HOW TO BE A NOMINALIST IN REALIST CLOTHING

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In the last two decades, discussions have proliferated regarding the existence and nature of universals. Three broad schools of thought about universals (with varieties of each) are currently being defended. In order to clarify these three different positions and to focus the dialectic which follows, let us concentrate on issues involving monadic universals and the phenomenon of quality agreement.

Consider two round and red spots called Socrates and Plato. Socrates and Plato have the same infimaae species of redness and roundness. Further, let us refer to the redness of Socrates and the redness of Plato as red1 and red2, respectively.

How are we to explain such cases of quality agreement? Extreme Nominalism is one answer to this question. Extreme Nominalists deny the existence of qualities altogether by giving them a reductive analysis such as a biconditional of this type:

\[ a \text{ has the quality } F \iff P \]

For example, P could be replaced by "a is a member of the set of F-things". Thus, the Extreme Nominalist denies an ontology of qualities and quality-instances and only allows for concrete particulars - red balls, individual humans - and sets (predicates, concepts) of concrete particulars. W. V. O. Quine and Wilfrid Sellars are examples of Extreme Nominalists.

2. It is not relevant for our purposes to analyze attempts to reduce concrete particulars to space-time worms, since such space-time worms and specific spatiotemporal slices of them are still particulars which generate problems about universals and their instances. Thus, we will bypass these issues and continue to refer to concrete particulars in the more traditional way.
A second school of thought is called Nominalism. A Nominalist acknowledges the existence of qualities but denies that quality agreement is to be explained along Realist lines wherein qualities are taken to be universals. The Nominalist denies that the redness of two exactly similar red balls, e.g. red₁ and red₂, is a numerically identical entity in each. Rather, each ball has a particular entity that is not multiply exemplifiable – a little red. "Universals" are sets or some other sort of grouping of quality-instances in which each member of the set stands to each other member in a relation of exact similarity (and this relation is itself a particular), and quality-instances are themselves particulars which are called, among other things, "tropes", "abstract particulars", "perfect particulars", "cases", "unit properties", or "moments". Proponents of Nominalism include D. C. Williams, G. F. Stout, and Keith Campbell.

In my opinion, Campbell is the most articulate Nominalist currently writing on the subject. According to Campbell, the "universal" redness is a set whose members are all and only the abstract particulars – he calls them tropes – which stand to one another in the relation of exact similarity. Further, the relation between the "universal" redness and red₁ and red₂ is the ∈ of set

3. The label "moment" is the one used by Edmund Husserl. I have argued elsewhere that Husserl is not a Nominalist. For the issues and literature surrounding that debate, see J. P. Moreland, "Was Husserl a Nominalist", Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 49 (June 1989): 661-674.