Tropes - Nominalism

PHI 202 (Western Metaphysics)

M.A. Philosophy, 2nd semester

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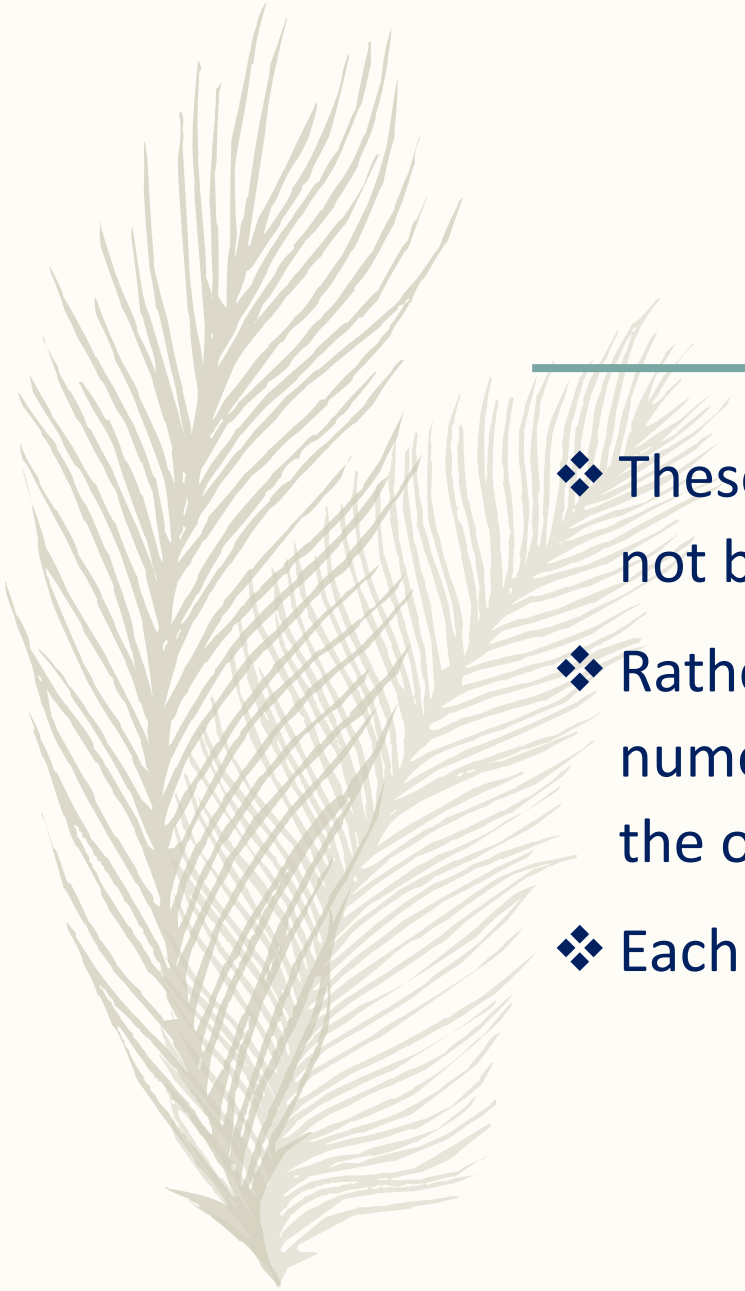
- Extreme version of nominalism
- All other versions of nominalism agree with property realism about which things are particulars; they only disagree about the need to postulate further entities; universals.
- Properties and relations are conceived of as particulars.
- Tropes – Properties and relations conceived of as particulars.
- Tropes- abstract particulars (in contrast with the more familiar particulars, ordinary concrete objects).
- Concrete particulars - you, me, the mount Everest etc.
- Your smile, the colour of my eyes and the height of the mount Everest are abstract particulars.

Proponents of Trope theory

- Trope theory was proposed by G. F. Stout (19th century).
- Developed and defended by - Donald Williams, and Keith Campbell.
- Williams: Tropes are the basic items of the universe, the alphabet of being.
- According to trope theory, properties and relations are abstract particulars, not universals.
- Consider two cricket balls whose images are given in the next slide.



- These two cricket balls are exactly similar. They are both red. But not because they share a common property.
- Rather, the redness of one ball is an (unrepeatable) particular, numerically distinct from, but exactly resembling, the redness of the other ball.
- Each redness is a distinct abstract particular (a trope).

