Philosophy 125 — Day 9: Overview

- Administrative Stuff
  - Guest Lecture Thursday: Ed Zalta on Abstract Objects
    * Introducing Ed — *via* `iChatAV`
  - First Paper Topics and S.Q.s announced last week (see website)
  - Lectures should be up to date (sometimes I fiddle before lecture)

- Agenda: Nominalism
  - Metalingusitc Nominalism
    * Carnap's Naive Proposal
    * Sellars' Refinement
    * Residual Problems
  - Trope Theory
    * The best of both worlds?
    * Plus set theory?

Nominalism XVII: Metalinguistic Nominalism 2

- Metalinguistic nominalists think that realists and austere nominalists make the same kind of mistake: thinking that there must be some non-lingusitic entities to which terms like "courage" (in, *e.g.*, "Courage is a virtue") refer.

- For realists, these entities are universals, for austere nominalists, the entities are concrete particulars (*e.g.*, courageous persons). The metalingustic nominalist thinks both the realist and the austere nominalist are incorrect.

- Carnap sketches how a systematic and precise metalinguistic nominalistic theory might be worked out. Carnap proposes (roughly) that claims like "Courage is a virtue" get unpacked as claims about predicates in languages:

  "Courage is a virtue" $\mapsto$ " 'Courageous' is a virtue predicate".
  "Trangularity is a shape" $\mapsto$ " 'Triangular' is a shape predicate".

- Problems: (1) Linguistic types *vs* linguistic tokens (trading new universals for old ones?), (2) Language relativity (abs. claims don't seem language relative).

Nominalism XIX: Metalinguistic Nominalism 4

- Sellars addresses this first problem (for nominalism) of linguistic types/tokens by introducing *distributive singular terms*. Here's an object language example:

  – The lion is tawny.

- Sellars: a *distributive singular term* – "The K", K a proper noun – *appears* to be a name of some abstract entity (the universal K), but is just a device for indicating that a general claim is being made about the various individual Ks.

- Argument: "The lion is tawny" is true, but it would be false if were to take "The lion" to denote an abstract entity, since abstract entities cannot exemplify colors [Zalta has an answer to this: exemplification *vs.* encoding].

- This gives us a common noun use of metalinguistic expressions, as in "'Courageous' is a virtue predicate" $\mapsto$ " 'Courageous's are virtue predicates".

- This is not as crazy as it may sound. We say things like: "How many 'man's are there on page 100 of the text?" Such common noun ML usage exists.

Nominalism XX: Metalinguistic Nominalism 5

- To address problem (2), Sellars introduces what he calls *dot-quotation*. Regular quotation marks pick-out expressions in *particular languages*. For instance, 'man' picks out a word *in English* (either a type or its tokens).

- So, if we stick with regular quotation, we will end-up with *language relative* paraphrases of abstract referring sentences. But, this seems wrong. There seems to be something more general and language invariant going on here.

- Intuitively, the various ways of saying 'courageous' in various languages (*e.g.*, 'courageux', 'valiente') are all just different ways of saying the same thing. That courage is a virtue is not relative to the language in which it is expressed.

- What we need is a way to pick-out expressions with the same functional behavior (same inferential role, same role in guiding behavior, *etc*.) across different languages. Sellars's dot notation is intended to do just that.

  "'Courageous's are virtue predicates" ↦ "·Courageous·s are virtue predicates"

Nominalism XXI: Metalinguistic Nominalism 6

- "·Courageous·s are virtue predicates" says (in our English metalanguage) all words that are functionally equivalent (in their respective languages) to the English word 'courageous' are virtue predicates (in their respective langs).

- Applying this idea, 'hombre,' 'uomo,' 'homme,' and 'Mensch' are all ·man·s and 'rojo,' 'rosso,' 'rot,' and 'rouge' are all ·red·s.

- Dot quotation provides us with the materials for metalinguistic discourse that cuts across languages. For instance, consider the following two sentences:

  (i) Red is a color.

  (i′) Rojo es un color.

- On Carnap's account, claims (i) and (i′) are *about different things*. For Carnap, (i) is about the English word 'Red', and (i′) is about the Spanish word 'Rojo'.

- Accordingly, what the speaker of English says when assertively uttering (i) is precisely what the speaker of Spanish say when they assertively utter (i′).

Nominalism XXII: Metalinguistic Nominalism 7

- Sellars' theory (which includes a rich theory of metalinguistic quantification) can handle very tricky sentences, *e.g.*, "Those species are cross-fertile."

