

Paradigms and Russell's Resemblance Regress

Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra

Hertford College, Oxford

gonzalo.rodriguez-pereyra@philosophy.ox.ac.uk

Resemblance Nominalism is the view that denies universals and tropes and claims that what makes F-things F is their resemblances. A famous argument against Resemblance Nominalism is Russell's regress of resemblances, according to which the resemblance nominalist falls into a vicious infinite regress. Aristocratic Resemblance Nominalism, as opposed to Egalitarian Resemblance Nominalism, is the version of Resemblance Nominalism that claims that what makes F-things F is that they resemble the F-paradigms. In this paper I attempt to show that a recently advocated strategy to stop Russell's regress by using paradigms does not succeed.

1. Resemblance Nominalism is a metaphysical or ontological theory that denies the existence of universals and affirms the existence of particulars other than tropes. I shall use the word 'property' in a neutral way, not as meaning a universal or a trope, but in such a way that when I say that something has a property all I mean is that the thing is somehow, i.e. it is white, or green, or square, or hot, etc. Then what Resemblance Nominalism says is that what makes things have their properties is their resemblance to other things.

There are two ways in which Resemblance Nominalism can be developed. One can say that resemblances to all white things make white things white. Or one can say that resemblances to certain privileged white things make white things white. These privileged things are called 'paradigms'. Paradigms are supposed to 'hold a class together' [Price 1953: 21–22]. Less metaphorically, the function of the F-paradigms is to collect, through resemblance relations, all and only F-things.

I call the version of Resemblance Nominalism that invokes paradigms *Aristocratic Resemblance Nominalism*, and I call the version of Resemblance Nominalism that does not use paradigms *Egalitarian Resemblance Nominalism*. H. H. Price articulated a version of Aristocratic Resemblance Nominalism, though it is not clear to what degree he endorsed it, and Carnap at one time endorsed a version of Egalitarian Resemblance Nominalism [Price 1953, Carnap 1967]. I myself favour

Egalitarian Resemblance Nominalism. This is for two reasons: (a) I have not seen any satisfactory conception of paradigms and (b) I have not seen a good reason why Resemblance Nominalists ought to postulate paradigms [Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002: 127–141].

One traditional problem faced by Resemblance Nominalism is Russell's resemblance regress [Russell 1997: 48]. The regress is as follows. Consider the white things. According to the Resemblance Nominalist what makes them white is that they resemble each other, or that they resemble the white paradigms. But what makes their resemblances resemblances cannot be, according to the Resemblance Nominalist, that they all share a universal of resemblance but it must be that they resemble each other, or that they resemble a resemblance paradigm. So there are second order resemblances, namely the resemblances between resemblances between white things. But what makes these second order resemblances second order resemblances cannot be sharing a universal but it must be that they resemble each other, or that they resemble a second order resemblance paradigm. So there are third order resemblances, and so on. The regress arises because each level of the regress is a product of the application of the Resemblance Nominalist account to the preceding level. The regress is said to be vicious because it prevents Resemblance Nominalism from completing its account of what makes white things white in terms of resemblances.

I have argued that there is no such regress, and that there is no explanatory deficiency in Resemblance Nominalism. What makes it true that *a* and *b* are both white is that they resemble each other but this does not mean that there is an extra entity, the resemblance between *a* and *b*. What makes *a* and *b* resemble each other? Simply *a* and *b*. So if there are resembling particulars but no resemblances there is no regress of resemblances [Rodriguez-Pereyra 2001: 403; Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002: 115].

In a recent paper James Cargile claims that paradigms help Resemblance Nominalism avoid Russell's regress and that without paradigms the regress is inescapable [Cargile 2003: 557–8]. As I have indicated, Resemblance Nominalism can avoid the regress by refusing to reify resemblances, and this need not involve postulating paradigms, so it is not the case that without paradigms the regress is inescapable. But this leaves untouched the claim that by invoking paradigms

Resemblance Nominalism can avoid the regress. It is this interesting claim that I shall examine here.

2. How are paradigms supposed to avoid Russell's regress? According to Cargile an appeal to paradigms 'steadily reduces the number of items in the resemblance relations invoked, or else pools the original relata in one final relation' [Cargile 2003: 557–8].

By the latter Cargile means that all n white things, for example, stand in an n -place relation. Although Cargile is not explicit on this, this n -place relation is a resemblance relation. Otherwise it is not clear that the resulting nominalism is *Resemblance* Nominalism.

The view that resemblance has an adicity greater than 2, whether the adicity in question is fixed or variable, has been proposed [Hausman 1979; Lewis 1997: 193] and criticized [Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002: 80–1] before. But what matters here is that if Resemblance Nominalism avoids the regress by taking the n white things to n -place-resemble each other, then the regress is avoided not because of paradigms but because there are no different resemblances holding between the different white things and so there is no need to bring in other resemblances to account for what makes many different resemblances between white things resemblances between white things.