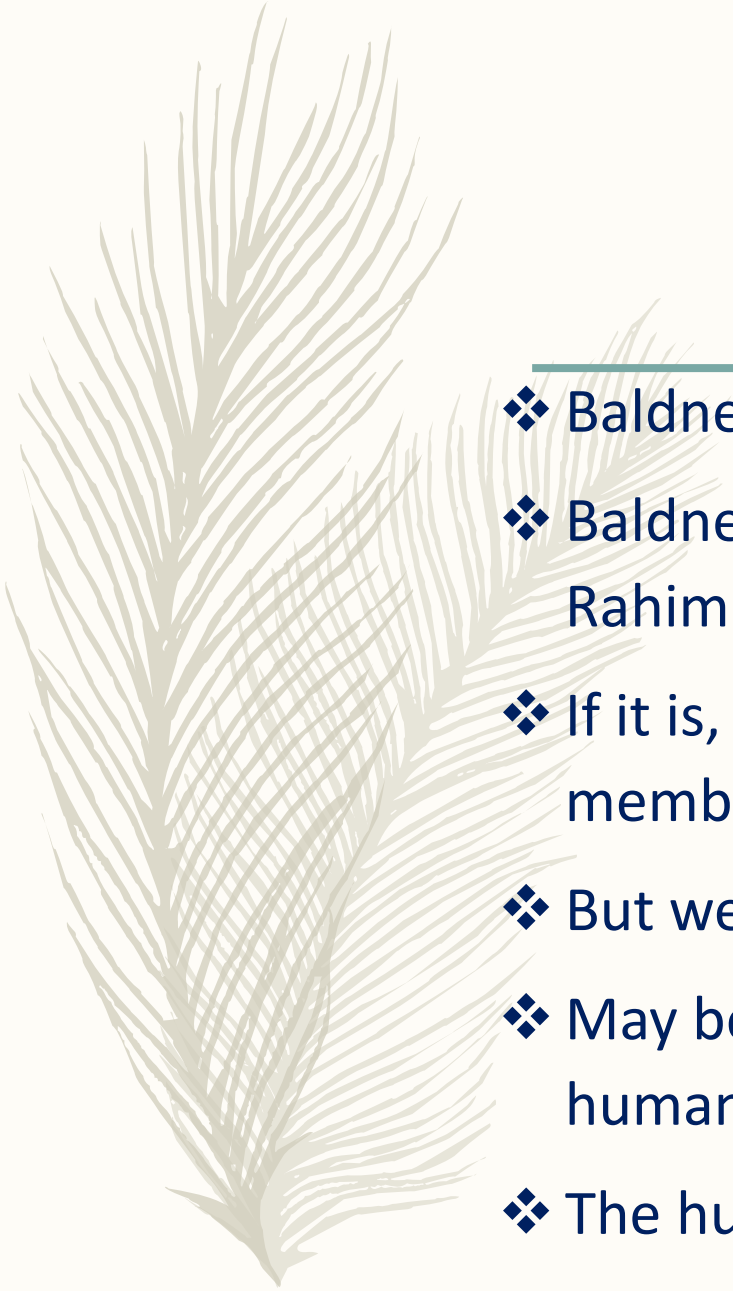
Properties

- Ordinarily we contrast a concrete particular with its properties. E.g. we contrast a man with his baldness.
- We don’t think Rahim’s baldness itself as a particular. But that is what Trope theory hold.
- Property – trope

Relations

- Relation – trope
- Rahim's being a foot taller than Rakesh
- And Susmita's a being a foot taller than Kavita.
- They are not the
  same relations: they are, two exactly similar relation tropes.

- Trope theory : ordinary concrete objects are not substances but bundles of tropes.
- What is the relation between bundle and the trop?
- it is not much of a problem if I feel that it
- Common sense intuition: some properties of a concrete particulars are accidental.
- Relation of a concrete object to its trope: cannot be that of a set to its member.



- Baldness is one of Rahim’s accidental properties.
- Baldness is not a member of the set of tropes which constitute Rahim.
- If it is, it will follow that Rahim is essentially bald (since a set has its members essentially).
- But we know that it is not the case.
- May be other properties are essential to Rahim, for example his humanity.
- The humanity trope is essential to the bundle that is Rahim.

Objection

- Instantiation relation is replaced by part whole relation. But what is this relation? Not clear.
- How can a trope be essential to a bundle? What makes it essential? Is a bundle the sort of thing that can have essential parts?
- What binds the tropes together?