



Definition of the Problem of Universals

Realists argue that universals exist independent of individuals; they are non-physical and non-mental entities present in different places at the same time. For instance, a red apple and a red rose share an inherent quality - 'redness'.

To realists, this 'redness' is a universal entity that exists beyond both objects. On contrast, nominalists claim that only individual things exist (particulars) while universals are mere words or labels we use for grouping these particulars based on shared characteristics. In their view, 'redness' is just a name given to represent specific color experience common among certain objects but doesn't exist as an independent entity outside our mind.

Realism: Theories and Philosophical Underpinnings

Aristotelian realism provides another perspective within this school of thought. Unlike Plato's transcendental approach, Aristotle argued that universals do not exist outside particulars but within them.

He asserted that while particulars possess unique attributes (e.g., Socrates' wisdom), they also share common traits (humanity) with others - those shared traits representing universals. This theory suggests a unity between form and matter where each particular object embodies certain universal qualities rather than being mere copies of transcendent Forms.

Nominalism: Different Approaches and Key Concepts

There are different versions within nominalism as well - resemblance nominalism argues that we group objects based on noticeable similarities while trope nominalism suggests each property instance (or 'trope') is unique and distinct even if they appear similar to us.

So, two red apples may seem to share the property 'redness', but their colors are unique instances not related by a shared universal entity.

Comparing Realism and Nominalism: Strengths and Weaknesses

On the other hand, nominalism provides a more empirical approach focusing only on observable particulars. It avoids postulating unseen entities (universals) thus making it less metaphysically complex.

Yet, its main weakness lies in its inability to explain satisfactorily how we perceive similarities among particulars without referring to some form of universal qualities. It struggles particularly with abstract concepts such as mathematical truths which seem to hold universally without any tangible 'particular' existence.

Impact on Contemporary Philosophy and Science

On the other hand, nominalism influences various approaches within social sciences where realities are considered as constructed rather than discovered. This perspective aligns with postmodernist views stressing on the subjective interpretation and cultural context in understanding 'reality'.

For example, in anthropology or sociology, concepts like gender or race might be considered nominalistic constructs rather than universal entities - their meanings varying across different societies and cultures.

Case Studies: Practical Implications of Realism vs. Nominalism

On another front, in law and human rights discourse where concepts like justice or equality are pivotal, realism can be seen underpinning the belief in universal human rights - inherent qualities every individual possesses regardless of their specific circumstances.

Nominalism might challenge this by arguing such values are social constructs rather than universally applicable entities; what counts as 'justice' or 'equality' may vary greatly across different cultures and contexts. Thus, whether one subscribes to realism or nominalism could significantly influence how they interpret and engage with the world.