True, one could still postulate paradigms: the n -place resemblance relation would relate them as well as non-paradigms. But, apart from not being clear what reason one may have to postulate paradigms in such a case, the point is that paradigms would play no role in avoiding the regress. The regress would have been avoided merely because of there being a single resemblance relation relating all white things.

3. To see the role of paradigms in reference to the regress we need to focus on Cargile's claim that they steadily reduce the number of resemblances. The idea is that paradigms successively reduce the number of resemblances at each level in the regress until only one resemblance is left. Thus paradigms would make Russell's regress finite.

How does Cargile do this? By taking into consideration only the resemblances between non-paradigms and paradigms. To simplify imagine a case in which there are three white things. One of these things, let it be a , is the white paradigm. The other two,

b and c , resemble the white paradigm a . This gives us two resemblances, the resemblance between a and b and the resemblance between a and c . But these are not resemblances in virtue of sharing a universal of resemblance but in virtue of resembling a paradigm of resemblance between white things. One of them, say the resemblance between a and b , is the paradigm of resemblance between white things and the other, the resemblance between a and c , is a resemblance in virtue of resembling the resemblance between a and b . There is then a further resemblance, that between the resemblance between a and b and the resemblance between a and c . But this is the only second order resemblance in this situation. So there are no other second order resemblances such that a third order resemblance between them is needed to account for what makes them resemblances. The regress is thereby stopped.

4. There are several problems with this strategy. First, as Cargile recognizes, it works only if there is a finite number of white things. Cargile thinks the Resemblance Nominalist is justified in assuming a finite number of white things because these are as many white things as the Resemblance Nominalist can be forced to accept [Cargile 2003: 554]. But even if Resemblance Nominalists need accept only finitely many white things, making this assumption in order to stop the regress makes Resemblance Nominalism hostage to the truth of the as yet unproven proposition that there are only finitely many white things.

Furthermore, it is unclear that the Resemblance Nominalist needs to accept only finitely many white things, for due to the problem of coextensive properties, the Resemblance Nominalist has to accept an ontology of *possibilia* that will, in all likelihood, contain infinitely many white things [see Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002: 99–100].

5. Another problem is that, even if we assume a finite number of white things, the strategy does not work. For considering only the resemblances between non-paradigms and paradigms at a given level does not reduce the number of resemblances at the next level.

To see this consider again the case of the three white things, a , b and c . Even if what makes b and c white is resembling the white paradigm a , since b and c are white,

they resemble each other, and so we have three first order resemblances: that between *a* and *b*, that between *a* and *c* and that between *b* and *c*. The same happens at the next level: even if what makes the latter two resemblances first order resemblances is that they resemble the resemblance between *a* and *b*, being first order resemblances the resemblances between *a* and *c* and between *b* and *c* resemble each other and so we have three second order resemblances, and so on.

I am not convinced by Cargile's response to this problem. He says that perhaps *b* resembles *c*, perhaps not. He links this with 'the shaky transitivity of resemblance'. And he says that *at most* Resemblance Nominalism needs only the resemblances between *a* and *b* and between *a* and *c* [Cargile 2003: 555].

I find two problems with this response. First, if *b* and *c* are white, then they resemble each other. Each of them *may* resemble *a* to a different degree than the other does. But if both are white, they must resemble each other to some degree or other. And since both resemble the white paradigm *a*, and what makes anything white is resembling the white paradigm, they do resemble each other. So it is not that perhaps *b* resembles *c*, perhaps not: it does.

Second, it is true that in one sense the Aristocratic Resemblance Nominalist on whose behalf Cargile speaks needs only the resemblances between non-paradigms and paradigms. It is these resemblances, and these resemblances only, that on that theory account for what makes something white. But that these are the only resemblances such Resemblance Nominalist needs is irrelevant. For, as we have just seen, this does not mean the non-paradigms do not resemble each other. On the contrary, they do. But then Cargile's Resemblance Nominalist has a third resemblance, the resemblance between *b* and *c*, alongside the resemblances between *a* and *b* and between *a* and *c*, and he needs to account for what makes these three resemblances resemblances between white things. He can select only one as a paradigm, say the resemblance between *a* and *b*, and say that what makes the resemblances between *a* and *c* and between *b* and *c* resemblances is that they resemble the resemblance between *a* and *b*. But although he is here using two resemblances between resemblances, there are three resemblances between resemblances, for the resemblances between *a* and *c* and between *b* and *c* resemble each other. And now he has to account for what makes these three second order

resemblances second order resemblances. The same thing occurs every time he accounts for what makes resemblances of the *nth* level such resemblances. So he is embarked on an infinite regress.

