RESEMBLANCE NOMINALISM AND ABSTRACT NOUNS[1]

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1. Armstrong (1978: 58) and others have objected to Nominalism that it cannot give adequate paraphrases of *prima facie* true sentences like (1) and (2):

(1) Carmine resembles vermillion more than it resembles French Blue.

(2) Scarlet is a colour.

In my book *Resemblance Nominalism* I argued that what the resemblance nominalist must do is not to give a paraphrase of (1) and (2) but to say what its truthmakers are. And I proposed such truthmakers. I said that what makes (1) true is expressed by (1') or (1''), and that what makes (2) true is expressed by (2'):

(1') A carmine particular can resemble a vermillion particular more closely than a carmine particular can resemble a French Blue particular.

(1'') Some carmine particular resembles some vermillion particular more closely than any carmine particular resembles any French blue particular.[2]

(2') Any scarlet particular is coloured in virtue of being scarlet.[3]

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[2] (1') and (1'') follow Lewis's proposal, which was meant to give a paraphrase of a sentence similar to (1) (Lewis 1997: 194–95, footnote 10). In (1'') the particulars in question need not be part of any one possible world.
[3] See my 2002: 92.

Byeong-Uk Yi has recently objected to this account. He argues that there are true sentences to which my account of (1) and (2) does not extend. But that the account does not generalize in the way Yi thinks it should does not mean that it is faulty, at least not in the case of my account of (2).

For I said that the resemblance nominalist may take properties to be classes and that one can, as Lewis urged, find paraphrases of sentences (1), (2), and the like in terms of classes. By 'the like' I meant mere variations on (1) and (2). And when I said that the task of the resemblance nominalist was to find truthmakers rather than paraphrases, I *restricted* my task to sentences like (1) and (2), that is, true sentences which express a judgement of comparative resemblance between three properties ((1)) and true sentences that classify a determinate under a determinable ((2)). But the sentences Yi uses against my account of (2) are not like this, since they do not classify a determinate under a determinable. Thus Yi's attack on my account of (2) is based on an incorrect assumption, namely that I was trying to account for all sentences in which the subject is an abstract noun.

His attack on my account of (1), however, focuses on sentences expressing a judgement of comparative resemblance between three properties. And his criticism will lead me, in Section 2, to reject the account of (1) I proposed in the book and to propose a new account.

And although, as I said, Yi's attack on my account of (2) is wrongheaded, it can be taken as a challenge to give the nominalistic truthmakers of other sentences making apparent reference to universals, and I will briefly say how to do so in Section 3. However, what I shall say there should be seen as programmatic and it is not intended to establish that Resemblance Nominalism can account for all cases involving abstract nouns, but simply that the sentences proposed by Yi can be accounted for.

2. Two of the problematic sentences Yi considers are (3) and (4):

  (3) Carmine resembles vermillion more than it resembles triangularity.

(4) Carmine resembles triangularity more than it resembles vermillion.[4]

Applying to these sentences the scheme that yields (1') from (1) yields the following:

(3') A carmine particular can resemble a vermillion particular more closely than a carmine particular can resemble a triangular particular.

(4') A carmine particular can resemble a triangular particular more closely than a carmine particular can resemble a vermillion particular.

Although (3) is true, (3') is false (for although a carmine particular cannot completely resemble a vermillion one, a carmine particular can completely resemble a triangular one); and although (4) is false, (4') is true (for the same reason why (3') is false). Yi says that my rendering of (1) fails to formulate the truthmakers of (3) and the like, and that to defend Resemblance Nominalism I need to give a nominalistic rendering not only of (1) but of (3) as well (Yi 2014: 624).

But, in fact, one can account for (3), since the reason why it is true is that while carmine resembles vermillion to some extent, carmine does not resemble triangularity at all. And why is this the case? Because a carmine particular can fail to resemble some triangular particular at all, while no carmine particular can fail to resemble any vermillion particular.[5] This suggests how one should account for (1) and (3) in a unified way that avoids the problem presented by (4). For what I have just said can be put as follows: the minimum degree to which a carmine particular can resemble a vermillion particular (a degree greater than 0) is

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[4] In my book scarlet, vermillion and French blue were meant to be lowest determinate properties, the properties my Resemblance Nominalism was meant to account for (2002: 48–50). I will therefore take triangularity to stand for a lowest determinate triangular shape.

