

OSTRICH NOMINALISM

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1 What is ostrich nominalism?

David Armstrong introduced the term “Ostrich Nominalism” in his book, *Nominalism and Realism* (1978), when discussing the One over Many (OoM) problem. He describes this venerable problem as that of explaining in virtue of what “many different particulars can all have what appears to be the same nature...all be of the same *type*” (1978: xiii). He identifies the OoM problem with the “problem of universals” (1978: 41).¹ After outlining five reductive Nominalist responses to the problem, Armstrong mentions the Quinean response, under the name “Ostrich Nominalism”, as a possible sixth. This pejorative name aptly captures what Armstrong thinks of this response.² Ostriches are reputed to ignore problems by burying their heads in the sand, and doubtless many Realists and other metaphysicians think that is just what Quineans are doing. For, the distinctive feature of the Quinean response to the OoM problem is, in Armstrong’s words, seeing “no need for any reductive analyses of the sorts just [mentioned]. There are no universals but the proposition that *a* is *F* is perfectly all right as it is” (1978: 16). Where other Nominalists offer reductive analyses to explain the sameness-of-nature without positing universals, the Quinean sees no need for any explanation. Where other Nominalists take the OoM problem seriously and try to solve it, the Quinean dismisses the problem as pseudo.³

We have identified the OoM *problem* as the problem of explaining sameness-of-nature. That there is sameness-of-nature is the OoM *premise* of Armstrong’s Realist OoM *argument* (1978: xiii). That argument explains the premise by positing universals: *a* and *b* have the same nature in virtue of instantiating a certain universal. So, the Realist accepts both the problem and the argument to universals. The five reductive Nominalists accept the problem and premise but reject the argument to universals by urging different explanations of the premise. The Quinean accepts (a version of) the premise but rejects the very problem of explaining this sameness-of-nature and hence, of course, rejects the argument to universals.⁴

My paper, “‘Ostrich Nominalism’ or ‘Mirage Realism’?” (1980), was a reply to Armstrong, defending the Quinean response. I rejected the pejorative ‘ostrich’ label for this

¹ In one brief chapter (pp. 58-63), Armstrong rightly acknowledges some other arguments for universals arising from apparent references to a universal, as in “Red is a color”, and apparent quantifications over them, as in “He has the same virtues as his father”.

² “Ostrich Nominalism has been treated with disdain.” (Imaguire 2018: xiii)

³ But Quineans do not dismiss the problems and arguments alluded to in note 1. Indeed, it is because Quine (1980) thinks that our best theories have to quantify over universals that Quine himself is not a nominalist.

⁴ Oliver remarks, “Terminology is a mess here” (1996: 44, n. 46), before offering some useful clarifications. Suffice it to say, the Quinean rejection of the OoM as an argument for “universals” should be taken as a rejection of it as an argument for Platonic universals, Aristotelian universals, properties, attributes, classes, etc. I shall talk simply of “universals”.

response because, I argued, there is nothing ostrich-like about ignoring a problem that isn't there. Indeed, I charged, adopting Realism because of such a pseudo problem, as Armstrong largely does, deserves the pejorative label 'Mirage Realism'. Still, sometimes the victims of a slur embrace it; think of homosexuals embracing "queer". And philosophers sympathetic to the Quinean response have embraced 'ostrich'; as Howard Peacock says, "the label of 'Ostrich Nominalist' has recently been adopted as a badge of honour by nominalists who wish to emphasize their disdain for realists' arguments" (2009: 184; see Van Cleve 1994; Summerford 2013; Mantegani 2015; Imaguire 2018; Guillon 2021). So 'Ostrich Nominalism' has become a fairly neutral way of referring to the Quinean response, with no slur intended. And that is how I shall use it.

