

# How To Place Epicurus In Relation To "Nominalism"?

Post by "Cassius" of May 2, 2024 at 9:30 AM

As a reminder, here is the issue as Wikipedia states it:

In [metaphysics](#), **nominalism** is the view that [universals](#) and [abstract objects](#) do not actually exist other than being merely names or labels.<sup>[1][2]</sup> There are at least two main versions of nominalism. One version denies the existence of universals – things that can be instantiated or exemplified by many particular things (e.g., strength, humanity). The other version specifically denies the existence of abstract objects – objects that do not exist in space and time.<sup>[3]</sup>

[220px-William of Ockham.png](#)

[William of Ockham](#)

Most nominalists have held that only physical particulars in space and time are real, and that universals exist only *post res*, that is, subsequent to particular things.<sup>[4]</sup> However, some versions of nominalism hold that some particulars are abstract entities (e.g., [numbers](#)), while others are concrete entities – entities that do exist in space and time (e.g., pillars, snakes, and bananas).

Nominalism is primarily a position on the [problem of universals](#). It is opposed to [realist](#) philosophies, such as [Platonic realism](#), which assert that universals do exist over and above particulars, and to the [hylomorphic](#) substance theory of Aristotle, which asserts that universals are [immanently real](#) within them. However, the name "nominalism" emerged from debates in medieval philosophy with [Roscellinus](#).

Further:

## The problem of universals

Nominalism arose in reaction to the [problem of universals](#), specifically accounting for the fact that some things are of the same type. For example, Fluffy and Kitzler are both cats, or, the fact that certain properties are repeatable, such as: the grass, the shirt, and Kermit the Frog are green. One wants to know by virtue of *what* are Fluffy and Kitzler both cats, and *what* makes the grass, the shirt, and Kermit green.

The [Platonist](#) answer is that all the green things are green in virtue of the [existence](#) of a universal: a single [abstract](#) thing that, in this case, is a [part](#) of all the green things. With respect to the color of the grass, the shirt and Kermit, one of their parts is identical. In this respect, the three parts are literally one. Greenness is repeatable because there is one thing that [manifests](#)

<https://www.epicureanfriends.com/thread/2059-how-to-place-epicurus-in-relation-to-nominalism/?postID=30212#post30212>

itself wherever there are green things.

Nominalism denies the existence of universals. The motivation for this flows from several concerns, the first one being where they might exist. [Plato](#) famously held, on one interpretation, that there is a realm of abstract forms or universals apart from the physical world (see [theory of the forms](#)). Particular physical objects merely exemplify or instantiate the universal. But this raises the question: Where is this universal realm? One possibility is that it is outside space and time. A view sympathetic with this possibility holds that, precisely because some form is immanent in several physical objects, it must also transcend each of those physical objects; in this way, the forms are "transcendent" only insofar as they are "immanent" in many physical objects. In other words, immanence implies transcendence; they are not opposed to one another. (Nor, in this view, would there be a separate "world" or "realm" of forms that is distinct from the physical world, thus shirking much of the worry about where to locate a "universal realm".) However, [naturalists](#) assert that nothing is outside of space and time. Some [Neoplatonists](#), such as the pagan philosopher [Plotinus](#) and the Christian philosopher [Augustine](#), imply (anticipating [conceptualism](#)) that universals are contained within the *mind* of God. To complicate things, what is the nature of the [instantiation](#) or [exemplification relation](#)?