- Three Criticisms of Sellars' Theory (2 from Loux, 1 from class):

1. "The attribute most frequently ascribed to Socrates is a property." Let's say this sentence is true, and that wisdom is the attribute in question.
   * Sellars can't translate this as: ·the attribute most frequently ascribed to Socrates·s are adjectives (predicates), since they are noun phrases. Also, this translation comes out true if there is no attribute most frequently ascribed to Socrates, but the original comes out false in that case.
   * Try Russellian: "There exists an x such that ·x· is uniquely most frequently predicated of Socrates, and that expression is an adjective."
   * What if wisdom is the attribute most frequently ascribed to Socrates, but some dot quoted expression that is *not* an adjective, say ·man·, has been predicated of Socrates more frequently than any other?

* Problem: there are more ways of ascribing wisdom to Socrates than by predicating a ·wise· of him. *E.g.*, Socrates has the property that Quine is now thinking of. 'Sellarsizing' this is quite tricky (may not be doable).

2. Isn't Sellars just sneaking universals in the back door here? E.g., He talks anout functional roles, and functional equivalence, *etc*.

   * How are we to make sense out of such talk, nominalistically?

   * Sellars: functional roles can be analyzed by reference to linguistic *rules* and, the notion of a linguistic rule can be understood without reference to anything other than concrete particulars (*i.e.*, persons).

   * So, we don't even need linguistic tokens, much less types! We can do everything in terms of 'linguistic rules', which are themselves reducible to talk only about persons using language.

   * Realist Retort: to give a satisfactory account of linguistic rules, we'll need to introduce talk about norms and standards; and such talk cannot be understood without reference to the ontology of realism. *&* so on ...

3. Sellars' dot quotation does seem to solve the original problem faced by
    Carnap's theory: *equivalent* abstract claims made in *similar* languages.

    *   But, aren't there other possible forms of language variance (involving
        abstract reference) that could cause problems for Sellars' theory?

    *   It was suggested last time that other languages might not have the same
        kind of structure as English (or other western languages), and so may
        pose problems for Sellars' dot quotation. Counterexample?

    *   We'd need a case of *abstract reference* in one language that gets
        improperly captured by Sellars' theory. How would this go?

    *   It would have to be a case in which making an abstract claim *p* in
        language #1 involves an entirely different syntactic structure than does
        making *the very same abstract claim* in language #2.

    *   If the claims *are* (intuitively) *different* claims, then the fact that Sellars'
        theory makes them *come out different* is not a problem for his theory.

- Interestingly, Loux does not claim that Sellars' explanatory apparatus more
  complex than the realist's. Question: How do they compare on this score?

Nominalism XXII: Trope Theory 1

- So far, the nominalists we have seen believe that there are *only* concrete particulars — no properties or attributes of things, just the things themselves.

- Trope theorists are different. They believe that there are attributes as well as concrete particulars. But, they do not posit a separate ontological category for such things. According to trope theorists, these, too, are just particulars.

- Trope theorists think it is impossible for numerically distinct things to have numerically one and the same attribute (1st horn of Parmenides' dilemma).

- Thus, a particular red ball has a color, but it is a color nothing else has or could have. It has a certain shape, but it is a shape nothing else has or could have.

- These "shares of properties" (so to speak) are called *tropes*. Examples:
  - Socrates' courage.
  - Hercules' strength.

Nominalism XXIII: Trope Theory 2

- What about attribute agreement? It appears that things can share attributes. *I.e.*, it seems that distinct particulars can both have one and the same attribute.

- According to trope theorists, this is loose talk. When we say things like this we are really just talking about exact similarity between distinct attributes.

- So, "John and Jim are each white" gets unpacked as "John's whiteness is exactly similar to Jim's whiteness" (both understood to be *particulars*).

- As Williams puts it:

  They do not "have the same color" in the sense in which two children "have the same father" or two streets have the same manhole in the middle of their intersections or two college students "wear the same tuxedo" (and so can't go to dances together).

- So attribute agreement is explained by trope theorists in terms of exact similarity between numerically distinct particulars (tropes).

- What is the motivation for trope theory (aside from Parmenides' dilemma)?

Nominalism XXIV: Trope Theory 3

- Trope theorists appeal to considerations of *selective attention* to motivate their theory. When we experience particulars, we experience them in terms of *their* colors, shapes, *etc.*, and not in terms of these attributes in a *generic* sense.

- For instance, when I focus on the color of the Taj Mahal, I am not experiencing pinkness *generally*, I am attending to the *Taj Mahal's* pinkness.

