

## *Resemblance Nominalism and counterparts*

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### *1. Introduction*

In his (2002) Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra provides a powerful articulation of the claim that Resemblance Nominalism provides the best answer to the so-called Problem of Universals. Resemblance Nominalism has not been popular for some time, and one influential reason for this is the widespread belief that Resemblance Nominalism cannot dispense with all universals. The realist critics appeal to what is known as Russell's Regress (cf. Russell 1997). If properties are to be explained in terms of one object's resembling another, then this seems to leave the relational property of resemblance itself unexplained. The critics' objection is that this property itself must be explained by a dyadic universal of resemblance.

Rodriguez-Pereyra believes he has answer to this problem. His version of Resemblance Nominalism employs the full Lewisian panoply of modal realism with counterparts. While some might wonder whether the ontological benefits of nominalism outweigh the ontological costs of full modal realism, it seems fair to judge the combined view (nominalism plus modal realism) by its fruits in solving important philosophical problems. If indeed this view can avoid the above criticism and can explain what makes it true that *a* resembles *b* without positing a universal of resemblance, then that would be much to its credit.<sup>1</sup> If, on the contrary, it cannot achieve this, and nominalism is saddled with at least one universal, then it would seem that the benefits of nominalism are not so great after all. In what follows I shall argue that Rodriguez-Pereyra's treatment of the problem fails to show that nominalism can eschew all universals.

### *2. The alleged solution*

Rodriguez-Pereyra treats the problem in terms of truthmakers. Propositions of the form '*x* is *F*' are to be analysed in terms of propositions of the form '*a* resembles *b*'. The critics' challenge is that when we ask what makes propositions of the latter form true, there is no satisfactory answer that the nominalist can give that does not appeal to a universal of resemblance. It would appear that the truthmaker must involve at least *a*, *b*, and the resemblance relation.

<sup>1</sup> For simplicity I will treat 'resembles' as symmetric (i.e. *a* resembles *b*  $\equiv$  *a* and *b* resemble each other).

Rodriguez-Pereyra's response is that  $a$  and  $b$  are themselves sufficient truthmakers for the proposition. He employs the following truthmaker principle (2002: 39):

- (T) If  $E_1, \dots, E_n$  are joint truthmakers of 'S' then ' $E_1$  exists & ... &  $E_n$  exists' entails 'S'.

Let us assume that it is true in a world  $w$  that  $a$  resembles  $b$ . In this case (T) requires:

- (T1) If  $a$  and  $b$  are joint truthmakers of ' $a$  resembles  $b$ ' then ' $a$  exists &  $b$  exists' entails ' $a$  resembles  $b$ '.

Since he says that  $a$  and  $b$  are themselves (jointly) sufficient truthmakers, Rodriguez-Pereyra is committed to the following:

- (E) ' $a$  exists &  $b$  exists' entails ' $a$  resembles  $b$ '.

The critics' challenge is that (E) is clearly false. We need at least an additional entity, a universal, on the left-hand side of the entailment. It is at this point that Rodriguez-Pereyra brings Counterpart Theory into play (cf. Lewis 1968, 1986: 192–220). According to Counterpart Theory particulars only ever exist at one possible world. David Beckham exists only in this world. In other worlds there are individuals that are very like David Beckham. But they are not identical to David Beckham. Rather they are (at best) his counterparts. Now let us see how this allows  $a$  and  $b$  to be sufficient truthmakers on their own for ' $a$  resembles  $b$ '. (The following argument I will call the 'Counterpart Argument'.) For (E) to be true the consequent proposition must be true in every possible world where the antecedent proposition is true. That is ' $a$  resembles  $b$ ' must be true in all worlds where  $a$  and  $b$  exist. As we have seen, according to Counterpart Theory  $a$  and  $b$  exist only at one possible world (viz.  $w$ ). So, whether (E) is true is just a matter of whether ' $a$  resembles  $b$ ' is true of  $w$ , which it is. As Rodriguez-Pereyra writes: 'if  $a$  and  $b$  exist only in one possible world and they resemble each other there, then " $a$  exists and  $b$  exists" *does* entail " $a$  and  $b$  resemble each other"', for then the former cannot be true and the latter false' (2002: 116). Consequently, Counterpart Theory allows it to be the case that if it is true that  $a$  resembles  $b$  then the existence of  $a$  and  $b$  may indeed be jointly sufficient truthmakers for ' $a$  resembles  $b$ '. And so Rodriguez-Pereyra can say 'the Resemblance Nominalist can perfectly well maintain that the truthmakers of a sentence like " $a$  and  $b$  resemble each other" are just  $a$  and  $b$  without abandoning the entailment between " $a$  exists and  $b$  exists" and " $a$  and  $b$  resemble each other" required by (T).'

