September 28, 2023

Week 5. Nominalism I: Abstraction, Universals, and Ones-in-Many

Plan:

I. Abstraction:

a) What is abstraction?
   i. Frege's example: directions of lines.
   ii. Equivalence relations: reflexive, symmetric, and transitive.
   iii. Treating equivalences as identities by licensing intersubstitution of new terms.

b) Abstractions and Sets:
   Are all entities introduced by abstraction sets (equivalence classes)?

c) Abstractness/concreteness is relative.
   Are material objects absolutely concrete? Are abstract objects causally inert?

d) Abstraction introduces new terms (singular and sortal) on the basis of old ones.
   Does it introduce a new kind of *object* (abstract entities), about which skepticism is in order?
   Compare: Introducing theoretical terms by their inferential relations to observational terms does not induce an ontological difference.

II. Universals and Metalinguistic Nominalism:

a) Medieval and recent nominalisms.

b) Carnap's metalinguistic approach and two problems with it:
   i. Claims about universals don't mention language—shown by translation issues.
   ii. Still invoke *linguistic* universals or properties, e.g. 'predicate'.

c) Ground-clearing in GE. Two bad arguments for universals:
   i. Predicate quantification, and
   ii. Semantics of predicates.

d) Sellars's response to (b-i) is a new form of quotation: dot-quotes, using the illustrating sign-design principle.

e) Sellars's response to (b-ii) is a kind of *one-in-many* that is not a *universal*: distributive singular terms (DSTs).

III. Conclusion: Sellars's Nominalization Nominalism:

a) Sellars objects to nominalizing other parts of speech: forming singular terms from predicates and sortals, as in 'triangularity' and 'lionhood'.

b) When does introducing new vocabulary on the basis of old vocabulary have ontological consequences?

c) Sellars's answer: When the method of introduction is *essentially metalinguistic*, that blocks reference by the new terms to anything that is real or in the world "in the narrow sense."

d) It is not clear that this stricture applies to all terms introduced by abstraction.