To say more about Ostrich Nominalism (the Quinean response), we need first to say more about the OoM. Alex Oliver is a big help. He points out that Armstrong vacillates between "various versions" of the OoM (1996: 48). There are six different types of fact which demand an account according to Armstrong:

- (1) *a* and *b* are of the same type/ have a common property
- (2) *a* and *b* are both *F*
- (3) *a* and *b* have a common property, *F*
- (4) *a* has a property
- (5) *a* is *F*
- (6) *a* has the property *F* (1996: 49)

We should think of these as different premises that Armstrong is requesting us to account for in OoM arguments.

But what exactly is Armstrong requesting? Oliver thinks this is unclear, detecting "three possible interpretations":

First, the request is for a *conceptual analysis*.... Second, the request is for a specification of the *ontological commitments* of the sentences. Third, the request is for a specification of the *truth-makers* of the sentences. (1996: 50)

My paper addressed only ontological commitments. The truthmakers request has loomed large in recent discussions. I shall consider it at some length in sections 6-7. The Ostrich simply dismisses the request for conceptual analysis, for reasons I shall but briefly indicate now (but see Devitt 2014).

Conceptual analysis is usually understood as an a priori examination of concepts in order to discover something about the world. The analysis is supposed to have the same "content" as the concept analyzed; the analysis is supposed to "define" the concept (Oliver 1996: 50-3). From the Quinean naturalistic perspective of the Ostrich (Devitt 2010), the search for such an analysis is totally misguided. The study of concepts and meanings is, or should be, an entirely empirical enterprise, on which progress is very hard. And, importantly, such progress as we have made provides novel information *about concepts*, not novel information *about the world* the concepts are about.

Return to ontological commitments. In effect, I took (3) to be Armstrong's premise. I rejected it immediately because of its commitment to properties, replacing it with the Quinean paraphrase, (2) (1980: 434-5). (Quinean paraphrasing will be discussed in section 8.) So, (2) is

the OoM sameness-of-type premise that the Ostrich accepts. And the alleged OoM problem becomes that of explaining in virtue of what (2) holds. The Ostrich has a swift response, as Quine brings out in his famous discussion of red things: “That the houses and roses and sunsets are all of them red may be taken as ultimate and irreducible” (1961: 10). And (2) has no commitment to the universal *F*-hood.

Alternatively, the Ostrich might treat explaining (2), as I did, as “a trivial problem” that is solved by (5), the Quinean paraphrase of (6), together with its like companion, ‘*b* is *F*’. I anticipated an objection from Armstrong: “In virtue of what is *a* (or *b*) *F*?” (1980: 435).⁵ If there were a OoM problem it would be answering this question. But there is no problem: in Quine’s words, the predication is “ultimate and irreducible”. David Lewis soon entered the fray and agreed. He had these choice words on this question about “predication in general”: it is not “answerable at all...[it] deserves our neglect. The ostrich that will not look at it is a wise bird” (1983: 352; see also Summerford 2003: 103). And (5) has no commitment to the universal *F*-hood.

In sum, the Ostrich rejects (6) but accepts (5) as a paraphrase, and claims that (5) needs no explanation. The Ostrich rejects (3) but accepts (2) as a paraphrase, and claims either that it needs no explanation or that it is trivially explained by (5) and its like companion which, as just noted, need no explanation. (5) and (2) do not posit universals. That, in brief, is the Ostrich’s response to versions of the OoM starting from premises (2), (3), (5), and (6).

I will say more in support of this response in the course of discussing objections to Ostrich Nominalism. I will also respond to versions of the OoM starting from (1).