[5] Someone might think that a carmine particular would resemble any triangular particular at least with regards to their being particulars. But I doubt that on any sensible notion of resemblance any two particulars resemble each other because of being particulars. Indeed, resemblance between their instances is one of the elements that are used to distinguish abundant from sparse properties. And the notion of resemblance I am using here, which is the notion of resemblance I was using in my book (2002: 50–52), is one that accounts for sharing of *sparse* properties – but *being a particular* is not a sparse property.

greater than the minimum degree to which a carmine particular can resemble a triangular particular (degree 0). In other words, the minimum possible degree of resemblance between a carmine particular and a vermillion particular is greater than the minimum possible degree of resemblance between a carmine particular and a triangular particular. The same is true of carmine, vermillion, and French blue: the minimum degree to which a carmine particular can resemble a vermillion particular is greater than the minimum degree to which a carmine particular can resemble a French blue particular (though here we need not assume that the minimum degree to which a carmine particular can resemble a French blue particular must be 0). So this suggests that the truthmakers of sentences (1) and (3) are given by the following:

(1*) A carmine particular must resemble a vermillion particular more closely than a carmine particular can resemble a French blue particular.[6]

(3*) A carmine particular must resemble a vermillion particular more closely than a carmine particular can resemble a triangular particular.[7]

The good thing about this account is that applying it to the false sentence (4) produces the false sentence (4*):

(4*) A carmine particular must resemble a triangular particular more closely than a carmine particular can resemble a vermillion particular.

(4*) is false because it is possible for a carmine particular to resemble a triangular particular less closely than it is possible for a carmine particular to resemble a vermillion particular.

Yi (2014: 624, footnote 6) suggests that the resemblance nominalist should also account for the following two sentences:

(A) Carmine resembles carmine more than it resembles triangularity.

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[6] Or, emulating (1''): Every carmine particular resembles any vermillion particular more closely than some carmine particular resembles some French blue particular.
[7] Or, emulating (1''): Every carmine particular resembles any vermillion particular more closely than some carmine particular resembles some triangular particular.

(B) Triangularity resembles triangularity more than it resembles trilaterality.

The new idea can account for (A), since a carmine particular must resemble a carmine particular more closely than a carmine particular can resemble a triangular particular. But it is not necessary to account for (B), since the resemblance nominalist must reject necessarily coextensive but distinct properties (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002: 100).

The account I proposed in my book was based on the idea that if a determinate resembles another determinate more closely than it resembles a third, the maximum degree to which something having the first determinate can resemble something having the second determinate must be greater than the maximum degree to which something having the first determinate can resemble something having the third determinate.[8] This fails, as Yi's examples show, because although determinates of different highest determinables do not resemble at all, something having a determinate A of a certain highest determinable can resemble something having a determinate C of a different highest determinable more closely than something having A can resemble something having a determinate B of the same highest determinable as A.

The new account, instead, is based on the idea that if a determinate resembles another determinate more closely than it resembles a third, the minimum degree to which something having the first determinate can resemble something having the second determinate must be greater than the minimum degree to which something having the first determinate can resemble something having the third determinate.

This is a plausible idea, but to make it work it needs to be assumed that some determinates of the same highest determinable do not resemble at all. For the minimum degree to which a carmine particular can

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[8] Since I do not believe in the existence of colours and shapes, as opposed to the existence of coloured and shaped particulars, strictly speaking I should say something like this: 'the account I proposed in my book was based on the idea that if there is a true sentence stating that a determinate resembles another determinate more closely than it resembles a third, the maximum degree…'. But applying this kind of circumlocution would make the text more cumbersome than necessary. The reader should therefore understand that my manner of speaking in the text is not intended to commit me to the existence of colours and shapes over and above coloured and shaped particulars.

resemble a triangular particular is a degree to which a carmine particular can resemble a coloured particular (for, let us assume for the sake of example, triangular particulars must be coloured). But the minimum degree to which a carmine particular can resemble a triangular particular is degree 0, and so the minimum degree to which a carmine particular can resemble a coloured particular is degree 0. Let C* be the colour (or one of the colours) of the particulars that a carmine particular can resemble to degree 0. Then the minimum degree to which a carmine particular can resemble a C*-particular is not greater than the minimum degree to which a carmine particular can resemble a triangular particular. Therefore, carmine does not resemble C* more than it resembles triangularity. And since carmine does not resemble triangularity at all, carmine does not resemble C* at all. So there is at least one colour carmine does not resemble at all.[9]

Fair enough, but I think this is no problem at all, since I find the idea that determinates of the same highest determinable must resemble each other utterly implausible. Indeed, some black particulars do not resemble at all some white particulars, and some green particulars do not resemble at all some red particulars; similarly some triangular particulars do not resemble at all some 'New Zealand'-shaped particulars (indeed some triangles do not resemble at all the territory known as New Zealand).[10] Thus it seems to me that black and white, and red and green, do not resemble each other. Similarly for triangularity and the 'New Zealand shape'.[11] (Nothing here entails that determinables cannot be accounted for in terms of resemblances between particulars – but that is a story for a different time).

