Class Nominalism and Resemblance Nominalism

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**1 Introduction**

I take the Problem of Universals to be the problem of accounting for the truthmakers of predications attributing so-called *sparse* or *natural* properties to particulars (for the distinction between sparse and abundant properties see Lewis 1983, Schaffer 2004 and ch. XX, this volume; for my interpretation of the Problem of Universals as a problem about truthmakers see Rodriguez-Pereyra 2000 and Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002: 14–30). On this interpretation of the problem, theories of universals and theories of tropes make universals and tropes, respectively, part of the truthmakers of predications attributing sparse properties to particulars.

But Class and Resemblance Nominalism reject both universals and tropes. Instead, Class Nominalism identifies sparse properties with *natural* classes (or sets), where being natural is a primitive feature of certain classes. For instance, assuming for simplicity that *being red* is a sparse property, such a property *is* the class of red things according to Class Nominalism. Accordingly, the truthmakers of propositions predicating redness of certain things are the facts that the things in question belong to the class of red things. If a certain apple, call it *a*, is red, the truthmaker of the proposition that *a* is red is the fact that *a* belongs to the class of red things. Philosophers who have expressed sympathy for different versions of Class Nominalism include Anthony Quinton (1957) and David Lewis (1986: 50–53, 1983: 344–51), although neither Quinton nor Lewis adhered to my interpretation of the Problem of Universals.

The central idea of Resemblance Nominalism is that resemblance is basic in the account of commonality of sparse properties. Thus, suppose that *being red* is a sparse property (a supposition I will continue to make hereafter), and that there are two red apples. Resemblance Nominalism says that they are red because they resemble each other, not that they resemble each other because they are red. Resemblance Nominalism can be taken to be the theory that sparse properties are resemblance classes, that is, classes such that their membership conditions can be stated in terms of resemblance. According to Resemblance Nominalism – at least according to the version of Resemblance Nominalism I am now considering – the property of *being red* is the class of red things. Accordingly, the truthmakers of propositions predicating redness of certain things are the facts that the things in question belong to the class of red things. If a certain apple, call it *a*, is red, the truthmaker of the proposition that *a* is red is the fact that *a* belongs to the class of red things, but since the class of red things is a resemblance class, the truthmaker is the fact that *a* resembles certain things and fails to resemble other things. Different versions of Resemblance Nominalism have been held by Carnap (1967) and Rodriguez-Pereyra (2002). There are also philosophers who have felt the attraction of Resemblance Nominalism, without having accepted it; these include H. H. Price (1953) and Quine (1969).[[1]](#footnote-1)

Thus Class Nominalism and Resemblance Nominalism – at least given how I have represented them so far – are akin in that both identify sparse properties with classes. But while in Resemblance Nominalism resemblance plays an essential role in the characterization of such classes and thus in distinguishing the classes properties are from other classes, resemblance plays no such role in Class Nominalism – instead, as I said, what makes natural classes natural is a primitive fact about them. Given the affinity between Class Nominalism and Resemblance Nominalism some suspect, and others think, that they are two formulations of one and the same theory (see Lewis 1983: 348, fn. 9; Guigon 2009: 189, fn. 1; Busse 2016: 693, and Busse 2018: 447–8). Whether they are two formulations of one theory or whether they are two different theories depends both on issues of theory individuation – issues I cannot discuss here – and what versions of Class Nominalism and Resemblance Nominalism one is considering. Thus I shall remain non-committal on this question, but it is clear that even if they are two different theories, there is a considerable affinity between them.

At this point someone might object the nominalistic pedigree of these two theories. For classes are abstract objects, and doesn’t Nominalism consist in the rejection of abstract objects? The answer is that “Nominalism” is an ambiguous word. In one sense it means the rejection of abstract objects. This sense of the word dates back to the 1940s, to the work of Goodman and Quine (1947). In another sense the word means the rejection of universals, and this usage goes back to the Middle Ages. Class Nominalism and Resemblance Nominalism are nominalistic theories in the latter sense. They reject universals. But they don’t need to reject abstract objects. And they don't reject them if, as there is reason to think, classes are abstract objects. As we shall see later, the identification of properties with classes presents a serious problem for Class Nominalism and Resemblance Nominalism, but the problem is not that classes are abstract objects.