2 Armstrong’s caricature

Armstrong’s paper, “Against Ostrich Nominalism” (1980), is a response to mine. He claims that sameness of type is “a Moorean fact” that needs an account. He then simply repeats the charge that Quine is an ostrich for not giving such an account, for “refusing to answer a compulsory question” (1980: 441). But, of course, the Quinean point is precisely that the question needs no answer. I had emphasized that the Quinean indeed takes predicates “with ontological seriousness”, as Armstrong demands (1978: 16), and does not deny that an object “*really is F* (or *G*, or whatever)” (Devitt 1980: 435). Armstrong is unmoved, insisting that, on the Quinean view, “particulars are a sort of structureless blob...they lack real internal structure” (1980: 446). Decades later, I responded to Armstrong in a “Postscript” to a reprint of my paper:

This is a caricature. It foists on the Quinean an ontological framework that is motivated by the One over Many problem, just the problem that the Quinean rejects. So the problem does not lead the Quinean to traffic in “bare particulars”, “mere thisnesses”, and the like; as I remarked, “he sees no need to play that game”. Suppose that, according to the Realist, an object has an internal structure *F*-ness. Then, according to the Quinean, it really is *F*, said as firmly as you like. Nothing more need be said. (2010: 26-7)

This rejection of “old-time” metaphysics is the crux of Ostrich Nominalism. Yet the Ostrich’s critics tend to just *insist* on her joining what she regards as a pointless game. Thus, Armstrong’s habit of distinguishing “thin particulars” from “thick particulars” (1978: 114; 1989: 94-6)

⁵ This is Campbell’s “A question”; (2) raises his “B question” (1990: 29).

“invites the Ostrich Nominalist to start a game that she simply cannot play” (Calemi 2016: 41; see also Melia 2005: 72).

3 The “less definite” OoM of Lewis and Van Cleve

As already noted, Lewis is sympathetic to the Ostrich. Indeed, he agrees (1983: 354) with much of my 1980 paper. He finds Armstrong’s OoM argument “unconvincing” (1983: 351). He notes that if Armstrong’s vivid criticism – “Quine gives the predicate what has been said to be the privilege of the harlot: power without responsibility” (Armstrong 1980: 443) – applied to Quine, it would apply equally to Armstrong himself. For, Armstrong’s “*non-relational* Realism” accepts at least one predicate without analysis, “the predicate ‘instantiates’ (or ‘has’), as in ‘particular *a* instantiates universal *F*’” (Lewis 1983: 353-4).⁶ Nonetheless, Lewis thinks that my taking (3), which is about “some specific *F*”, as the OoM premise, makes the problem “too easy” (p. 354). There is another OoM problem concerned with the “less definite”

a and *b* have some common property (are somehow of the same type).

I owe an account of that (p. 355). A decade later, James Van Cleve, made the same criticism (1994: 586-587). They are both drawing attention to a OoM argument with a premise that is item (1) on Oliver’s helpful list.

In my “Postscript”, I offered this paraphrase of the likes of the “less definite”, and rather trivial, (1):

a and *b* resemble each other. (2010: 28)

But there is a problem with this, neatly demonstrated to me by Jonathan Schaffer: “where ‘some’ can live, any quantifier can live”. Thus, the Ostrich needs to paraphrase not only (1)’s claim that *a* and *b* share *some* common properties but also the more interesting claims that they share *all*, *many*, *seven*, or... properties. The way forward is to note that whenever *a* and *b* resemble each other it will be because

(S) *a* and *b* are both *F*, for some substitution of the schematic ‘*F*’.

So, we adopt (S) as our paraphrase of (1). Then the paraphrases for the other quantifications are easily obtained by substituting ‘all’, ‘many’, ‘seven’, or... for ‘some’.

4 Peacock’s similar but different problem

Peacock sees “a pressing problem for the Ostrich Nominalist” in dealing with the claim that *a* and *b* are “qualitatively the same” “in one respect” but “qualitatively different” in another (2009: 203). He examines five ways for the Nominalist to avoid quantifying over respects and finds them all “unsatisfactory” (2009: 204). One of those ways is, in effect, what I shall now offer. We paraphrase the sameness claim with (S) and the difference claim with:

⁶ Consider also: “In the end, even Armstrong himself cannot afford to take predicates with the same ontological seriousness that he nonetheless demands from the Ostrich Nominalist.” (Calemi 2016: 39)

(D) a is F but b is not, or a is not F but b is, for some substitution of the schematic ' F '.

