Philosophy 125 — Day 7: Overview

- Administrative Stuff
  - First Paper Topics and Study Questions will be announced Thursday (9/18)
  - All section locations are now (finally!) known (see website)
  - Blog on regress (my last word?!) available (see home page for link)
  - Guest Lecture next Thursday: Ed Zalta on Nonexistent/Abstract Objects

- Agenda: Nominalism
  - Austere Nominalism
  - “Plato’s Beard”
    - A Puzzle for Nominalism, and a Proposed Solution by Quine
  - Metalingusitic Nominalism
  - Trope Theory

Nominalism III: Austere Nominalism 1

- So, how does the austere nominalist account for or explain attribute agreement among concrete particulars? They don’t. They say it isn’t necessary.
- According to austere nominalism, attribute agreement among concrete particulars is simply a basic, unanalyzable, and inexplicable fact.
- Recall that perhaps the most popular realist reply to the (attribute agreement) dilemma!
- What about abstract reference? What do austere nominalists say about that?

Nominalism IV: Austere Nominalism 2

- The nominalist does think that an explanation of the truth of “a is F” is needed. For the nominalist, though, this explanation is painfully simple. Nominalists adopt a very weak, minimal account of truth, based on:
  (T) “a is F” is true if and only if a is F. (viz., “a is F” is true because a is F)
- This is called a disquotational or deflationary account of truth. NOTE: (T) in and of itself is not inconsistent with a (realist) correspondence theory of truth, which requires there to be a language-independent truthmaker in virtue of which “a is F” is true. So, nominalists need not be anti-realists (more later).
- There is a dilemma for deflationary accounts of truth. It seems that there is much more to the truth of the sentence “a is F” than merely a’s being F. After all, “a is F” must mean or assert that a is F (and that is not guaranteed merely by a’s being F). So, (T) seems false if it is applied to sentences “a is F”.
- There is another horn here. Perhaps we should read (T) as asserting that the proposition expressed by the sentence “a is F” is true iff a is F. But, then we face a difficulty with the explanation, which says “a is F” because a is F.
  - If this, too, is read as a propositional claim (i.e., as “the proposition that a is F is true because a is F”), then we seem to be able to deduce (using (T)) that a is F because a is F, which seems false (since because is not reflexive). But, then it seems we can’t have both (T) and the explanatory claim as well. Thoughts?
  - Realists may be tempted here to complain that (T) is (true, but) trivial. But, they must be careful, since the same charge may threaten their own account.
  - Recall the nominalist ‘paraphrase’ “Socrates exemplifies courage”. If this is equivalent to “Socrates is courageous”, then (plausibly) it is true iff Socrates is courageous — back to (T). How does this lead to a less trivial explanation?
  - If, on the other hand, “Socrates exemplifies courage” is not equivalent to “Socrates is courageous”, then how can the realist claim to be giving truth conditions for the latter using the former? We’re back to our old dilemma!
  - What about abstract reference? What do austere nominalists say about that?
Nominalism V: Austere Nominalism 3

- Remember, the problem of abstract reference involves statements like:
  (2) Courage is a virtue.
  (4) John’s eyes are the same color as his hair.
  (5) Those two species are cross-fertile. [This is Quine’s example – see below.]
- The realist accounts for the truth of these abstract claims in exactly the same sort of way that they account for the truth of more mundane claims like:
  (3) Socrates is a man.
  (2′) Courageous persons are virtuous.
- But, do (2) and (2′) have the same meaning? (2) seems necessarily true, but (2′) may well be false (imagine a courageous person with no other virtue).

Nominalism VI: Austere Nominalism 4

- Perhaps a successful austere nominalist translation strategy can be found here, but it seems it’ll have to be more subtle. Perhaps we could say things like: (2′) Ceteris paribus (other things being equal), courageous persons are virtuous.
- Problem: what is the force of the ceteris paribus clause? Intuitively, it means that courageous persons who have all the remaining virtues are virtuous. But, nominalists cannot say that – it reintroduces what was to be eliminated.
- Try “courageous persons who satisfy all the remaining virtue predicates” are virtuous. But, there aren’t enough virtue predicates to ensure that (2′′) cannot be false. Loux concludes that CP’s are not fully nominalistically analyzable.
- Claims like (4) present further problems. The austere nominalist has to explain (4) in terms of concrete particulars agreeing in various ways. One could try to introduce adverbs here, and then translate (4) into:
  (4′) John’s eyes and John’s hair agree colorwise.
- Loux: these adverbs must then be taken as explanatorily primitive (Why?).