Indeed, it has been argued that Resemblance Nominalism need not identify properties with classes, since it need not identify them with anything (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002: 61). This version of Resemblance Nominalism says that what makes true, or grounds, that a certain particular is, say, red, is that it resembles other particulars – but it refuses to identify properties with classes or anything else. This version of Resemblance Nominalism is eliminativist about properties. I used to prefer this version of Resemblance Nominalism (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002: 61). But now I think properties must be accepted in one’s ontology, although they are not classes or sets. Thus, I shall sketch in Section 4 a way in which both Class and Resemblance Nominalism can be developed so that they admit properties without identifying them with classes. If these theories can indeed be developed in this way, they have the resources to cope with a problem that has been thought to be lethal to them, namely the problem of coextensive properties.

**2 Some problems for Class and Resemblance Nominalism**

There are many problems that Class Nominalism and Resemblance Nominalism face. Some of them have to do with the identification of classes and properties, and I shall consider the most important of these below, in Section 4.

Resemblance Nominalism also faces additional problems having to do with taking resemblance as a primitive. For instance, Armstrong has argued that Resemblance Nominalism must take the formal properties of resemblance (reflexivity, symmetry, and non-transitivity) and exact resemblance (reflexivity, symmetry, and transitivity) as primitive, while the Theory of Universals can derive such formal properties from those of *sharing some universal with* and *sharing all universals with* (see Armstrong 1997: 23). It is not clear how forceful this objection is, since every theory will have its own primitive and some features of the primitive will have to be primitive too. Nevertheless, it has been argued that such formal properties of resemblance and exact resemblance can be derived from more basic principles (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002: 72–79).

Another issue having to do with the properties of resemblance is its adicity: does resemblance ever link more than two particulars? The opinions are divided: I argue that this is not the case (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002: 80–81), while Guigon (2009: 29–62) and Busse (2018: 453–54) argue that resemblance can link more than two particulars. The issue is important because if resemblance is “collective”, i.e., if it can link more than two particulars, a very famous problem for Resemblance Nominalism, the so-called Imperfect Community Difficulty, does not really arise. The problem consists in characterizing classes in terms of resemblance that do not apply to classes whose members resemble pairwise but that, intuitively, do not share any property. For instance, the class formed by three things as follows: a yellow, square and hard thing, a yellow, round and soft thing, and a red, square, and soft thing. The Imperfect Community difficulty, however, can be solved using a “dyadic” resemblance relation (i.e., one that links at most two particulars), but this predicate must apply not only to concrete particular things but also to their pairs: see (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002: 156–76) for details.

Another issue is whether the resemblance relation invoked by Resemblance Nominalism is contrastive or not. A contrastive resemblance relation is one that holds between particulars that resemble each other and particulars they don’t resemble: ‘*x*1, *x*2… resemble each other and do not equally resemble any of *y*1, *y*2,…’ is a predicate expressing a variably polyadic contrastive resemblance relation. Busse (2018) adopts a contrastive resemblance relation (see also Lewis 1983), while Rodriguez-Pereyra (2002) adopts a non-contrastive resemblance relation. A contrastive resemblance relation permits one to deal in a straightforward manner with the so-called Companionship Difficulty. This difficulty arises when all the Fs are G but not vice versa. In this case, there are things outside the class of Fs, namely the Gs that are not F, that resemble all the Fs. The problem then is to specify resemblance conditions satisfied by all classes corresponding to properties, including classes, like the class of Fs in this example, which are properly included in other such classes. A contrastive resemblance relation solves the Companionship Difficulty since the Fs resemble one another in contrast to Gs that are not F (cf. Paseau 2015: 106). But this is not necessary, since the Companionship Difficulty can also be solved using a non-contrastive resemblance relation, provided this relation comes in degrees. Briefly, the idea is that there is a lowest degree of resemblance to which the members of classes corresponding to properties resemble each other, and that no class C1 corresponding to a property is included in another class C2 corresponding to a property such that the lowest degree to which any two members of C1 resemble each other is the lowest degree to which any two members of C2 resemble each other. Assuming that the class of Fs is properly included in the class of Gs (and that the class of Gs is not properly included in any other class corresponding to a property), the lowest degree to which the Fs resemble each other is 2 and the lowest degree of resemblance to which the Gs resemble each other is 1. This is the basic idea, and a simplification of the actual solution to this difficulty, which is more complicated: see Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002: 177–185 for details. There are, as it should be expected, different views about how to measure the degrees of resemblance between two particulars (or more particulars, for those who believe in “collective” resemblance). For discussion see Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002: 65–69 and Blumson 2018 and 2022.