### 3. *The problem with the alleged solution*

The Counterpart Argument seems to provide a clever solution to the challenge presented to the nominalist. Unfortunately it proves too

much. Let us look again at (E) and why Counterpart Theory seems to make it true:

(E) 'a exists & b exists' entails 'a resembles b'.

This, claims Rodriguez-Pereyra, is true, so long as *a* does resemble *b*, because Counterpart Theory, in effect, restricts the required consideration of possible worlds to just one world, the unique world where *a* and *b* exist. If at *w* '*a* resembles *b*' is true then *a* and *b* exist at *w* and so, at the unique world where *a* and *b* exist, '*a* resembles *b*' is true. Thus, almost trivially, in all worlds where *a* and *b* exist it is true that *a* resembles *b*. But, if this is right, the very same restriction to consideration of a single world means that *any* true proposition concerning a particular will entail *all* true propositions. Consider:

(E1) 'David Beckham plays for Manchester United' entails 'Snow is white'.

The same reasoning employed above makes (E1) true. According to Counterpart Theory David Beckham exists just at the actual world. So the only world at which the antecedent of (E1) is true is the actual world. Hence the consequent of (E1) is true in all worlds where the antecedent is true if the consequent is true at the actual world. Which it is. This proof of (E1) depends on no relationship between the antecedent and consequent of (E1) at all. All that is required is that the consequent be true and the antecedent refer to a particular. We can go further by noting that it is not even required for this that the antecedent proposition be true. Even a false antecedent proposition that refers to a particular that exists at the world where the consequent proposition is true will suffice for the truth of an entailment like (E1). Hence:

(E2) 'David Beckham plays for Bayern München' entails 'Snow is white'.

will come out true, trivially, because there is no world in which David Beckham plays for Bayern München (since David Beckham exists only at the actual world and he does not play for Bayern München). For the same reason the following will be true:

(E3) 'David Beckham plays for Bayern München' entails 'Snow is black'.

In general, if Rodriguez-Pereyra's use of Counterpart Theory were admissible, the following would hold:

(EGen1) For any 'F' and 'S', if for some possible world *w* *a* exists at *w* and 'S' is true at *w* then: 'Fa' entails 'S'.

(EGen2) For any 'F' and 'S', if for some possible world *w* *a* exists at *w* and 'Fa' is false at *w* then: 'Fa' entails 'S'.

The absurdity of (E1)–(E3), (EGen1), and (EGen2) should be enough to show that something is badly wrong with Rodriguez-Pereyra's Counterpart Argument and that (E) is just as absurd as (E1)–(E3) etc. In which case Rodriguez-Pereyra has failed to show that the mere existence of *a* and *b* might be a jointly sufficient truthmaker for '*a* resembles *b*' and the critics' challenge still stands.

#### 4. *Biting the bullet?*

It is instructive to see why it won't avail much for Rodriguez-Pereyra to bite the bullet and insist that (E) is true, and that (E1)–(E3), (EGen1), and (EGen2) are thus true also. Some truthmaker theorists accept the following (Bigelow 1988: 126; Oliver 1996: 69; cf. Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002: 29):

(X) Entity E is a truthmaker of 'S' if and only if 'E exists' entails 'S'.

