Ontological Commitment and Quantifiers
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When is a speaker committed to the existence of a thing? Or in the philosophical jargon, when is your statement *ontologically committing*?[1] At first, this may seem straightforward. For example, if a person sincerely asserts the following, a commitment to God's existence is indicated:

(1) God loves us and wants us to be happy.

Notoriously, however, natural language can be misleading. The term 'God' can be used in statements that do *not* commit one to God's existence, as with the following idiomatic expression:

(2) Some acts of God are covered under this policy.

When an insurance salesperson sincerely asserts (2), she does not mean to introduce theology into the discussion. And of course, a person can insincerely assert a God-statement. Sometimes, in the face of adversity, a non-religious person can be heard saying:

(3) God hates me.

But the most important case of an "ontologically idle" term occurs in a literal reading of a negative existential, such as the following:

(~P) Pegasus does not exist.

This use of the name 'Pegasus' clearly should not make (~P) ontologically committing. After all, the name is used precisely to *deny* the existence of Pegasus.

And here arises one of the oldest philosophical conundrums, going back to Parmenides—the problem of Non-Being. If one assumes the truth of 'Pegasus lacks being', then it follows (does it not?) that there is nothing to which the subject-term refers. So it does not refer to Pegasus in particular. In which case, the statement fails to say anything in reference to Pegasus. But of course, it *is* saying something in reference to Pegasus—that Pegasus is not. But if you can refer to Pegasus, it seems that Pegasus must in some sense "be." Legions of responses to this problem have ensued.

What interest does this have for metametaphysics? The Problem of Non-Being is an issue in first-order metaphysics, specifically ontology (the study of what exists).[2] Yet the Problem makes vivid that we cannot directly "read off" ontological commitments from the names that a speaker uses. So this introduces a question about *methodology in ontology*: By what criterion can we identify the ontological commitments incurred by a statement? If the use of a name does not tip us off to an ontological commitment, what does? The present chapter is a slightly opinionated review of the three most prominent factions on such metaontological[3] questions: Quineans, Carnapians, and Meinongians. At the end, I also offer some related considerations about ontology, touching on ideas I have developed in various publications.

1. Quine and his successors

In his seminal work, Quine (1948/1961; 1960, etc.) approaches matters, first, by "regimenting" our statements—by paraphrasing them into the precise language of first-order quantificational logic. This effectively dispenses with idioms and metaphors like that in (2) and (3), along with other vagaries and infelicities of natural language. (Thus, "acts of God" might be re-framed as talk of "unforeseen accidents" or the like.) It still leaves us with negative existentials like (~P) however.

On this matter, Quine (1948/1961) first brushes aside two proposals, attributed to two fictional philosophers "McX" and "Wyman," although the latter is thought to be Meinong in a thin disguise.[4] (For more on Meinong, see section 3.) McX holds that 'Pegasus' refers to an idea in our minds, whereas Wyman claims that 'Pegasus' refers to a "unactualized possible object." But against McX, Quine observes that when one asserts (~P), one is not trying to deny the existence of an *idea*. Rather, one is denying the existence of a specific *animal*, a winged horse. Wyman's view, on the other hand, is criticized in several ways. Quine's most influential point here is that it is difficult to *individuate* nonactual objects. So to illustrate: I am presently thinking of a non-actual fat man standing in the doorway. And now…I am thinking of a non-actual bald man standing in the doorway. Question: Is this the same man on both occasions? As it stands, there seems to be no fact of the matter. And Quine asks rhetorically "what sense can be found in talking of entities which cannot meaningfully be said to be identical with themselves and distinct from one another?" (p. 4)[5]

For his part, Quine endorses the analysis of (~P) from Bertrand Russell (1906; 1919, etc.). Generally, Russell held the view that the meaning of an ordinary proper name[6] should be analyzed in terms of a *definite description*, a description that is uniquely satisfied by the denotation of the name—if such there be. To illustrate, suppose a Russellian regards the name 'Pegasus' as equivalent to the definite description 'the winged horse captured by Bellerophon'. Then, (~P) will be seen as equivalent to:

(~P*) The winged horse captured by Bellerophon does not exist.[7]

This in turn can be symbolized into first-order quantificational logic as follows (where 'Wxb' translates 'x is a winged horse captured by Bellerophon'):

(4) $\sim\exists x\, (Wxb\, \&\, \forall y\, (Wyb \supset y = x))$

This says: Nothing is a winged horse captured by Bellerophon (which is identical to any such horse).[8] And crucially, its truth does *not* require Pegasus to exist as a referent. It is enough if everything in existence fails to satisfy 'Wxb', i.e., fails to be described as a "winged horse captured by Bellerophon."