A traditional objection to Resemblance Nominalism is Russell’s infinite regress of resemblance. According to Russell, if resemblance is not a universal, there must be a different resemblance for each pair of resembling things; but then these resemblances will have to resemble each other. Thus either one embarks on an infinite regress or one has to admit that resemblance is a universal (Russell 1997: 48). What is vicious, however, is Russell’s argument, for it implicitly reifies resemblance. Indeed, without the reification of resemblance it makes no sense to claim that individual resemblances resemble each other. But the Resemblance Nominalist does not reify resemblance: in the Resemblance Nominalist ontology there are resembling entities, but their resemblance is not a further entity. Once this is pointed out, there is no opportunity for a regress of resemblances to arise (see Rodriguez-Pereyra 2001, 2002: 105–23, and 2004 for a fuller discussion of Russell’s regress).

**3 Advantages of Class and Resemblance Nominalism**

What are the advantages of Class Nominalism and Resemblance Nominalism over alternative theories, specifically over the Theory of Universals and the Theory of Tropes? Since classes are particulars, it is sometimes held that their advantage over the Theory of Universals consists in ontological economy: while Class Nominalism and Resemblance Nominalism admit particulars and only particulars in their ontology, the Theory of Universals admits both particulars and universals in its ontology. But not only will this not work against the Theory of Tropes (since it also only admits particulars in its ontology), it does not really work against all versions of the Theory of Universals, since some versions of it are eliminativist about particulars. Such versions of the Theory of Universals admit only universals.

There are many respects in which metaphysical theories can be compared, and different philosophers will assign different weights to different respects. For instance, those who think that preserving intuitions and accepted opinions is the preeminent parameter of theory comparison might think that Class Nominalism and Resemblance Nominalism are inferior to the Theory of Universals and the Theory of Tropes. This is because, for instance, according to Resemblance Nominalism it is because two apples resemble each other that they are red, while the common intuition is that they resemble each other because they are red. Similarly, according to Class Nominalism, whether something has a certain property must be an extrinsic fact about it, since whether something is a member of a class (at least of a non-singleton class) must be an extrinsic fact about it, and yet the common intuition is that whether something has a property can be an intrinsic fact about it. It should be noted that not every alternative to Class Nominalism and Resemblance Nominalism is free from problems with intuitions. Some versions of the Theory of Universals, for example, violate the intuition that entities cannot be located at many places at the same time. However, although I cannot argue the point at length here, it seems to me that Class Nominalism and Resemblance Nominalism are more counterintuitive than the Theory of Universals and the Theory of Tropes.

