# Philosophy 125 — Day 8: Overview

- **Administrative Stuff**
  - First Paper Topics and S.Q.s announced today (see email *&* website)
    * Three study questions (do all)
    * Five paper topics (choose one)
    * Both due four weeks hence (10/16/03)
  - Josh's Handout on Regresses (see homepage for link)
  - Philosophy Colloquium Today (4pm, Howison Library, 3rd Floor Moses):
      "Intelligent Design is Untestable. What about Natural Selection?"
        – Elliott Sober, Stanford University, Philosophy Department
  - Guest Lecture next Thursday: Ed Zalta on Nonexistent/Abstract Objects

- **Agenda: Nominalism**
  - A Few More Remarks on Austere Nominalism *&* on Quine
  - Metalingusitc Nominalism
  - Trope Theory

**A Few Remarks on Austere Nominalism (On a Nice Suggestion Made Last Time)**

- We have seen the following 'paraphrase' strategies for the Austere Nominalist:

(1) "Courage is a virtue." $\mapsto$ "*Ceteris paribus*, courageous persons are virtuous."

(2) "John's eyes are the same color as his hair."

$\mapsto$ "John's eyes and John's hair agree *color-wise*."

- A nice suggestion was made last time by a student in lecture. Why not think of (2) as a case of *attribute agreement*, and then (as Quine suggests) take the agreement as *explanatorily primitive* (*i.e.*, say no 'paraphrase' is needed)?

- The only difference (assuming John's Hair and John's eyes are indeed *particulars*, which seems OK) between (2) and standard AA cases seems to be that the color in question is not *specified* in (2). But, why should *that* matter?

- Turn this on its head: Why not *account for* attribute agreement using adverbial expressions? *I.e.*, "$a \ldots n$ are each $F$" $\mapsto$ "$a \ldots n$ agree $F$-wise".

- Taking this to its extreme: Why not think of (**1**) as a case of attribute agreement? — "*Ceteris paribus*, courageous persons agree *virtue-wise*".

### Nominalism XIII: A Puzzle Concerning Nominalistic Discourse 6

- Abstract Reference: What would Quine say about "Courage is a virtue"?

- 'Descriptionizing' gives: "The thing which is-Courage is a virtue". But, on Quine's account, this becomes "Something uniquely couragizes, and that thing is a virtue", which is *false* for a Courage-nominalist. But, courage *is* a virtue!

- This seems to make it impossible for a Courage-nominalist to affirm claims like "Courage is a virtue", which seem to express truths about courage.

- Other versions of nominalism (metalinguistic, austere) allow the Courage-nominalist to affirm the (intuitively true) claim "Courage is a virtue".

- Quine talks about abstract reference elsewhere, and he suggests (where possible) the paraphrase strategies (above) adopted by austere nominalism.

- For (Q2), Quine goes meta-linguistic: nominalists *can't* (consistently) say "There are things the realist has in his ontology but I do not"; they *can* "talk about the realist's sentences" & "what to do with them" (*i.e.*, debate their usage).

## Nominalism XIV: A Puzzle Concerning Nominalistic Discourse 7

- Quine's view seems to be that one's ontological commitments are determined by the "ineliminable" bound variable expressions in one's best theory of the world — *i.e.*, the *entities (ineliminably) quantified over* in one's best theory.

   We may say …that some dogs are white and not thereby commit ourselves to recognizing either doghood or whiteness as entities. 'Some dogs are white' says that some things that are dogs are white; and, in order that this statement be true, the things over which the bound variable 'something' ranges must include some white dogs, but need not include doghood or whiteness. On the other hand, when we say that some zoological species are cross-fertile we are committing ourselves to recognizing as entities the several species themselves, abstract though they are. We remain so committed at least until we devise some way of so paraphrasing the statement as to show that the seeming reference to species on the part of our bound variable was an 'avoidable manner of speaking.'

- Quine says classical mathematics is committed to various abstract entities (*e.g.*, sets), and he says *science* is too (sets are 'indispensible' to best science).

# Nominalism XV: Epilogue on Quine

Let us by all means see how much of the physicalistic conceptual scheme can be reduced to a phenomenalistic one ... physics also ... demands pursuing, irreducible *in toto* though it be. Let us see ... to what degree, natural science may be rendered independent of platonistic mathematics; but let us also pursue mathematics and ... its platonistic foundations.

- Here, Quine hints that realism about *some* physical universals (*e.g.*, species) and *some* mathematical universals (*e.g.*, sets) may be ineliminable.

Provided merely that [the nominalist's] ontology countenances linguistic forms, or at least concrete inscriptions and utterances, [she] can talk about [the realist's] sentences.