Peacock takes three problems to “immediately threaten this position”. First, it may require a “higher-order quantification” leading to “ontological commitment to properties” (2009: 208). But there is no such requirement and the commitment is only to the predicates that serve as substitutions.

Second, and more interesting:

A nominalist who says that ' Fa and Fb ' is a *schema* which has instances will have to say things like 'sentences $S1$ and $S2$ are instances of the same *schema*'. But if one and the same *schema* has different sentences as instances, it sounds like a *schema* is a kind of *type*, and types were precisely what the nominalist was hoping to do without. This argument is parallel to an objection raised repeatedly in Armstrong's criticism of rival nominalist theories. (2009: 208-9)

Peacock is right about Armstrong: Armstrong is very fond of this sort of argument. Indeed, he used it in criticizing my Ostrich paper: where Peacock talks of “same schema”, Armstrong talked of “same predicate” (1980: 442). And the Ostrich is very fond of the following sort of response, which indeed I used (2010: 26) in responding to Armstrong. The Ostrich's treatment of sameness of type is *quite general*: it applies not only to sameness of the type *red*, but also to sameness of the type *schema 'F' substitutions*. So, the Ostrich follows Quine's example by saying that various expressions “are all of them” schema ' F ' substitutions. No types there.

Finally, Peacock finds some schema substitutions unsuitable; for example, “a disjunctive predicate like ‘...is spherical or is a philosopher’ can be true of two particulars without those two particulars exhibiting any qualitative sameness at all” (2009: 209). So, presumably, Peacock does not count sharing the *property* spherical-or-a-philosopher as “qualitative sameness”. The Ostrich then awaits Peacock's specification of the *sorts of properties* that do not thus count. This can then be turned easily into a specification of the *sorts of predicates* that do not count as substitutions.

5 Pickel and Mantegani on ontological parsimony

Bryan Pickel and Nicholas Mantegani (“PM”) introduce a “box world” of “a blue sphere”, “a green cube”, “an orange sphere”, and “a blue cone” (2012: 1). They quote (2012: 2) my Occamist criticism of the Realist: “In ontology, the less the better. Therefore this sort of Realist makes us ontologically worse off without explanatory gain” (1980: 437). I am implying, as PM note, that the Ostrich's theory is more parsimonious. PM think that this is “simply wrong”. By comparing theories of the box world, PM argue that “the ostrich's commitments using Quine's criterion yields a less parsimonious ontology than that of her realist rivals” (2012: 2). Using that criterion, we see immediately that the Ostrich is committed to *six* sorts of things: blue things, spheres, green things, cubes, orange things, and cones. Yet, PM argue, the Realist is committed only to *four* sorts: “particulars, universals, instantiating things, and instantiated things” (2012: 19).

PM's grasp of Quine's criterion strikes me as excellent. But they misunderstand the Ostrich's parsimony claim. This misunderstanding is revealed in two ways. (I), in the rival “theories” that PM attribute to the Ostrich and the Realist. PM call these “description[s]” of the

box world (2012: 2) and that is apt because that is all they are; thus, the Ostrich's "theory" is simply the claimed existence of the four objects, "a blue sphere", "a green cube", etc. Neither of these "theories" *explain* anything. Yet what the Ostrich claims to be more parsimonious is not a *mere description* of the world but a *theoretical explanation* of it. As I said, the Realist is less parsimonious in that he adds entities "without explanatory gain". (II), the misunderstanding is also revealed in PM's box world. PM say: "This world is supposed to share crucial features with our own" (2012: 1). And so it does; both have spheres, for example. But there is a crucial difference: in the box world, *nothing happens*. The Ostrich compares theories that attempt to explain the causal structure of the world; to explain *why* things are as they are and interact as they do. The box world has no such structure. PM's descriptions of the box world are "mock theories", not real theories.

