Universals:  
Devitt, “‘Ostrich Nominalism’ or ‘Mirage Realism’?”

1. Three Theses

This paper is a response to David Armstrong—a realist—who has argued previously against Devitt by claiming he is an Ostrich Nominalist. Let’s see what this business is all about:

**Ostrich Nominalist:** a person who maintains nominalism while ignoring a problem  
**Mirage Realist:** a person who adopts realism because s/he sees a problem that isn’t there.

**Devitt’s Three Theses:**
1. To maintain nominalism while ignoring the One over Many argument is not to be an Ostrich Nominalist; rather to adopt realism because of that argument is to be a Mirage Realist.
2. Armstrong is largely, though not entirely, a Mirage Realist.
3. Quine is not an Ostrich Nominalist.

We’re not going to worry too much about (2) and (3).

2. Argument for Thesis 1

According to Devitt, there is no genuine problem of the One over Many. So, he denies that he an Ostrich Nominalist.

According to Armstrong (Devitt’s opponent), we are happy to assert sentences of the following form:

(1) a and b have the same property (are of the same type), F-ness.

**Devitt:** Once we paraphrase (1), the apparent problem disappears:

(2) a and b are both F.

**Devitt:** No more needs to be said—a and b are both F.

**Armstrong:** But what explains the fact that a and b are both F?

**Devitt:** Anyone who asks this question obviously doesn’t understand the meaning of the word ‘and’.

(3) a is F.  
and  
(4) b is F.

**Devitt:** There is no deep problem to be solved here.

**Armstrong:** This just pushes the question back. Now we have to ask: ‘In virtue of what is a F?’ It has to be that:

(5) a has F-ness.

**Devitt:** We have to ask what ‘has’ commits the realist to here. According to Armstrong, there are two views to choose from:

Relational Immanent Realism: (5) expresses a proposition about a relation—between a and F.  
Non-Relational Immanent Realism: (5) does not express a proposition about a relation. Rather, it is similar to ‘F-ness is in a’. Particulars are bonded to universals in a “metaphysical unity”.

Armstrong espouses Non-Relational Realism. According to Devitt, this view “replaces the explanatory failings of relational Realism with a complete mystery” (155).

What are the explanatory failings of Relational Immanent Realism?