Nevertheless, when the comparison is between metaphysical theories postulating a definite ontology, preserving intuitions and common opinions cannot be the preeminent parameter of comparison, since intuitions and such opinions are no more than uncritical beliefs and there is no reason to expect them to be true. In this sense, Metaphysics is like Physics, a discipline in which it makes little sense to respect intuitions and pre-theoretical opinions. On the other hand, in any area of research – whether philosophical or not – it is of the utmost importance to have as much independent evidence as possible for the entities postulated by theories. This is done by avoiding, in so far as possible, *ad hoc* ontology, i.e. avoiding, in so far as possible, the postulation of entities whose only or main reason to believe in is that they solve one or more particular problems or play one or more particular theoretical roles. Thus, given that there is more independent evidence for concrete particulars and classes than there is for universals and tropes, Class Nominalism and Resemblance Nominalism are superior to the Theory of Universals and the Theory of Tropes. For further discussion of this and related points see Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002: 199–221. For a dissenting voice see Mantegani 2015.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Which one of Class Nominalism and Resemblance Nominalism is better? Here the difference cannot consist in a difference in ontology, since both theories have the same ontology. In my view, Resemblance Nominalism is superior to Class Nominalism because it is explanatorily more powerful. Since Class Nominalism takes the naturalness of natural classes to be a primitive fact about them, Class Nominalism cannot explain what distinguishes natural from non-natural classes: certain classes are natural and others are not, and that’s all there is to it. Resemblance Nominalism, on the other hand, can explain that difference: classes are natural if and only if their members satisfy certain resemblance conditions. For further discussion of these points see Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002: 222–26.

**4 The Coextension Difficulty**

The best-known difficulty for both Class and Resemblance Nominalism is the *Coextension Difficulty*. Suppose that the class of Fs is a property, the property F. And suppose that the class of Fs is the class of Gs. Then that class is also the property G. So the properties F and G are one and the same. But for many substitution instances of “F” and “G”, this is wrong. The classical example is that in which “is a cordate” and “is a renate” are substituted for “F” and “G”. Clearly, the properties of *being a cordate* and *being a renate* are not one and the same property.

I actually think this is a bad example, since class and resemblance nominalists should identify *being a cordate* and *being a renate* with different classes (see Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002: 97–8). But it doesn't matter. Even if *being a cordate* and *being a renate* are not coextensive properties, it is likely that there are other examples, for example the mass and the charge of electrons. In any case, even if there are no actual cases of coextensive properties, it is clear that there could have been different but coextensive properties (see Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002: 98 for an argument), and this is enough to cause trouble for Class and Resemblance Nominalism.

One possible solution to this problem is to adopt Lewisian Modal Realism. If F and G are not necessarily coextensive, there could have been Fs which are not G, or Gs which are not F. On Lewisian Modal Realism this means that there is a possible world where there are Fs which are not G and/or there is a possible world where there are Gs which are not F. And on Lewisian Modal Realism this means that there are Fs which are not G and/or there are Gs which are not F, if the quantifier is used without restricting it to the actual world. Thus the Class Nominalist and the Resemblance Nominalist can identify the property F with the class of all Fs, including those existing in other possible worlds. Similarly, they can identify the property G with the class of all Gs, including those existing in other possible worlds. In this way they can avoid the identification of the properties F and G, since those classes are two distinct classes. These are the classes Lewis identifies properties with, and in my book on Resemblance Nominalism I argued that Resemblance Nominalists should be modal realists of the Lewisian variety, precisely in order to solve the Coextension Difficulty (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002: 99). I was then a committed Lewisian modal realist.

But if the modal realist solution works at all, it can only work for contingently coextensive properties. Couldn’t there be necessarily coextensive properties? I used to think that there are no necessarily coextensive properties, and that any apparent example of necessarily coextensive properties was a case of semantically different predicates applying in virtue of one and the same property (Rodriguez-Pereyra 2002: 100).

But I have come to see, finally, that Lewisian Modal Realism is wrong. Why? Basically because, as many have pointed out, those enormous island universes Lewis calls *possible worlds* have nothing to do with modality. There is no reason why a horse in one of those universes should be a merely possible horse (van Inwagen 2001: 226). Additionally, I now find the rejection of necessarily coextensive properties unpersuasive. So, can Class and Resemblance Nominalism avoid the Coextension Difficulty without adopting Lewisian Modal Realism? Yes, and this is what I shall argue now.

There is a variety of proposals about how Class or Resemblance Nominalism can deal with the Coextension Difficulty in an actualist setting. Here I shall sketch what I take to be the most promising option. But first let me indicate why I find some of the other proposals more or less unsatisfactory. First, it will not do to postulate ersatz possible worlds, i.e. abstract objects – whatever they may be – that play the role of possible worlds. Typically, the objects in those ersatz possible worlds are abstract objects, and no abstract object is red, or square, or has some of the other properties for which Class and Resemblance Nominalism try to account for. So the objects in those ersatz possible worlds cannot be the members of the classes Class and Resemblance Nominalism single out as properties.