The distance between PM's mock theories and real theories can be brought out simply. The Ostrich's theory of the real world posits *Fs* because being an *F* explains phenomena. Any Realist rival *must also explain these phenomena*. The Realist's mock theory of the box world posits "particulars, universals, instantiating things, and instantiated things". These posits will not explain any phenomena of scientific interest.

In section 1, we noted Oliver's "three possible interpretations" of Armstrong's "request" in posing his OoM problems. One of these, "conceptual analysis", was quickly dismissed. I have now concluded my presentation of the Ostrich's response to the "ontological commitments" request.⁷ I turn to the "truthmakers" request.

6 Interpreting truthmaking

The dominant development in the universals debate since Armstrong introduced Ostrich Nominalism has been the turn to truthmakers: "the idea that truthmakers are the explanans demanded by the Problem of Universals has become a sort of new orthodoxy" (Imagire 2018: 31).

Armstrong attributes "the truth-maker principle" to C. B. Martin and expresses it as follows:

...there must be something in the world that makes [a contingent truth] true. "Something" may be taken as widely as may be wished. The "making"...is that in the world in virtue of which the truth is true. (1989: 88)

The talk of "truth" in the name of, and motivation for, the truthmaker principle leads Armstrong to interpret the principle as *semantic*: "The [truth-making] relation...is a cross-categorial one, one term being an entity or entities in the world, the other being...true *propositions*" (2004: 5).⁸ Indeed, a semantic interpretation of truthmaking is standard. Thus, Oliver assesses "the truth-maker principle" as "a sanitised version of a correspondence theory of truth" (1996: 69). Despite this, the truthmaker principle can be interpreted as *metaphysical*.

⁷ Calemi (2016) has a neat criticism of the Ostrich based on an assumption about anaphora. But the assumption is false, as the phenomenon of copredication shows.

⁸ Mulligan et al. 1984, which seems to have introduced contemporary talk of "truthmakers", takes the concern of truthmaker theory to be with "the complex and bewildering difficulties of the relations between language and the real world" (1984: 288).

The truth term is very tricky, as many works have shown (e.g. Horwich 1990; Kirkham 1992; David 1994; Devitt 2001). What Martin is really *motivating* is a metaphysical principle. Consider Armstrong’s counterfactual example of something that needs a truthmaker: “If you had not put your foot on the brake so promptly just then, there would have been a nasty accident” (2004: 1). What we need to explain is something *entirely worldly*. We want to know *why* would there have been a nasty accident if you had not put your foot on the brake so promptly just then. What in the world made that so? Martin is right to demand an explanation. But any semantic property of sentences or propositions, including *truth*, is irrelevant to the explanation. Of course, it can be convenient to use ‘true’ to pose that very same metaphysical question. Thus, if we name Armstrong’s counterfactual “CF”, then we can ask Martin’s question: “What made CF true?” More importantly, if we want to *generalize* the question, we *have* to use ‘true’ (or some similar device). Armstrong is illustrating this in asking for “*some way that the world is* in virtue of which these [counterfactual] truths are true” (2004: 1). This question about counterfactuals in general is no more semantic than the one about CF in particular. In the apt words of Lewis, the use of ‘true’ is just a way of “making a long story short” (2001: 278); the question “is not at all about truth” (2001: 279).

My claims here are simply drawing attention to the oft-noted “disquotational” role of a truth term. This role stems from the “equivalence thesis”: all appropriate instances of the “equivalence schema”

s is true iff p

hold, where an appropriate instance substitutes for ‘ p ’ a translation of the statement referred to by what is substituted for ‘ s ’. Deflationists like Paul Horwich (1990) think that this is *all* there is to ‘true’. But the rest of us who think that there is more to ‘true’ than this – for example, that ‘true’ has an explanatory role in semantic theory – should nonetheless accept the equivalence thesis and hence accept that the truth term has the disquotational role exploited above. The question, “In virtue of what is ‘Snow is white’ true?” can be just another way of asking the metaphysical, and entirely non-semantic, “In virtue of what is snow white?”