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[9] That is, strictly speaking, there is a true sentence stating that there is at least one colour that carmine does not resemble at all, but this sentence is made true by facts of resemblance between carmine and C*-particulars. Again, I should not be interpreted as committing myself to the existence of colours over and above coloured particulars.

[10] It should also be noted that *coloured* and *shaped* are determinables and determinables are not sparse properties since sparse properties are enough 'to characterize things completely and without redundancy' (Lewis 1986: 60), and therefore it is not a legitimate objection to say that black and white particulars resemble in being coloured or that triangles and New Zealand resemble in being shaped. Furthermore, the notion of resemblance my Resemblance Nominalism uses was explicitly introduced to account for lowest determinate properties (2002: 48–50).

[11] Again, strictly speaking, what I am saying is that it seems to me that the sentence stating that black and white do not resemble each other is true. A similar comment applies to the case of triangularity and the 'New Zealand' shape.

3. I accounted for (2) in terms of (2') (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002: 92):

(2) Scarlet is a colour.

(2') Any scarlet particular is coloured in virtue of being scarlet.[12]

Yi´s objection to this account is that there are sentences of the same form as (2) but such that accounting for them in the way I accounted for (2) would deliver false sentences. From Yi's examples one infers that he takes (2) to have the form: abstract noun + copula + predicative expression (with the exception of his sentence (9)). But sentences having the same or similar grammatical form need not have the same truthmakers. A simple example: 'Socrates exists' and 'Socrates speaks' have the same grammatical form but it is standard to take them to have truthmakers of different kinds: Socrates is the truthmaker of 'Socrates exists' and, say, the fact that Socrates speaks is the truthmaker of 'Socrates speaks'. Thus Yi's objection is based on a false presupposition. Furthermore, sentence (2) classifies a determinate under a determinable, and the account I gave of (2) was meant to generalize only to other sentences classifying a determinate under a determinable. And, indeed, it is a very plausible account for that case, even if one is not a nominalist, for philosophers of all persuasions maintain that having a determinate is the truthmaker or the ground of having a determinable (cf. Audi 2012: 108, Rosen 2010: 126–27). So the fact that the account does not generalize to other predications having abstract nouns as subjects is no objection to the account.

However, as I said in Section 1, I shall argue that one can account in a nominalistic way for the truthmakers of the sentences proposed by Yi. Consider his sentence 6:

(6) Courage is a virtue.

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[12] In (2') the quantifier must range over *possibilia*, since if it does not, in a situation in which there are no scarlet particulars, (2') is only vacuously true, and therefore it does not express what makes (2) true. Similar comments apply to similar sentences below.

Courage does not stand to virtue as determinate to determinable since the different virtues are not mutually exclusive as different determinates of the same determinable are supposed to be. Furthermore, a courageous person is not thereby virtuous *tout court*, which is why the extension of my account of (2) to this case fails. But although possessing courage does not ensure being virtuous *tout court*, possessing courage makes one *partially* virtuous. Thus, what makes (6) true is (6'):

(6') Any courageous person is partially virtuous at least partly in virtue of being courageous.[13]

Another sentence proposed by Yi is (7):

(7) Wisdom is an abstractum.

But there is no need to give the truthmakers of (7) since the sentences the resemblance nominalist needs to account for are those that are plausibly true independently of any metaphysical theory of properties. (6) is one such sentence. But (7) is not, since it presupposes the existence of properties as abstract *entities* and so it is plausible only on a certain kind of realist theory of properties. Another sentence proposed by Yi is:

(8) Scarlet is beautiful.

It is unclear whether (8) is true. Indeed, I can see no plausibility in it. Are all colours beautiful? And shapes? Which shapes are beautiful and which ones are not? But let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that (8) is true. Then one can say that what makes it true is:

(8') Any beautiful scarlet particular is beautiful partly in virtue of being scarlet.