This point might be thought to be too quick, since one might take ersatz possible worlds to be Lagadonian set-theoretical constructions in which every object functions as a name for itself and every property or relation functions as a name for itself. This is the proposal suggested by Busse (2016), although he does not advance it to deal with the co-extension difficulty. But in Class Nominalism and Resemblance Nominalism properties are classes, so if properties F and G are coextensive they will be one and the same class and therefore one and the same property. The set-theoretical construction <*a*, F> will be the same as <*a*, G> and so there is no way of differentiating coextensive properties F and G on this proposal.

Another way of getting around the Coextension Difficulty has been proposed by Ghislain Guigon (2015). He proposes that the Resemblance Nominalist should adopt Counterpart Theory in an actualist setting. Thus, although property F may be one and the same with property G, the F-counterparts of the actual F/Gs need not be the same as their G-counterparts. And so the Class Nominalist and the Resemblance Nominalist can maintain the identity of properties F and G while at the same time accounting for the strong intuition that something could have been F without being G. But even if this proposal accounts for such an intuition, it cannot account for the intuition, also a strong one, that F and G, or *being F* and *being G*, are two distinct properties. Indeed, the account assumes that coextensive properties are identical.

One could also appeal to degrees of similarity and say that in cases of coextension, the particulars having the coextensive properties resemble to a degree higher than 1 (see for example Paseau 2015: 108). If there are coextensive properties, then this allows one to distinguish a case where certain particulars share just one property, from a case where particulars instantiate two coextensive properties (they resemble to degree 2), from a case where certain particulars instantiate three coextensive properties (they resemble to degree 3), and so on. But if properties *are* classes, as they are in the version of Resemblance Nominalism we are considering, then this is not enough, for it does not allow one to distinguish two coextensive properties F and G: if the class of Fs is the same as the class of Gs, then they are one and the same property, and so the Fs/Gs resemble to degree 1 (assuming the class of Fs/Gs is not included in a class corresponding to another property, which, even if it is the case, does not affect the substantive point I am making, namely that merely introducing degrees of resemblance does not help with the present problem if properties are classes).

Let me now sketch a different solution to the Coextension Difficulty. Predicates predicate conditions, and such predicable conditions are what properties, in the primary sense of the term, are.[[3]](#footnote-3) Thus, in this sense of the term, the property of *being human* is what the predicate ‘is human’ predicates of things. Clearly a property understood in this way cannot be a class (or a universal, or a trope), for a class (or a universal, or a trope) is not a predicable condition. *Being a class* (*universal*/*trope*) is of course a predicable condition, but a class (universal/trope) is not *being a class* (*universal*/*trope*) but what satisfies the predicable condition *being a class* (*universal*/*trope*).

How does a class stand to the corresponding predicable condition? On both Class and Resemblance Nominalism classes are the correlates of the relevant (i.e. sparse) predicable conditions in the sense that particulars must relate to them in a particular way – they must belong to them – for those particulars to satisfy the corresponding predicable condition. It is only in this sense that it makes any sense to call classes (or universals, or tropes) *properties*: they are what particulars must be related to for them to satisfy properties in the sense of predicable conditions. But classes are not really properties: they are the correlates of properties, that is, of predicable conditions.

Now, there is no reason why different predicable conditions cannot necessarily have the same correlates. Indeed, if there is a necessary connection between two predicable conditions, and nothing can have one without having the other, why should it not be the case that what particulars must be related to in order to satisfy those two predicable conditions cannot be the same thing? Thus, if class and resemblance nominalists take classes to be the correlates of predicable conditions, necessarily coextensive properties present no problem at all. There is no wrong identification of two different properties here. There are two predicable conditions, that is, two properties, having one and the same correlate.