So, despite its talk of truth, Martin’s principle can be understood as purely metaphysical.⁹ And, *that is how it has to be understood if the Ostrich is to take it seriously*. If the principle is understood in the standard semantic way, the Ostrich dismisses it as a misguided attempt to derive a metaphysics from a semantics. Such attempts are wrong in principle (Devitt 1984, 2010). They are particularly wrong where the semantics in question is the unpromising truthmaker principle.

So, uses of ‘true’ in what follows should always be understood disquotationally.

7 The metaphysical request for a truthmaker

The Ostrich is enthusiastic about Martin’s metaphysical principle, *understood naturalistically*. So, in claiming that “(5) needs no explanation”, the Ostrich is not denying that there is a need for a scientific explanation of what it is for a to be F . Indeed, there obviously is a need unless a being

⁹ Hornsby notes that “truthmakers have two different agenda”, one “ontological”, one the nature of “truth” (2005: 33). Melia notes that “Armstrong frequently treats truthmaking as a supervenience relation holding between different states of affairs, rather than a relation holding between states of affairs and sentences.” (2005: 79)

F is a fundamental physical fact. So, for an example, there is a need for a scientific explanation of what it is for *a* to be red. The Ostrich is denying that there is any need for some *non-scientific* explanation of *a* being *F*;¹⁰ there is no need for a metaphysical “grounding”, to use a term that is popular in analytic metaphysics (Schaffer 2009). I summed up the Quinean position:

What we are denying can be brought out vividly by taking ‘*F*’ to be a fundamental predicate, say a physical predicate. Then...we have nothing to say about what makes *a F*, it just *is F*; that is a basic and inexplicable fact about the universe.... Why be dissatisfied with this? Explanation must stop somewhere. What better place than with a fundamental physical fact of our world? (1980: 436)¹¹

That is the Ostrich’s response to the OoM request for an ontological commitment, but it works just as well in response to the present request for a truthmaker: the Ostrich simply dismisses the request; the OoM is still a pseudo problem. Yet the Ostrich’s critics think that the move to truthmakers makes all the difference. Consider Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra:

Since the Problem of Universals is the problem of giving a philosophical or metaphysical explanation of how the facts expressed by (1)-(6) are possible...the sort of account in question cannot be one about their ontological commitments. (2000: 261)

Why not? The Ostrich has no problem at all explaining how it is *possible* that, say, this rose is red, without positing anything but the rose. We simply look to science for an explanation of how roses can *actually* be red. Indeed, nothing else is appropriate. Clearly Rodriguez-Pereyra disagrees:

Is it not possible to reproduce the ostrich’s strategy about truthmakers? No, for even if ostrich nominalism works for ontological commitments, the truthmaker version is untenable... (2000: 267)

Why? Rodriguez-Pereyra’s position reflects a crucial move from the principle that Martin motivated to what Peacock calls “the Strong Truthmaker Principle” (2009: 189). Where our “weak” principle demands an explanation of *a* being *F*, Rodriguez-Pereyra’s “strong” Principle demands an explanation *that is simply in terms of the existence of entities*:

(TM) Necessarily, if <p> is true, then there is some entity in virtue of which it is true. (2005: 18; see also 2000: 259; Armstrong 2004: 5, 17)

Calemi draws out the consequence of moving to (TM):

In truthmaker theory *only existence matters*; but according to the Ostrich Nominalist, it is not the case that such predicative truths as (3) [Socrates is wise] are true *solely by virtue*

¹⁰ As Melia’s “sensible nominalist” also denies (2005: 70).