This Russellian analysis would explain, moreover, why the use of the name 'Pegasus' is not ontologically committing. The name is seen as equivalent a definite description, and the compound descriptor is meaningful (thanks to its constituent predicates like 'horse'), even if nothing actually satisfies it. What's more, Quine recognizes that Russell's analysis suggests a *different* criterion of ontological commitment.[9] As (4) makes clear, the truth of the statement depends on each object failing to satisfy the quantified-formula, when the object is assigned as the value of the variable 'x'. Thus, a commitment to the statement amounts to an ontological commitment against such a satisfier. *Mutatis mutandis* for 'Pegasus exists', where it is analyzed as:

(5) $\exists x\, (Wxb\, \&\, \forall y\, (Wyb \supset y = x))$

In this case, truth requires that some object indeed satisfies the quantified-formula, when the object is assigned as the value of '*x*'. And thus a commitment to (5) is an ontological commitment to such an object. Generalizing, we thus arrive at Quine's criterion of ontological commitment:

> (QC) An object *o* is an ontological commitment of a regimented (set of/) statement(s) iff *o* is required to make the statement(s) true (where *o* is assumed to be in the range of the bound variable(s)).

Quine (1948/1961) puts it this way: "To be assumed as an entity is…to be reckoned as the value of a variable" (p. 13).[10] Concordantly, Quine adds that "the *only* way we can involve ourselves in ontological commitments [is] by our use of bound variables. The use of alleged names is no criterion" (p. 12, his italics).[11]

It is fair to say that (QC) has been the most influential part of Quine's philosophy on contemporary writers. Indeed, some credit Quine with "reviving metaphysics" from the slumber induced by his positivist predecessors. However, Quine himself is clear that his interest is not metaphysics as much as metaontology—or more specifically, a criterion of ontological commitment: "We look to bound variables in connection with ontology not in order to know what there is, but in order to know what a given remark or doctrine…*says* there is" (ibid.).[12]

Van Inwagen (1998; 2014, ch. 3) is one metaontologist who carries the Quinean tradition. Yet there are enough surface differences that it is useful to say something particular to van Inwagen's view. He sums up his position in a series of five theses:

1. Being is not an activity.
2. Being is the same as existence.
3. Existence is univocal.
4. Existence is expressed by the existential quantifier.
5. (QC) is a procedural norm for ontological disputes.

One apparent departure from Quine is that van Inwagen's theses 1-4 seem concerned with the metaphysics of existence rather than a linguistic criterion of ontological commitment. But (assuming standard disquotational principles) 1-4 can be seen as having implications for the meaning of the words 'being', 'exist', and the like. And as we saw at the outset, the key issue is to decide when the use of natural language is ontologically committing.

Thesis 5 is not given a one-sentence formulation in van Inwagen; he says that it is really a "family of theses" (2014, p. 85). But the above formulation seems to capture the core of it. The thought is that (QC) lays down one of the "rules for engagement" for ontological disputes. Van Inwagen illustrates this using the Platonism vs. nominalism debate about numbers. Consider that, assuming (QC), our best scientific theories are committed to the existence of numbers, as when physics tells us:

> (6) The mass in grams of a homogeneous object is the product of its density in g/cm^3 and its volume in cm^3.

This would naturally be regimented as quantifying over numbers, i.e., as having numbers in the range of bound variables. Going by (QC), then, the nominalist is obligated to regiment (6) in a different manner. Quine himself did not believe that suitable nominalist paraphrases for mathematical physics were available, although see Field (1980) for an impressive attempt. But the present point is that (QC) defines an essential task for nominalism, if nominalism is to remain a viable option in the philosophy of mathematics. And it is this task-setting role which (QC) has for ontological disputes, per thesis 5.

Another contemporary Quinean is Sider (2009; 2011). Sider is an interesting case since, while he endorses something like (QC) (see 2011, p. 12), he also rejects descriptivism, given his affinity for Lewis' (1984) semantic doctrine of "reference magnetism." In fact, this combination of (QC) with anti-descriptivism seems common after Kripke's (1972/1980). Yet the continued popularity of (QC) is odd in one respect, since Quine's argument for (QC) assumed descriptivism. Granted, (QC) itself may still be defensible by some non-descriptivist means. Even so, (QC) itself may remain incompatible with externalist views such as "reference magnetism." (See Parent 2017a.)