Rodriguez-Pereyra rejects (X) because it makes any entity the truthmaker for any necessary truth S (2002: 33–34). But given the Counterpart Argument he has even greater reason for rejecting (X). For (EGen1) means that for any entity E and *any* truth S, 'E exists' entails 'S'. Hence (X) would mean that any entity is a truthmaker for any truth. Which trivializes the idea of truthmakers.

Since Rodriguez-Pereyra rejects (X) he does not have to face this consequence. But that rejection means that (X) is unavailable as a characterisation of truthmaking. Instead he adopts (2002: 34):

(Y) Entity E is a truthmaker of 'S' if and only if E is an entity in virtue of which 'S' is true.

The problem with this is that the phrase 'in virtue of which' is imprecise. However, Rodriguez-Pereyra does retain from (X) the left to right implication, and this is what gives us, when generalized for joint truthmakers, (T), which we have already seen:

(T) If  $E_1, \dots, E_n$  are joint truthmakers of 'S' then ' $E_1$  exists & ... &  $E_n$  exists' entails 'S'.

Since (T) is only a necessary condition on truthmaking, satisfaction of the entailment does not guarantee that  $E_1, \dots, E_n$  are joint truthmakers of 'S'. For this reason, even if we were to accept such an entailment, as in (E), that would not show that *a* and *b* are truthmakers of '*a* resembles *b*'. So Rodriguez-Pereyra's argument, even if sound, does not establish the truth of his claim concerning the truthmaker for truths of resemblance. Rather at best it can only block the critics' use of (T) to show that *a* and *b* are *not* enough to be joint truthmakers of '*a* resembles *b*'. Even so, if (T) is an important truth concerning truthmaking, that result might be seen as an impressive enough result in favour of Resemblance Nominalism.

But is (T) an important truth concerning truthmaking? Given the Counterpart Argument it surely is not. As we have seen, a corollary of the Counterpart Argument is that any entity's existence entails any true proposition. So the consequent of (T) (' $E_1$  exists & ... &  $E_n$  exists' entails 'S') is trivially easy to satisfy. In which case (T) itself is trivially easy to satisfy. That in turn means that a debate concerning the truthmakers for ' $a$  resembles  $b$ ' cannot reasonably be expected to turn on (T). That is to say, given the Counterpart Argument, the critics would be ill-advised to frame their truthmaking-related criticism in terms of a claim, (T), whose truth has little or nothing to do with truthmakers. Rather we should turn our attention to (Y), which according to Rodriguez-Pereyra really is at the heart of the truthmaker idea. Now the critics' accusation is that it is *false* that  $a$  and  $b$  are, on their own, entities in virtue of which ' $a$  resembles  $b$ '. In the light of our discussion this 'in virtue of which' has to be a very thick notion. It has to be *more* than entailment. (If it were not, then (Y) would collapse into the rejected (X)). Now in the absence of any clear indication of what 'in virtue of' means, it is difficult definitively to assess the pertinent assertions. But the intuition, I suggest, is clearly on the side of critics here. With a thick notion of 'in virtue of', it cannot be that ' $a$  resembles  $b$ ' in virtue of the existence of  $a$  and  $b$  *alone*. Surely something extra is required, such as a property that is shared by  $a$  and  $b$ , or their resembling one another. Put another way, if as Rodriguez-Pereyra maintains (X) and (Y) are distinct claims, the fact that the existence of  $a$  and  $b$  entails ' $a$  resembles  $b$ ' is insufficient to establish that ' $a$  resembles  $b$ ' in virtue of the existence of  $a$  and  $b$  alone. And no reason has been given to think that the 'in virtue of' claim is true and that the critics are mistaken in their intuition that it is false.

