CHAPTER 1
THE SCAFFOLDING FOR A SOLUTION

Play is a thing by itself. The play-concept as such is of a higher order than is seriousness. For seriousness seeks to exclude play, whereas play can very well include seriousness.

Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, p. 45

1.1 GAME (1): TALK ABOUT THE SPATIO-TEMPORAL WORLD

To start with, we have to attend to the most straightforward and naturally paradigmatic language-game of talking about spatio-temporally locatable and datable individuals. Let us call this game "Game (1)" to signify its primacy, which, if not ontologically uncontroversial, is at least intuitive. The original psychological roots of reference can surely be traced back to this game. Its bona fide items would be concrete spatio-temporal particulars such as books, flowers, birds, people, motor-cars, houses, countries and limbs of living bodies. Material such as mud, water or sugar is also talked about, not merely in the unsorted generic fashion but also riding on count-nouns – "blobs", "drops", and "lumps" – bit by bit in the singled-out fashion.

There is, however, no end to the philosophical problems regarding the criteria of identity, etc., even with these apparently innocent articles of reference. Artifacts have identity conditions which are different from those of organisms. Continuity over time for plants, or that over space for roads, may pose exceedingly tough problems to the logical analyst of natural language. Events, of course, like a particular dropping of a stone, a famine, an earthquake or the fall of an empire can cover very brief or very large stretches of time. The same action can be counted differently from the side of the agent and from the side of the recipient. Problems of a separate kind arise with items which show traits of both events and entities, e.g. waterfalls. Whirlpools, for example, can be given proper names in spite of the possibility that they can have a temporally intermittent history, can perhaps divide into two and again merge back into one, or reappear in a slightly different place after vanishing for some time. The same named wind comes back each year. (The sky, I would like to think, is an item of this language-game, although I have no clear answers to questions like: "Is the sky in London the same as the one in Delhi? Or, has it got a shape, like the inside of a dome?" These questions make us suspect that it might be a merely phenomenal entity, although there is a certain "publicness" about it which
it shares with rainbows.) Waves of an ocean or flames of a fire are surely objective items, though difficult to individuate. It would be a mistake to expel shadows out of this game because they are not only publicly available for reference but they also have particular location in space and time. They occupy places even if they do not prevent other things from occupying the same places. They have objective but two-dimensional shapes which can get distorted by interference. Then there are vague objects like a certain pile of trash or an automobile, about which identity-questions seem to have no clear-cut "yes/no" answers. To try to give a watertight criterion of inclusion in a class of particulars recognisable as items of this game is too ambitious even for a meticulously descriptive metaphysician.

For our purposes, we can rest satisfied with the general characterisation that whatever is an historically (maybe omnitemporally or just for an instant) available basic particular – a concrete, and more or less public substance or event – is a designatable item in this game. When we are playing this game (i.e. both we and our hearers are consciously talking about the common and the only world where we share location), we cannot take “Sherlock Holmes” or “wisdom” as directly referring expressions for two different reasons. Though a concrete particular – in the story – Sherlock Holmes cannot be a game (1) item because we do not take talk about him as seriously belief-expressing or belief-demanding. Although we believe in wisdom, and speak seriously of it, we cannot refer to it in this game because it is not a spatio-temporal particular. Even our use of numbers in this game must be attributive. When, for instance, we say, “The number of players in a football match is usually 22”, it would be preposterous to assume that we are referring to an entity, namely, the abstract natural number 22, by our use of the number name. Similarly, when in this game we say, “Selflessness is a rare virtue”, our statement most naturally deserves a pro-nominalist reinterpretation along the lines of “Very few people can be selfless.”

Of course even in game (1) we would be inclined to quantify over the predicate-position. Comments like the following seem to demand such quantification: “Jennifer has become everything that her mother did not want her to be.” From this, can we jump to the conclusion that properties also count as individuals in game (1)? I think that would be overhasty. In order to make room for the frank Platonism of conversational English, I have therefore categorised all individuating references to universals, features, kinds and other abstract entities as moves in a separate language-game, namely game (4). Whether or not one would treat game (4) as just an extension of game (1) seems to be largely a matter of philosophical taste and temperament. While I am an unashamed realist about non-particular entities like obsession with sin or meta-mathematics, I would like to keep singular reference to them semantically segregated from singular reference to spatio-temporal particulars. Surely we can mix the two styles of talking, making reference to items from both. Thus we can speak of obsession with sin as what Kant; and Kierkegaard shared, or of meta-mathematics as what Russell and Gödel had both worked on. But it is somewhat dangerous to eliminate the distinction between the two games altogether, lest we slip back to the erroneous two-name theory of predication. When