Now what I have just said about necessarily coextensive properties can be extended to contingently coextensive properties. For there is no reason why contingently coextensive predicable conditions should not have the same correlate. Thus, if classes are the correlates of predicable conditions, contingently coextensive properties present no problem at all. There is no wrong identification of two different properties here. There are two predicable conditions, that is, two properties, having one and the same correlate.

But is this really plausible in the case of contingently coextensive properties? If two properties are only contingently coextensive, they are independent, and therefore an explanation might be demanded of why what makes particulars satisfy them should be one and the same fact. Shouldn’t one expect that independent predicable conditions are always grounded in different facts, as in the Theory of Universals?

No, one shouldn’t expect such a thing in theories like Class and Resemblance Nominalism. Indeed, it is easy to see that according to these theories it is possible that the satisfaction of two independent predicable conditions is grounded in one and the same fact – in other words, it is possible that the truthmaker for propositions stating that a certain object satisfies independent predicable conditions is one and the same fact. Take the properties, that is, predicable conditions, of *being red* and *being square*. They are not coextensive, and according to Class and Resemblance Nominalism what makes particulars satisfy *being red* is that they belong to a certain class and what makes particulars satisfy *being square* is that they belong to a different class. Now, since particulars are contingent entities, there must be a possibility in which the only particulars that are red are the particulars that are actually red and square, and the only particulars that are square are the particulars that are actually red and square. This is a possibility in which the properties of *being red* and *being square* are coextensive. If that possibility obtained, what would make anything satisfy *being red* would be exactly the same as what would make it satisfy *being square*, namely being a member of one and the same class: the class of red particulars, that is, the class of square particulars.

The key to this solution is the distinction between properties, as predicable conditions, and their correlates, which Class and Resemblance Nominalism take to be classes and other theories take to be universals or tropes. But can Class and Resemblance Nominalism accept properties in the sense of predicable conditions? Why not? Well, presumably such predicable conditions are abstract, and Nominalism rejects abstract objects. But as it was pointed out in Section 1, Class and Resemblance Nominalism are nominalistic theories in the sense that they reject universals, not abstract objects; indeed it is perfectly possible for them to accept abstract objects.

Someone might argue that predicable conditions are, basically, universals. After all, many of them can be satisfied by many different particulars. But they are not universals. Nor are those predicable conditions that can be satisfied by only one particular trope. First, tropes, and universals on Aristotelian conceptions of them, are located in space and time, while predicable conditions are not located in space or time. Tropes and universals thus conceived are concrete, while predicable conditions are abstract. Of course, universals can be conceived Platonically as abstract objects. But even here there is a crucial difference: universals and tropes, whether abstract or concrete, are supposed to be what makes particulars satisfy certain predicable conditions – alternatively, they are what account for the fact that particulars satisfy certain predicable conditions. Thus they cannot be predicable conditions.

But on the view of properties as predicable conditions, properties are not classes. So, can Class and Resemblance Nominalism really adopt this solution? Yes, because Class and Resemblance Nominalism are theories of what makes particulars satisfy predicable conditions, and what they say is that belonging to certain classes is what makes particulars satisfy predicable conditions. Thus the identification of properties with classes is not essential to them. Similarly, the Theory of Tropes and the Theory of Universals are also theories of what makes particulars satisfy predicable conditions, and thus the contrast between these theories is still the same: where other theories postulate universals and tropes, Class and Resemblance Nominalism postulate classes.

Note, also, that on this conception Class and Resemblance Nominalism are still theories of sparse properties – or, more strictly, theories of the correlates of sparse properties. For although not every predicable condition plays the roles usually associated with sparse properties, some of them do; and it is about these that Class and Resemblance Nominalism say that their correlates are classes.

But if properties are predicable conditions, what is the role of classes in these theories? To account for what makes particulars satisfy predicable conditions. When something is red, it satisfies the predicable condition of *being red*, and what makes it satisfy it is that it belongs to a certain class. Thus classes, in so far as they are the correlates of predicable conditions, form part of the truthmakers of propositions stating that a certain particular satisfies a certain predicable condition, e.g. the proposition that *a* is red.

