

# Nominalism

The Prospects of Paraphrase

# Doubts about Universals

- Unreflective Empiricism
  - When all is said and done, we have only Antisthenes' eyes.
- Patent Incoherence
  - How can one thing be, say, 15 metres from itself?
- Principle of Parsimony
  - It is not necessary to postulate universals; and we should not 'multiply entities beyond necessity'.
- Eleatic Principle
  - $x$  exists *iff*  $x$  is implicated in the causal nexus
    - Or, if you like:  $x$  exists *iff* possibly  $x$  is a cause or an effect

# Doubts about these Doubts

- Unreflective Empiricism
  - Realism and empiricism are not mutually exclusive; further, one may have doubts about unreflective empiricism.
- Patent Incoherence
  - Russell: “There is no place. . . where we find the relation ‘north of’.” (1912, 98)
- Principle of Parsimony
  - If true, the purport of this principle is yet to be decided.
- Eleatic Principle
  - A universal might be involved in the causal nexus without being itself a cause or effect.

# Eleatic Principle (EP) Applied

1. If universals exist, then they are abstract entities.
2. If (EP), then there are no abstract entities.
3. So, if (EP), there are no universals.
  - Supporters of (EP) might yet accept universals by denying (1); this would in effect reject *ante rem* universals in favour of *in rebus* universals.

# *Ante Rem vs. In Rebus*

- A universal  $\phi$  exists *ante rem* iff: (i)  $\phi$  is a universal; (ii) possibly there is no  $x$  such that  $\phi x$ .
- A universal  $\phi$  exists *in rebus* iff: (i)  $\phi$  is a universal; and (ii) necessarily, if  $\phi$  exists,
  - (i) there is some  $x$  and some  $y$ ,
  - (ii)  $\phi x$  and  $\phi y$ ,
  - (iii)  $\sim (x = y)$ .

# *Ante Rem* Universals

- Let us, though, take *ante rem* universals as the focus of our discussion.
- These seemed to be the universals generated by our arguments of last week, if they were successful.
- Let us ask of them: can we paraphrase them away?

# Abstract Reference Revisited

- In simple singular predictions, the subject term *names* a subject, whereas the predicate is a general term, which *expresses* but does not name a quality.
  - So: 'Hieronymus is charitable.'
- Still, predicate expressions can be and often are nominalized.
  - Thus: 'Charity is a virtue.'
- A metaphysical realist has an easy story to tell: in cases of abstract singular reference, an AMLIE, a universal, is named by the singular term, just as Socrates is named by 'Socrates'.
- The nominalist attempts a conditional paraphrase:  $(x)(Cx \rightarrow Vx)$ 
  - Is this adequate?
    - It seems not: someone could be charitable but otherwise rotten.

# Paraphrase Tests

- A paraphrase is successful when and only when a paraphrase is:
  - truth-preserving;
  - meaning-preserving; and
  - of the same modal profile as its targeted sentence.



# Some Attempts at Paraphrase

- Target Statement: Charity is a virtue.
- Paraphrases:
  - Predicate nominalism: What is called 'charitable' is also called 'virtuous'.
  - Conditionalization: If something is charitable, then it is also virtuous.
  - Set-theoretic nominalism: The set of charitable things is a subset of the set of virtuous things.
  - Meta-linguistic nominalism (Carnap): 'Charitable' is a virtue predicate.
    - Singular Distributives (Sellars): \*Charitable\* is a virtue predicate.
  - The set of charity tropes is a subset of the set of virtue tropes.

# Predicate Nominalism

- Paraphrase: What is called 'charitable' is also called 'virtuous'.
  - Or, omitting abstract reference, where the target sentence is:
    - An electron has a positive charge.
    - 'Having a positive charge' is predicated of electrons.
- On the plus side:
  - Ranges over all and only particulars.
  - Makes no reference to abstract universals.
  - May seem to mean just what the target sentence means.
- Unfortunately: this is hopeless.

# Conditionalization

- Paraphrase: If something is charitable, then it is also virtuous.
- On the plus side:
  - Ranges over all and only particulars.
  - Makes no reference to abstract universals.
  - May seem to mean just what the target sentence means.
- Unfortunately:
  - Gets the truth conditions wrong.
  - Shifts modal profile: we go from a necessary truth to what is at best a contingent truth.

# Set-theoretic Nominalism

- Paraphrase: The set of charitable things is a subset of the set of virtuous things.
- On the plus side:
  - Ranges over all and only particulars.
  - Makes no reference to abstract universals.
  - Introduces a particular in place of a universal: the set of electrons is non-repeatable and thus not a universal; such a set is also an *open and pure set*.
- Unfortunately:
  - Misses the truth conditions.
  - Shifts the modal profile.
  - Simply relocates the universal: each charitable entity stands in the *membership relation* to the set or class; this, though, seems to be a dyadic relation and so universal type rather than a particular.

# Meta-Linguistic Nominalism I

- ‘Charitable’ is a virtue predicate
  - Or, better: \*Charitable\* is a virtue predicate.
- The Basic Idea:
  - Sentences masquerading in the material mode are actually disguised formal-mode statements.
  - Statements seemingly about non-linguistic entities (e.g. the property of being charitable) are analyzed as meta-linguistic statements about object-language expressions or entities playing a given linguistic functional role.

# Meta-Linguistic Nominalism II

- On the plus side:
  - Makes no reference to abstract universals.
- Unfortunately:
  - Evidently, relocates the type: we say 'charitable' is a kind of linguistic type, betokened on various occasions of its use.
  - In the basic version, suffers the same problems as predicate nominalism in keying the paraphrase to this or that natural language.
  - Seems not to be meaning-preserving. We cannot, for instance, understand claims across natural languages to be the same in meaning.

# Meta-Linguistic Nominalism III

- The more sophisticated variant sidesteps these problems.
- \*Charitable\* is a virtue predicate.
  - Rather than tie the target predicates to individual natural languages, Sellars' convention of dot quotation treats the meta-linguistic claims in terms of their *linguistic functional roles*.
  - So, e.g., \*charity\* is equivalent to 'the word which plays the functional linguistic role played by 'charity' in English in the home language of the word in question, whatever it may be.'
  - Now we are not tied to any particular natural language.
- Still, we seem to have relocated the *type* once again.

# Trope Nominalism I

- In addition to the concrete particulars embraced by the more austere nominalist, there are *tropes*.
  - A trope is a fully particular attribute, not multiply exemplifiable, numerically distinct from every other attribute, whether or not it is similar or even qualitatively the same as it.
  - Abstract reference can again then be treated as fully referential.
    - ‘Charity is a virtue’ receives the paraphrase:
      - ‘The set of charity tropes is a subset of the set of virtue tropes.’
        - Each of these sets is a resemblance class.



# Trope Nominalism II

- On the plus side:
  - Avoids all reference to language.
  - Thus seems much closer to being meaning-preserving.
  - Has a natural way of handling perception.
- Unfortunately:
  - Has trouble handling meaningful statements about non-existent entities, e. g. ‘The nymphs in the retinue of Artemis are especially naughty.’
  - Violates the modal profile of the abstract referring expression.

Each paraphrase is  
in its way desperate  
to avoid something  
unwanted.

But what is to be  
gained in these  
jealous machinations?