- In this way, the trope theorist can satisfy the realist's preference for the posit of a *mind-independent* thing in virture of which the Taj Mahal is pink.

- Moreover, the trope theorist's entity is something with which we are *directly* acquainted *via* experience of concrete particulars [no uninstantiated tropes!].

- The trope theorist seems to enjoy all the benefits of realism, without its ontological commitment to universals, and with many of the epistemic advantages and the parsimoniousness of metaliguistic nominalism.

- But, how do they handle those pesky case of abstract reference?

Nominalism XXV: Trope Theory 4

- There are two main trope-theory approaches to abstract reference:

  1. Medieval: Try to *eliminate* abstract singular terms as mere *seeming* names, by paraphrasing abstract claims into claims about tropes. *E.g.*, "Courage is a virtue" becomes "Courages (courage tropes) are virtues (virtue tropes)."
     - Similar to the eliminativist account of the austere nominalist, but it seems to have its advantages (Does it need CP clauses or adverbials?).
     - Does seem to need 'similarity' or 'resemblance' as *primitive*.

  2. Contemporary: Abstract singular terms are *genuine names*. Then, what's their *denotation*? Standard approach: abstract singular terms denote *sets of resembling tropes*. *E.g.*, "Courage" denotes the set of courage tropes **C** and "Virtue" denotes the set of virtues **V**. "Courage is a virtue" $\mapsto$ "**C** $\subset$ **V**."
     - Avoids the problem of *extensionality* (having a heart $\neq$ having a kidney).
     - Set theory does seem to come with *commitments* (*e.g.*, *relations* $\in, \subset$?). I'll have more to say about set theory in this connection, below.

Nominalism XXVI: Trope Theory 5

- Problem: Empty abstract singular terms, on the set-theoretic trope theory, all denote one and the same thing — the empty set (of tropes) ∅. Should such empty abstract terms all denote (and denote *the same thing*)? Reply: OK, they don't denote ∅, they denote *nothing at all*. See Zalta for another possible reply.

- Q: In virtue of what is a courage trope a *courage* trope? A: that's *primitive*.

- Loux is not so worried that trope theorists are including sets in their ontology (or set theory). Quine would not have been too worried about this either, since he thought sets were *indispensible* for both mathematics and science.

- I'll return to set theory in a moment (I'm tempted to say "not so fast!" here). Loux offers a criticism of trope theory that is based on *modal* considerations.

- Loux's problem: sets have their members *necessarily*, but but it seems *contingent* that the set of courageous people should include, say, 1 million members. Loux seems to think this causes a problem for trope theorists. Why?

Given that sets have their members necessarily, the trope theorist is committed to the claim that the set that is courage could not have had a different membership. …On the trope theorist's account, however, concrete objects, persons, are courageous just in case they have a trope that is a member of the set that is identical with courage. But if that set could not have had more or fewer members than it does, we have the result that there could not have been more or fewer courageous individuals than there, in fact, are.

(1) Given any set, it is impossible that it have members other than those it, in fact, has. [note: this assumption seems to make $\mathbf{C} \subset \mathbf{V}$ *necessary*, which is *good*]

(2) $\therefore$ The set $\mathbf{C}$ could not have had more of fewer members than it does.

(3) $\therefore$ There could not have been more or fewer courage tropes than there are.

(4) p is courageous iff there exists a trope t such that p has t and $t \in \mathbf{C}$.

(5) ?? [This step is not obvious from Loux's passage (missing? study question).]

(6) $\therefore$ There could not have been more or fewer courageous persons than there are.

• The set of courageous persons $\mathbf{P}$ – is *its* cardinality fixed? Courage tropes are necessarily in $\mathbf{C}$ (courages). Are courageous people necessarily in $\mathbf{P}$ (courageous)?

Nominalism XXVII: Trope Theory 6

- There seems to be a problem with thinking of sets as pre-existing, completed wholes. What about the set of future sea battles? Is *its* cardinality fixed?

- Insofar as this is a problem with a certain way of thinking about sets, perhaps the trope theorist can adopt a different conception of sets. Perhaps …

- Loux says that sets are "perfectly respectable, well-behaved entities," that they have "clear-cut identity conditions" and that "there is an established discipline, set theory, that lays out the central properties of sets, so that we have a thorough understanding of their behavior." This is a bit sanguine.

- Set theory is a rather strong and controversial mathematical theory. Full-blooded set theory is by no means a piece of commonsense.

- It isn't even known if the full-blooded theory of sets (or Quine's version, which is meant to be "cleaner") is consistent. So, this is not so innocuous.

- I'd be almost as worried about sets as about universals, generally.