To reinforce the last point, note Rodriguez-Pereyra's response to the hypothetical philosopher who invokes Counterpart Theory to support Ostrich Nominalism. Ostrich Nominalism takes  $a$  alone to be the truthmaker for sentences such as ' $a$  is F' and ' $a$  has the property F'. Since Rodriguez-Pereyra takes the Problem of Universals to be a matter of providing truthmakers for such sentences, Ostrich Nominalism would, if true, provide a satisfactory solution to the problem. Rodriguez-Pereyra accepts that under Counterpart Theory, if  $Fa$  is true,  $a$  exists entails  $Fa$ : 'Counterpart theorists ... believe that "Socrates exists" is true in only one possible world and so "Socrates exists" does entail the truth of "Socrates is white".' (2002: 44). Rodriguez-Pereyra goes on: 'But Counterpart Theory provides no reason to make Socrates the truthmaker of "Socrates is white", unless one assumes that entailment is sufficient for truthmaking.' And, as we have seen, Rodriguez-Pereyra rejects the view that entailment is sufficient for truthmaking. But by the same token, the fact that the existence of  $a$  and  $b$  entails ' $a$  resembles  $b$ ' is not enough to establish that  $a$  and  $b$  are joint truthmakers for ' $a$  resembles  $b$ '. And so we have no more reason to suppose that

Resemblance Nominalism has provided a satisfactory answer to the Problem of Universals than Ostrich Nominalism did.

### 5. *The fallacy*

To help identify the fallacy involved in the Counterpart Argument, I will identify a contradiction to which Rodriguez-Pereyra's position is committed. He notes that some may think that 'if *a* and *b* are the truthmakers of "*a* and *b* resemble each other" then they must necessarily resemble each other' (2002: 116). But, he says, this is a confusion. Let us be clear about what the challenge is. The alleged necessary resemblance of *a* and *b* is not supposed to require that *a* and *b* exist in all possible worlds. Rather the idea is that necessarily, if *a* exists and *b* exists then *a* resembles *b*. So what Rodriguez-Pereyra is denying is:

- (Z) If *a* and *b* are joint truthmakers of '*a* resembles *b*' then necessarily if *a* exists & *b* exists then *a* resembles *b*.

Recall that Rodriguez-Pereyra is committed to:

- (T1) If *a* and *b* are joint truthmakers of '*a* resembles *b*' then '*a* exists & *b* exists' entails '*a* resembles *b*'.

Entailment is identical to necessary implication (strict implication). That is, *p* entails *q* if and only if necessarily *p* implies *q*.<sup>2</sup> Hence (T1) is identical to:

- (T1\*) If *a* and *b* are joint truthmakers of '*a* resembles *b*' then necessarily if *a* exists & *b* exists then *a* resembles *b*.

Rodriguez-Pereyra denies (Z) and is committed to (T1\*). Yet (Z) and (T1\*) are identical. He ought perhaps to accept the necessary resemblance of entities that actually resemble. This might seem obvious given the Counterpart Argument. After all if *a* does resemble *b* then, according to the Counterpart Argument, that resemblance holds in all possible worlds where *a* and *b* exist (i.e. in the unique world where *a* and *b* exist).

But at this point Rodriguez-Pereyra understands necessity in Lewis's way, not as concerning only *a* and *b* but also their counterparts: 'although

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that Rodriguez-Pereyra regards sentences as the relevant truth-bearers and also treats entailment as a relationship between sentences. In which case the equation entailment = necessary implication is not exactly right since implication is usually understood as a propositional rather than sentential operator. In which case the move from entailment to necessary implication requires a minor supplementation to license the semantic descent. Nothing in this discussion hangs on that. The un-supplemented equation could be retained if we take implication to be sentential. Or, preferably, if we treat everything propositionally, in which case the inverted commas in (T), (T1), (E) etc. should be treated not as quotation marks but as an abbreviation for 'the proposition that ...'.

$a$  and  $b$  are the truthmakers of “ $a$  resembles  $b$ ”,  $a$  and  $b$  are not necessarily such that they resemble each other. For on Counterpart Theory this requires that all of  $a$ 's and  $b$ 's counterparts resemble each other, which is surely not the case' (2002: 116).