Nominalism VII: Austere Nominalism 5

- Loux concedes that austere nominalism posits fewer ontological categories than realism (no universals, only particulars). But, he argues that austere nominalism is explanatorily more complex and less unified than realism.
- Austere nominalism seems to treat more things as explanatorily primitive
  – Attribute agreement
  – Their ceteris paribus clauses
  – Their adverbial expressions
- Austere nominalism also seems to have a less unified account of the truth of subject-predicate claims – especially in the case of abstract reference:
  – They do not have a general recipe for generating nominalistic translations of abstract claims. These seem to be done piecemeal or one at a time.
  – Realism, on the other had, has a unified explanatory scheme for subject-predicate discourse in general (esp. the case of abstract reference).
  – How are we to weigh these conflicting assessments of parsimony?

Nominalism VIII: A Puzzle Concerning Nominalistic Discourse 1

- Here are two fundamental questions about nominalistic discourse:
  (Q1) When a nominalist (particularly, an Austere Nominalist) says “There are no universals”, what could this possibly mean (by their own lights)?
  (Q2) When a realist says “There are universals”, how can the nominalist make sense of this claim (and how can the nominalist engage the realist here)?
- Quine (in “On What There Is”) suggests an answer to (Q1), based on Russell’s “On Denoting” (which is assigned for next week’s guest lecture).
- Quine also discusses (Q2), but only briefly. He suggests that the nominalist should resort to talking about the realist’s sentences, and how they are used.
- Before we get to metalinguistic nominalism, I think it will be useful to digress somewhat and discuss Quine’s application of Russell’s theory of descriptions.
- Russell was concerned with the problem of empty names. Problem: How can we make sense out of singular claims with empty singular terms (subjects)?
Quine argues this exposes a fallacy in the realist ‘paraphrase’ strategy. OK for non-abstract S–P discourse, but what about attribute agreement?

Quine then considers some possible replies: Aren’t The present King of France is bald. There is no present king of France. So, how can we make sense of (*)?

Ed will address ‘objectual’ issues next week, and we’ll do modality in unit 3. In particular, Russell unpacks (*) as “Something is the present King of France, and nothing else is the present King of France”, which is false.

Quine argues this exposes a fallacy in the realist ‘paraphrase’ strategy. Even if we grant the realist their paraphrase of “Socrates is courageous” into “Socrates exemplifies Courage”, it does not follow that the seeming name “Courage” refers to anything (either via naming or via ‘connoting’).

Quine: the conflation of meaning and reference (see Frege reading) causes people to believe “Courage” refers to a universal (or to an idea in the mind).

Quine then considers some possible replies/objections, on behalf of the realist: – OK for non-abstract S–P discourse, but what about attribute agreement?

* Quine: Why think attribute agreement is something to explain at all? “…that …houses and roses and sunsets are all of them red may be taken as ultimate and irreducible.” Sound familiar (and austere)?

* Quine: There are no meanings (only people using language). He is a behaviorist about meaning — they’re psycho/sociological dispositions.
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 courageizes, 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 ‘indispensable’ 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 semantical terms is no indication that the question is linguistic.

• Here, Quine makes it clear that ontological debates are not about language (even if we reconstruct the discourse in this way). They’re about which theory is best, and what it quantifies over. Seguí into metalinguistic nominalism …
Nominalism XVI: Metalinguistic Nominalism 1

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

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

- Abelard: universals are meaningful linguistic expressions (not mere breaths); and, the challenge for nominalism is to explain how predicative expressions can be meaningful in the absence of multiply exemplifiable entities.

- William of Ockham: Abelard is right, but the meaningfulness of written or spoken language requires an inner language of the soul (language of 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!).


\[\footnote{Only names that are general terms (nomina) can have universality – the origin of “nominalism”.}\]

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-linguistic 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 metalinguistic 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:

\[
\text{“Courage is a virtue” } \mapsto \text{ “‘Courageous’ is a virtue predicate in English”}.
\]

\[
\text{“Trangularity is a shape” } \mapsto \text{ “‘Triangular’ is a shape predicate in English”}.
\]

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