Before closing, there are two things I would like to note. The first is that the solution here sketched is likely to commit the Class or Resemblance Nominalist to the rejection of Truthmaking Necessitarianism, the idea that, necessarily, if the truthmaker of a certain proposition exists, that proposition is true. For particulars are contingent and many of their sparse properties are had contingently; think of shapes for instance. Then it is easy to show that it could have been the case that all the square particulars could have been the only round particulars. If that possibility had been the case, the proposition that *a* is square (where *a* is an actual square particular) would have been false, and yet what makes it true according to Class and Resemblance Nominalism would have existed anyway: the class of actual particulars would have existed and would have been natural, and the particulars that are actually square would have satisfied the relevant resemblance condition.

I say that the solution here advocated is *likely* to commit the Class and Resemblance Nominalist to the rejection of Truthmaker Necessitarianism because it is open to the Class and Resemblance Nominalist to have a metaphysics that maintains that particulars are not contingent entities, or that, although they are contingent entities, they have their sparse properties necessarily. But some resemblance nominalists might not take this line and will want to admit that it is possible that all square particulars had been the only round particulars. How bad is this consequence? On the one hand, although it is an appealing doctrine, there seem to be no generally accepted arguments for Truthmaker Necessitarianism. On the other hand, Class and Resemblance Nominalists will have to provide a plausible explanation of how this particular violation of Truthmaker Necessitarianism is possible: how can it be that belonging to the same class, or resembling the same things, makes something square but could have failed to make it square? Note that in the classical cases of violation of Truthmaker Necessitarianism – negative existential truths and affirmative universal ones – the explanation seems to be at hand: “How can it be that what makes it true that these are all the birds on this tree could have failed to make it true?” Easy: “Because there could have been a further bird on the tree”.

The second thing to note is that Class and Resemblance Nominalism need not be committed to the idea that properties are predicable conditions to implement the essentials of this solution to the Coextension Difficulty. For the record, I do think that properties are predicable conditions, but my point now is that Class and Resemblance Nominalism can be eliminativist about properties. Indeed, they can maintain that properties do not exist. But they cannot reject predicable conditions. And once they accept predicable conditions, what they have to say is that classes are the correlates of predicable conditions, and that what makes true propositions stating that certain particulars satisfy certain predicable conditions is that such particulars belong to the corresponding classes.

Needless to say, there are many more issues that need discussing in relation to the solution to the Coextension Difficulty that I have presented. But I cannot be exhaustive here, and so I have limited myself to sketching the idea.[[4]](#footnote-4)

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1. Although, as I have noted in other publications, Leibniz sometimes says things that are suggestive of a version of Resemblance Nominalism, his theory is a version of so-called Ostrich Nominalism rather than Resemblance Nominalism (see Rodriguez-Pereyra 2014: 198–99); thus, I do not interpret Leibniz as a resemblance nominalist. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Nicholas Mantegani maintains that Resemblance Nominalism’s commitment to resembling particulars arises from a purely theoretical motivation, and therefore such a commitment is *ad hoc* (Mantegani 2015: 201). Yes, the commitment to resembling particulars in Resemblance Nominalism arises from a purely theoretical motivation, that of accounting for the truthmakers of predications attributing so-called *sparse* or *natural* properties to particulars. But this does not mean that such a commitment is *ad hoc*, since the entities Resemblance Nominalism postulates (resembling particulars) are not entities whose only or main reason to believe in is that they solve any particular problems or play any particular theoretical roles. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Different philosophers have adopted theories of properties like this (see, for instance, van Inwagen 2004: 131–8; Jubien 2009: 54–7; Hale 2015: 37–40). See also Rodriguez-Pereyra 2022: 9–13 for more on this conception of properties and, in particular, for the relation between predicable conditions and meanings. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Material on which this chapter is based was presented to conferences or seminars at Eidos, Theorema, and the Conference for the *Routledge Handbook of Properties*. Many thanks to the many people who contributed to the paper by discussing it in those events, to Nick Jones for conversations about the topics of this paper, and to Paul Audi and Ralf Busse for written comments on a previous draft of the paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)