What Rodriguez-Pereyra has done is to treat the modal concepts of entailment and necessity in different ways. In his treatment of *entailment* Rodriguez-Pereyra considered as significant only the worlds in which  $a$  and  $b$  exist (i.e. only one world) whereas in his treatment of *necessity* Rodriguez-Pereyra considered also the many worlds in which  $a$ 's and  $b$ 's counterparts exist. I.e. he holds:

$$(A) \quad F(a, b) \text{ entails } G(a, b) \text{ iff } \forall w(at\ w, F(a, b) \rightarrow G(a, b))$$

whereas he also says:

$$(B) \quad \text{Necessarily } H(a, b) \text{ iff } \forall w(at\ w, \text{if } H(a\text{'s counterpart, } b\text{'s counterpart}))$$

Clearly (A) and (B) are inconsistent treatments of modal concepts, and a contradiction ensues when we put  $H(a, b) = F(a, b) \rightarrow G(a, b)$ , and employ the identity of entailment and necessary implication (and assume with Counterpart Theory that  $a$  and  $a$ 's counterparts in other worlds are not identical).

Conceivably, Rodriguez-Pereyra might deny that entailment is necessary implication. In effect he might discern two classes of modal concepts, one for which counterparts must be considered (containing concepts such as necessity, and, presumably, counterfactuals) and another for which counterparts are not considered (including entailment). We might wonder what independent justification there is for doing so. But in any case, the realist critics can finesse such a move by restating their position in terms of necessary implication rather than entailment. That is, they can claim that what *they* mean by (T) and (T1) is captured by:

$$(T\uparrow) \quad \text{If } E_1, \dots, E_n \text{ are joint truthmakers of 'S' then necessarily, if } E_1 \text{ exists \& } \dots \text{ \& } E_n \text{ exists then S.}$$

$$(T1\uparrow) \quad \text{If } a \text{ and } b \text{ are joint truthmakers of 'a resembles b' then necessarily, if } a \text{ exists \& } b \text{ exists then } a \text{ resembles } b.$$

Applying (B) to (T1 $\uparrow$ ) gives us:

$$(T1\ddagger) \quad \text{If } a \text{ and } b \text{ are joint truthmakers of 'a resembles b' then necessarily } \forall w(at\ w, \text{if } a\text{'s counterpart exists \& } b\text{'s counterpart exists then } a\text{'s counterpart resembles } b\text{'s counterpart}).$$

And clearly (T1 $\ddagger$ ) is false. So the realist critics can reasonably claim, employing a conception of entailment that is perfectly standard (entailment = necessary implication), that  $a$  and  $b$  cannot be a jointly sufficient truthmaker for ‘ $a$  resembles  $b$ ’.

## 6. Conclusion

Rodriguez-Pereyra claims that if it is true that  $a$  resembles  $b$  then the existence of  $a$  and  $b$  is a jointly sufficient truthmaker for ' $a$  resembles  $b$ '. This enables him to avoid the charge from realist critics that a universal of resemblance is required as part of the truthmaker for ' $a$  resembles  $b$ '. But his claim avoids refutation only on an idiosyncratic view of how entailment should be understood within Counterpart Theory. That understanding renders entailment almost trivial. That triviality means that the connection between entailment and truthmaking is very weak indeed. In which case Rodriguez-Pereyra is in no position to support let alone establish the truth of his truthmaking claim. The critics' argument was that  $a$  and  $b$  are not truthmakers for ' $a$  resembles  $b$ ' because the existence of  $a$  and  $b$  does not entail ' $a$  resembles  $b$ '. Rodriguez-Pereyra's understanding of entailment allows him to reject that argument. But that does nothing to undermine the critics' intuition that ' $a$  resembles  $b$ ' cannot be true merely in virtue of the existence of  $a$  and  $b$ .

Furthermore, the critics are free to exploit Rodriguez-Pereyra's understanding of necessity. Unlike his treatment of entailment, this is perfectly standard as far as Counterpart Theory is concerned. Replacing entailment by necessary implication the critics can rephrase their argument so that it is sound, showing that the existence of  $a$  and  $b$  is not a sufficient truthmaker for ' $a$  resembles  $b$ '. In which case we are still owed an explanation of what it is that makes ' $a$  resembles  $b$ ' true, in addition to the existence of  $a$  and  $b$ . The suspicion, shared with Russell, is that the answer must involve at least one universal.

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