This does not mean, of course, that every scarlet particular is beautiful. It does not mean either that every scarlet particular is partially beautiful. It means that, although being scarlet does not ensure beauty, it can

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[13] I am grateful to an anonymous referee for this suggestion, which improves upon a previous suggestion of mine.

contribute to it, provided other factors are present. For beauty has to do with the harmonious combination of different sensible qualities.

The next sentence considered by Yi is:

(9) Euclid is interested in triangularity.

What makes (9) true is that Euclid is interested in some truths expressed by English sentences of the form 'necessarily x is triangular if and only if ...', 'necessarily x is a triangle if …', 'necessarily, if x is a triangle, then …', and so on. Exactly which truths of this kind he must be interested in for (9) to be true I cannot say. But this consideration should suffice to make clear that (9) can have truthmakers that are consistent with Resemblance Nominalism.

Finally, Yi considers (10) and (10'):

(10) Triangularity is triangular.

(10') Any triangular particular is triangular in virtue of being triangular.

Yi thinks that (10) stands to (10') as (2) stands to (2'), and he thinks that (10) is false, although (10') is true. He takes this to indicate that (2') does not express what makes (2) true.

To reply to Yi I prefer to use examples in terms of scarlet rather than triangularity, since I think this facilitates comparison with sentences (2) and (2'). Thus expressed, Yi's point is that since (11) stands to (11') as (2) stands to (2'), and (11) is false while (11') is true, (2') cannot be what makes (2) true:

(11) Scarlet is scarlet.

(11') Any scarlet particular is scarlet in virtue of being scarlet.

Note that (11) should be read as a predication and not as an identity statement, since otherwise the analogy between (10) and (11) is lost. Thus the second occurrence of 'scarlet' in (11) is an adjective, not a noun. Indeed taking the second occurrence of 'scarlet' as a noun not only

breaks the analogy with (10), but it does not bring (11) closer to (2) either, since such a reading would make (11) an identity statement, which (2) clearly is not. Note that this indicates an important difference between (11) and (2). For while (11) purports to tell us *how* scarlet is, (2) tells us *what* scarlet is.

There are two problems with Yi's argument, both of them originating in a disanalogy between (11') and (2'). Firstly, while (2') has the form 'Any F-particular is G in virtue of being F', (11') has the form 'Any F-particular is F in virtue of being F'. And it is plausible that the facts expressed by sentences of (2')'s form make true sentences of the form 'F-ness is a G' if F-ness is a determinate of G-ness (as in (2)). But this gives us no reason to think that the facts expressed by sentences of (11')'s form make true sentences of the form 'F-ness is F' (as in (11)). That is, a commitment to (2')'s expressing what makes (2) true gives us no reason to think that (11') expresses what makes (11) true.

Yi needs to show that there is a true sentence of the form 'Any F-particular is G in virtue of being F', where F-ness is a determinate and G-ness a determinable, but the corresponding sentence 'F-ness is a G' or 'F-ness is G' is false. He has not shown that, and I do not see that he could possibly do it.

Secondly, there is another reason why (2') and (11') are not analogous. For while (2') is accepted by the resemblance nominalist, (11') is rejected by the resemblance nominalist. For the resemblance nominalist maintains that what makes scarlet particulars scarlet is that they resemble other scarlet particulars (roughly, since this is an approximation to the full story as told in my book, a story that involves *possibilia* and higher order pairs; but this suffices for the purposes of the point). So instead of (11'), what the resemblance nominalist asserts is (12'):

(12') Any scarlet particular is scarlet in virtue of resembling the scarlet particulars.

And (12'), by the way, has a different form from (11')'s. (12')'s form is something like this: 'Any F-particular is F in virtue of bearing R to the F-particulars'. But if (11') is rejected by the resemblance nominalist, the fact that (11) is false is no reason for the resemblance nominalist to think

that (2') cannot express what makes (2) true.

4. Thus, I have retracted my original account of the truthmakers of (1) and proposed a new one. I have argued that there is no reason, as far as Yi's case is concerned, to reject my original account of the truthmaker of (2). I have also proposed an account of the other sentences Yi considers. But this does not mean that there might not be other difficult sentences to account for, or that there might not be further difficulties with the accounts I have provided here. My remarks here have a programmatic character and they do not intend to establish that Resemblance Nominalism can account for all cases involving abstract nouns, but they are simply intended to show that Yi's objection can be met.

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