¹¹ As Guillon’s points out, everyone in the debate stops somewhere (2021: 84-86). According to Giladi “Hegel’s realism can be read as directly opposed to Devitt’s claim that the best terminus for explanation is ‘a fundamental physical fact of our world.’” (2014: 738)

of the existence of some entity.... (3) is true if and only if (i) Socrates exists and (ii) he is wise. (2016: 42)

On the one hand, (TM)'s insistence on a grounding in "existence facts" rather than "predicative facts" (Guillon 2021) is fatal to the Ostrich, as Rodriguez-Pereyra demonstrates:

...the truthmaker version of ostrich nominalism fails simply because a sentence like "*a* is *F*" may be contingently true. If so, then *a* does not suffice to make it true that it is *F*, since "*a* exists" does not entail "*a* is *F*"... Therefore *a* is not the truthmaker of "*a* is *F*". (2000: 267-8)

On the other hand, (TM) yields a case for universals, though far from a decisive one; think of tropes. (TM) demands the existence of some entity *other than a*. The universal, *F*-ness, will spring immediately to the Realist's mind:

...it becomes entirely natural and reasonable to postulate that [*a*] has properties that are objectively there, and that one or more of these properties is the truthmaker. (Armstrong 2004: 41)

Yet the existence of *F*-ness, even along with the existence of *a*, won't suffice to ground *a* being *F*: *a* might not instantiate *F*-ness. So, as Oliver points out (1996: 71-72), the Armstrongian Realist is likely to take the truthmaker to be a "state of affairs" that includes *F*-ness.

In sum, the response to the Ostrich's dismissal of the truthmaker interpretation of the OoM rests entirely on the strong (TM). But why accept (TM)? The question is particularly pressing given that, as Helen Beebe and Julian Dodd nicely remark, "from a Quinean perspective", (TM) yields such "ontological exotica" as "states of affairs or tropes" (2005: 3). *The Ostrich totally rejects (TM) as just another bit of unnatural metaphysics*. As Peacock says, "what 'makes it true' that *a* is *F* is simply the existence of a particular that is a certain way, i.e., is *F*" (2009: 189). Speaking for the Ostrich, Lewis rightly says, such predications are "true not because of *whether* things are, but because of *how* things are" (1992: 216).

Rodriguez-Pereyra has responded to doubts about (TM) with two arguments.¹² First:

But if being how it is is what makes the proposition that the rose is red true, being how it is is also what makes the proposition that the rose is light true, the proposition that the rose is fragrant true, and so on. But this is wrong. For what makes true that the rose is red is not what makes true that the rose is light. What makes true that the rose is red is that it is red, while what makes true that the rose is light is that it is light. (2005: 23)

When the Ostrich says that it is how (the way) the rose is that makes it red, *of course* she does not mean that it is how the rose is *in general* that does the making. She means that it is how the rose is *in particular, without being specific*. If specificity is demanded, she can follow Rodriguez-Pereyra: "What makes true that the rose is red is that it is red". That's trivial, of

¹² Armstrong offers no argument, seeming to find (TM) obvious (1989: 89; 2004: 42).

course. If more is demanded, the Ostrich directs us to the science of colors. “What makes the rose light?” The Ostrich has a *different* trivial answer, backed up by a *different* science. To point out these differences is *not*, contrary to Rodriguez-Pereyra, to “quantify over ways” (2005: 23); there is no mention of ways. In sum, nothing here ruffles the Ostrich’s feathers.

This is the appropriate place to consider Rodriguez-Pereyra’s claim that the truthmaker approach “transforms the Problem of Universals” from our OoM “into the Many over One, that is, the problem of explaining how the same particular can have different properties” (2000: 255). To the Ostrich, this is just another pseudo problem: the rose can be red without being light and vice versa. Nothing more needs to be said beyond the scientific explanations of being red and being light.