- Here, Quine suggests that the nominalist go meta-linguistic in their reconstruction (or 'paraphrase') of realist discourse. Interesting. More? BUT

... we must not jump to the conclusion that what there is depends on words. Translatability of a question into semantic terms is no indication that the question is linguistic.

- Here, Quine clearly says that ontological debates are not about language (even if we can reconstruct the discourse semantically). But, it's not clear they are about matters of fact either. They're about which overall 'scientific theory of the world' is 'best' *given our interests*, and what that theory quantifies over.

Ontological questions, under this view, are on a par with questions in natural science. consider the question whether to countenance classes as entities. This, as I have argued elsewhere [in "On What There Is"], is the question whether to quantify with respect to variables which take classes as values. Now Carnap has maintained that this is a question not of matters of fact but of choosing a convenient language form, a convenient conceptual scheme or framework for science. With this I agree, but only on the proviso that the same be conceded regarding hypotheses generally. Carnap has . . . preserve[d] a double standard for ontological questions and scientific hypotheses . . . which I reject. . . . I espouse a more thorough pragmatism. Each man is given a scientific heritage plus a continuing barrage of sensory stimulation; and the considerations which guide him in warping his scientific heritage to fit his continuing sensory promptings are, where rational, pragmatic.

- What are the consequences of this view? Is there really *disagreement* here?

# Nominalism XVI: Metalinguistic Nominalism 1

- Metalinguistic nominalism has only recently been carefully worked out (20th centuty: Carnap and Sellars), but its roots are in medieval philosophy, in the work of Roscelin, Abelard, and William of Ockahm.

- Roscelin (1050~1125): talk about universals is really talk about those linguistic expressions that can be predicatively ascribed to many individuals.[a] And, linguistic expressions are physical vocalizations (mere breaths of air).

- Abelard (1079–1142): universals are *meaningful* linguistic expressions (not mere vocalizations). The challenge is to explain how predicable expressions can be meaningful *in the absence of* multiply exemplifiable entities.

- William of Ockham (1285~1349): Abelard is right, but the meaningfulness of written or spoken language requires an inner 'language of the soul/thought'.

- All agree that the notion of universality itself is to be explained in terms of the linguistic activity of predication (this turns realism's scheme on its head!).

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[a]Only names that are general terms (*nomina*) can have universality – the origin of "nominalism".

# 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" ↦ " 'Courageous' is a virtue predicate".
    "Trangularity is a shape" ↦ " '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 XVIII: Metalinguistic Nominalism 3

- **Object Language**: quantifies over non-linguistic entities (particulars for the nominalist + universals for the realist). *E.g.*, "Socrates is courageous".

- **Metalanguage**: quantifies over linguistic entities (letters, words, sentences, predicates, *etc*.). *E.g.*, " 'Socrates is courageous' is true".

- **Linguistic Type**: A linguistic form, instantiated by its tokens. *E.g.*, the fifth letter of the English alphabet, of which "E", "𝔼", "**E**", *etc*. are all instances.

- **Linguistic Token**: A particular inscription, which instantiates a linguistic type. *E.g.*, "𝔼", which is an instance of the fifth letter of the English alphabet.

- Intuitively, " 'Courageous' is a virtue predicate" is not about the token inscription on its left hand side. It's about all tokens of the type *Courageous*.

- So, Carnap's approach seems to require linguistic types, which are themselves universals. But, he has eliminated *almost all* universals, and these types are not unexemplifed universals (indeed, they seem *necessarily* exemplified!).

# 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 $K$s.

- 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 tricky sentences like "Those species are cross-fertile."

- Indeed, Sellars' account of abstract reference is very systematic, highly unified, and not *ad hoc*. It does require metalinguistic pronouns (primitives?).

- Two Criticisms of Sellars' Theory (from Loux):

  1. Some sentences seem to resist analysis in Sellars' framework.
     *E.g.*, "The attribute most frequently ascribed to Socrates is a property."
     * Can't say: ·the attribute most frequently ascribed to Socrates·s are adjectives, since they are noun phrases not adjectives.
     * Try "Some dot quoted expression – ·wise· – is the one 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 requires lots of sophistication.

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

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

   * Sellars: linguistic 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 (a là Quine).

   * 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.

* 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" 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' as an explanatory primitive.

  2. Contemporary: Accept that abstract singular terms are *genuine names*. But, then, we need to say what the *denotation* of such terms is. The standard approach is that abstract singular terms denote *sets of tropes*. *E.g.*, "Courage" denotes the set of courage tropes $\mathbf{C}$ and "Virtue" denotes the set of virtue tropes $\mathbf{V}$. And, "Courage is a virtue" $\mapsto \mathbf{C} \subset \mathbf{V}$.

     – Set theory is pretty powerful, and seems to come with ontological commitments decidedly non-nominalist. Need the *relation* $\in$?