6. A further problem is that Cargile's paradigms cannot do the work they are supposed to do, namely to collect all and only F-things. Cargile's examples involve a single paradigm. But a single paradigm cannot collect all and only the things it is supposed to collect. To see this consider the white paradigm. If it collects white things because they resemble it, it also collects non-white things, for many of these also resemble it. This is because the white paradigm will have other properties apart from being white. Let us imagine it is white and square. But then the white paradigm will wrongly collect black and square things, for these resemble it as much as white and round things do. Such a paradigm does not collect all and only white things.

Of course the Resemblance Nominalist cannot solve this problem by saying that white things are those that resemble the white paradigm in respect of being white. But a satisfactory conception of paradigms must be provided before they can be used to stop the regress in a finite number of steps.

7. But perhaps a group of paradigms will do? For instance, Price thought that there are more than one paradigms and that non-paradigms resemble the paradigms at least as closely as the paradigms resemble each other. But this conception of paradigms does not work because, as stated, it does not ensure that the F-paradigms collect only F-things [Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002: 128–131].

But what I want to note here is that even if this conception of paradigms worked, it would be of no help to Cargile's Resemblance Nominalist. Thus imagine four white things, *a*, *b*, *c* and *d*. Let *a* and *b* be the white paradigms. Since *c* and *d* are white, each of them resembles *a* and *b* at least as closely as these two resemble each other. But then there are four resemblances: the resemblance between *a* and *c*, the resemblance between *a* and *d*, the resemblance between *b* and *c* and the resemblance between *b* and *d*. Let two of these resemblances be paradigms of resemblance. The other two will be resemblances because of resembling the two paradigms at least as

closely as the paradigms resemble each other. But this will produce four second order resemblances. Letting two of those be paradigms of second order resemblance and the other two resemble them produces four third order resemblances, and so on. In this case the regress continues to infinity.

There are other conceptions of paradigms. But I need not go to see whether they enable one to stop the regress. For these conceptions are also defective [Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002: 131–39]. My point here is simply that before we can use any conception of paradigms to stop the regress we must make sure (a) that there are such paradigms for all properties and (b) that such F-paradigms collect all and only F-things. Merely developing such a conception of paradigms does not show that the version of Aristocratic Resemblance Nominalism in question is superior to the versions of Egalitarian Resemblance Nominalism that deal with the regress satisfactorily. But satisfying (a) and (b) is a necessary condition to any attempt to show that paradigms can be used to stop Russell's regress.

8. Nothing here shows that there is no conception of paradigms that Cargile may use to stop Russell's regress in a finite number of steps. But even if such conception of paradigms were found it would be of no use to the Resemblance Nominalist. For Cargile's strategy is at odds with the ontology of Resemblance Nominalism. Cargile is aware that the Resemblance Nominalist should avoid viewing a resemblance relation as 'a kind of entity in itself' [Cargile 2003: 557]. That is, resemblances should not be reified. But Cargile's strategy involves reifying resemblances, since it takes resemblances as terms of higher order resemblance relations. But if resemblances are entities, they must be particulars, for there are no other entities in the ontology of Resemblance Nominalism. But if a particular, the resemblance between a and b is not a particular like a or b . If a particular, the resemblance between a and b is of a kind with the whiteness of a . But if a particular at all, the whiteness of a is a trope, not an ordinary particular like a . But Resemblance Nominalism admits no tropes, whether intrinsic or relational. Thus Resemblance Nominalism cannot treat resemblances as entities and so it cannot take them to resemble each other.

9. Given the problems identified above, I conclude that it has not been shown that paradigms help Resemblance Nominalists in dealing with Russell's regress.

Hertford College, Oxford

References

- Armstrong, D. M. 1978. *Universals and Scientific Realism*. Vol. 1: *Nominalism and Realism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cargile, J. 2003. On Russell's Argument against Resemblance Nominalism, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 81: 549–560.
- Carnap, R. 1967. *The Logical Structure of The World* (translated by Rolf George), London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Hausman, A. 1979. Goodman's Perfect Communities, *Synthese* 41: 185–237.
- Lewis, D. K. 1997. 'New Work for a Theory of Universals', in *Properties*, ed. D. H. Mellor and A. Oliver, Oxford: Oxford University Press: 188–227.
- Price, H. H. 1953. *Thinking and Experience*, London: Hutchinson's University Library.
- Raphael, D. D. 1955. Universals, Resemblances and Identity, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 55: 109–32.
- Rodriguez-Pereyra, G. 2001. Resemblance Nominalism and Russell's Regress, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 79: 395–408.
- Rodriguez-Pereyra, G. 2002. *Resemblance Nominalism*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Russell, B. 1997. 'The World of Universals', in *Properties*, ed. D. H. Mellor and A. Oliver, Oxford: Oxford University Press: 45–50.