Rodriguez-Pereyra’s second argument for (TM) is as follows:

- (1) Truth is grounded.
- (2) Grounding is a relation.
- (3) Relations link entities.
- (4) Therefore, truth is grounded in entities. (2005: 25)

The Ostrich accepts (1) provided it is understood as the claim that non-fundamental facts are scientifically explicable in terms of other facts. Take the case of the rose. The Ostrich thinks that the rose is red *because*, according to the science of colors, it is *P* (and not, spuriously, because it is red). That’s *all there is* to the idea of grounding that Rodriguez-Pereyra nicely motivated earlier (2005: 21). So, (2) is false: grounding is not a relation. Rodriguez-Pereyra’s argument to the contrary (2005: 26-31), with its uncalled-for talk of “propositions” and “facts”, simply begs this question. The only entity that we need to talk about here is the rose, just as the Ostrich always thought.

8 Imaguire’s “Priority Nominalism”

I turn finally to Guido Imaguire’s “Priority Nominalism” (2018). Imaguire admires Ostrich Nominalism but thinks that it needs supplementation with “a new tool of analytic metaphysics”, *grounding* (2018: ix; see ch. XX in this volume for details). “Fundamental” truths have no grounds. Imaguire’s dramatic break with the Ostrich is his claim that “only fundamental truths are really ontologically committing” (2018: ix); “some sentences can be considered true, but their commitment may be neglected as merely apparent” (2018: 90). Consequently,

properties (like tropes and states of affairs) are derivative and, therefore, they do not really exist, i.e. they “exist” just in a “misleading” and not in an ontologically regulated manner of speaking. From a strict ontological perspective, there are only particulars. (2018: 40)

I shall not argue against this unwelcome departure from Quinean orthodoxy, but rather consider its motivation.

The motivation comes from an old objection (Alston 1958) to the Quinean strategy of avoiding the unwanted ontological commitments of *S* by adopting a paraphrase *S** that lacks those commitments. Imaguire raises the objection like this: “Why should we suppose that it is *S* and not *S** that deceives us?” (2018: 29). Thus, in section 1, I offered (5), which has no

commitment to universals, as a paraphrase of (6), which has. But why prefer (5) to (6)? Imaguire claims that such a preference is “apparently arbitrary” (2018: 87). He thinks that we need Priority Nominalism to solve this “serious problem” (2018: 88) for the Ostrich:

the priority nominalist solves it by means of the notion of grounding: compare the facts expressed by S and S^* in terms of ontological fundamentality and apply the commitment criterion only to the most fundamental one (2018: 29)

The persistent paraphrase objection stems from a misunderstanding of what Quine has in mind in talking of paraphrases. Quine does *not* have in mind that S and S^* “have to have the same meaning”, “express the same informational content”, or be “made true by the same truthmakers” (Imaguire 2018: 88). Nor do Mellor and Oliver have Quine right in the following discussion (cited by Imaguire 2018: 87):

Suppose we have a sentence S , apparently committed to some entity e , and an equivalent sentence [S^*] which is said to be uncommitted to e . This, it is said, shows that S is only apparently committed to e . (1997b: 15)

Paraphrasing is best thought of as a sort of *theory choice*. Suppose that e is a novel posit, for example, a universal: so, our theories are not already committed to universals. Suppose that a theorist is entertaining S , which is *really*, not just “apparently”, committed to e , but finds a paraphrase S^* , which has no such commitment. Suppose, finally, that S yields *no explanatory gain over* S^* . Then the theorist should choose S^* ; that’s the dictate of Quine’s Occamism (sec. 5). As I said in response to Mellor and Oliver,

[S^*] will serve his purposes well enough. He thus “frees himself from ontological commitments of his discourse” (Quine 1961: 103.). *His* commitment to e is only apparent not real: it arose from “an avoidable manner of speaking” (Quine 1961: 13). (2010: 25)

To emphasize, S is really committed to e , but S^* is not. And that is why the theorist prefers S^* , thus removing *his own* commitment to e . There is nothing in the least “arbitrary” about the replacement: it is guided by an Occamist principle that plays a major role in scientific theory choice.

In sum, the Ostrich has no need of groundings to keep out universals.¹³

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