

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 ϕ exists *ante rem* iff: (i) ϕ is a universal; (ii) possibly there is no x such that ϕx .
- A universal ϕ exists *in rebus* iff: (i) ϕ is a universal; and (ii) necessarily, if ϕ exists,
 - (i) there is some x and some y ,
 - (ii) ϕx and ϕy ,
 - (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 and the

But what is to be
gained in these
jealous machinations?

