are what '_____is F' stands for.

To the question, And what is that? appropriate answers are 'insensitive' or 'a human being.' But one cannot further ask, 'Which human being?' or 'Which insensitive?' Hence the use of 'what "_____is F" stands for' in (3) involves second-level quantification. From this Miller concludes that (2) is of the form, 2nd-level predicate/1st-level predicable. It follows that (1) is not an example of self-predication.

This argument is less that convincing for at least two reasons.

Note first that substitution of 'a human being' into (3) yields

    3.´   Tom and Mary are what '_____is a human being' stands for.

But (3′) makes no sense as can be seen if we attach, as we ought to be able to, a 'namely' clause:

    3.″   Tom and Mary are what '_____is a human being' stands for, namely, is a human being.

To make sense of (3″), the last 'is' must be deleted; but then the same compliment would have to be paid to (3′), the result being:

    3.‴   Tom and Mary are what 'a human being' stands for.

But this wreaks havoc with Miller's claim that (3) involves second-level quantification, quantification over properties. Following Frege, Miller holds that properties are unsaturated or incomplete; as such, they can only be the referents of correspondingly incomplete expressions. 'A human being,' however, is not incomplete, and therefore cannot stand for a property.[3]

Secondly, there is no need to make the move from (1) to (2). (1) is elliptical for

1'.   The property of being unextended is unextended.

Now 'The property of being unextended' is a singular term denoting an abstract object. If so, the logical form of (1) is singular term/predicate. Is the predicate first- or second-level? That depends on how we understand 'first-level predicate.' I take Miller's view to be that first-level predicates are predicates of objects, where objects (as opposed to functions) are the referents of singular terms. On this understanding of 'first-level predicate,' the logical form of (1) is singular term/first-level predicate. My view, however, is that first-level predicates are predicates of individuals, where an individual is anything that exemplifies properties but is not itself a property. So on my view the logical form of (1) is singular term/second-level predicate. Either way, we have self-predication, by which I understand the predication of a property of itself. Now if a property is truly predicated of itself, then the property is self-exemplifying.

None of this is likely to impress Miller, since he rejects an assumption I am making, namely, that properties are complete or 'saturated' entities. As already noted, Miller follows Frege in holding that properties are incomplete or 'unsaturated' (*ungesaettigt*). But what is it to be incomplete? There is an ambiguity in Frege and also in Miller on this point as between saying that

> Incomplete entities are incapable of independent existence

and that

> Incomplete entities cannot be named (are not objects).

The claims are distinct in that neither entails the other. Miller appears to endorse both. As for the first, he says that properties are incomplete in that they are "individuated *ab alio* and are incapable of independent existence..."[4] Thus Fido's blackness is not a universal, but a particular, a property-instance. Moreover, it is a property-instance which, unlike the tropes of D. C. Williams and Keith Campbell, cannot independently exist but can only exist in Fido.

Does this rule out self-exemplification? Not obviously. If point P's being unextended is an incomplete property-instance, it is a particular that cannot exist independently of P. But this seems to allow us to say that the property in question both exists in P and in itself, thereby accommodating the datum that the property of being unextended is itself unextended.

To exclude self-exemplification Miller must reach for the draconian thesis that no incomplete entity (hence no property-instance) can be named. On this thesis we cannot name what the predicate in 'Fido is black' stands for.[5] 'Fido's blackness,' if it succeeds in picking out anything, picks out an object, a complete entity, hence not what the predicate in 'Fido is black' stands for. This implies that no incomplete entity can be identical with any of its properties, which in turn implies that no incomplete entity can exemplify itself,

since a self-exemplifying property is one that is identical with one of its properties.

The draconian thesis, however, appears to issue in incoherence. Consider the triad:

4.   Property-instances are incomplete (unnameable) entities

5.   Fido's blackness is a property-instance

6.   Fido's blackness is an incomplete (unnameable) entity.

Miller is committed to both (4) and (5).[6] Now (6) follows from (4) and (5). But (6) is false, indeed self-contradictory: 'Fido's blackness' names a complete entity. So given that (5) is true, (4) must be false.

It thus appears that Miller's rejection of property self-exemplification rests on an incoherent foundation. Miller faces the same paradox Frege faced: The concept *horse* is not a concept.[7] In Miller it takes the form: The property Fido's blackness is not a property. But in that case Miller's doctrine of properties cannot be coherently stated — or whistled either.

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NOTES

1. Barry Miller, "On 'Divine Simplicity: A New Defense'," *Faith and Philosophy*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 474-77.

2. Cf. William F. Vallicella, "Divine Simplicity: A New Defense," *Faith and Philosophy*, vol. 9, no. 4 (October 1992), pp. 508-25.

3. This criticism of Miller is modelled on a criticism Wiggins makes of Dummett. Cf. David Wiggins, "The Sense and Reference of Predicates: A Running Repair to Frege's Doctrine and a Plea for the Copula," in *Frege: Tradition and Influence*, ed. Crispin Wright (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 126-43, esp. pp. 131-32.

4. Barry Miller, *From Existence to God: A Contemporary Philosophical Argument* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 38, n. 22.

5. Indeed, on Miller's view, we cannot even name the predicate itself. 'The predicate in "Fido is black"' names an object, a complete entity; but predicates are incomplete. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 32.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

7. Cf. Gottlob Frege, "On Concept and Object," in *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, trans. Peter Geach and Max Black (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1960), p. 46.