

On Universals: An extensionalist alternative to Quine's resemblance theory

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Abstract

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The notion of similarity plays a central role in Quine's theory of Universals and it is with the help of this notion that Quine intends to define the concept of kind which also plays a central role in the theory. But as Quine has admitted, his attempts to define kinds in terms of similarities were unsuccessful and it is mainly because of this shortcoming that Quine's theory has been ignored by several philosophers. In the present paper, I propose an alternative framework that accounts for the phenomena that Quine intends to explain with his resemblance theory. The framework agrees with Quine's austere ontology; in particular, it does not assume the existence of properties and of possible worlds. Moreover, the framework is extensionalist since the abstract entities it assumes are classes and these can be individuated extensionally. Finally, I will refute some of the objections to Quine's approach that have been raised by Malcolm and Oliver and I will argue that, contrary to what has been claimed, Quine is able to specify an important set of sparse properties.

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