2. Carnap and his successors

The most prominent opponent of Quine's metaontology is Carnap. Carnap's disagreement is best known via Carnap (1950), although the Quine-Carnap debate extends well beyond that. Indeed, Quine's famous "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (1951a) is in large measure a reply to Carnap. See also Quine (1951b), Carnap's (1955) replies, and the follow-up in Quine (1960, ch. 2), and Quine (1969, ch. 2).

Carnap's (1950) basic idea is that existence-statements, even on their literal reading, often do *not* incur any absolute ontological commitments. Take for example a statement about number:

> (N) There is an even prime.

Quine would regiment this as an existentially quantified formula, whose truth would require the number 2 in the range of the variable—whence it is ontologically committing. Carnap, in contrast, begins by reflecting on the linguistic rules by which number-terms were introduced in the first place. He says: "If someone wishes to speak in his language about a new kind of entities, [s/]he has to introduce a system of new ways of speaking, subject to new rules; we shall call this procedure the construction of a linguistic *framework* for the new entities in question" (p. 206). With the natural numbers specifically:

> The framework for this system is constructed by introducing into the language new expressions with suitable rules: (1) numerals like 'five' and sentence forms like 'there are five books on the table'; (2) the general term 'number' for the new entities, and sentence forms like 'five is a number'; (3) expressions for properties of numbers (e.g. 'odd,' 'prime'), [and so on]. (p. 208)

Once this framework is in place, (N) is straightforwardly a deductive consequence. Or, since the rules can be seen as *defining* the number-theoretic vocabulary, it turns out that (N) is *analytically true* with respect to those definitions (plus a few other axioms).

The metaphysical urge, however, is to insist on asking "But is (N) *really* true? Does an even prime *really* exist?" The question can seem odd: We just noted that within the framework for number-talk, it is uncontroversial that an even prime exists. Thus, Carnap says, the metaphysician's question must not be a question raised *internal* to the linguistic framework. Instead it must be an *external* question; it is a question about what exists "outside" the framework or independently of what the framework states. Yet here, the metaphysician's question remains odd, for the linguistic framework lays down the rules for the use of number-terms. Thus, if those rules are set aside, you get linguistic anarchy—number-theoretic talk is undefined. For this reason, Carnap concludes that the external question, the distinctly metaphysical question raised outside the framework, is *meaningless*.

Nonetheless, Carnap adds that those who ask metaphysical questions may be indirectly asking "a practical question, a matter of… whether or not to accept and use the forms of expression in the framework" (p. 207). Yet the practical question is not adjudicated so much by evidence, but more by the utility of the

framework, the "efficiency, fruitfulness, and simplicity" of the framework (p. 208). Carnap is clear, moreover, that utility is not evidence for the (external) truth of the framework.

So against Quine, points of ontology (when meaningful, and not indirectly practical) are uniformly uncontentious. Again, the question "Is (N) *really* true?" is patently affirmative within the number-theoretic framework, and unintelligible beyond it—except to debate theoretical utility in a roundabout way. N.B., internal ontological questions are not always affirmative: In the framework of evolutionary biology, the answer is negative if we ask "Does Pegasus exist?" The mistake for Carnap, however, is in thinking that there is a *framework-independent* answer to such questions, when really, such questions are incomprehensible outside of any framework. For Carnap, existence is a pluralistic affair, and whether *x* "exists" is always relativized to a framework.[13]

Several contemporary writers follow Carnap by adopting an internal/external distinction for existence-questions, and judging the legitimacy of such questions by this distinction. However, the details sometimes diverge from Carnap significantly. Consider first Thomasson (2009; 2015). In many respects, she is entirely with Carnap; for instance, she understands existence-terminology as governed by conventional "rules of use," and that under these rules, existence-questions are to be answered either empirically or analytically. And she rejects metaphysicians' attempts to answer existence-questions by *other* means, for this requires ignoring the established rules for use. Granted, rules can be stipulated *ad hoc* in a conversational context; however, this means that any metaphysical disagreement is merely verbal; this has disputants simply using existence-terms with different definitions.

Thomasson diverges from Carnap, however, in rejecting his pluralism about existence, where a question about the truth of (N) receives different answers relative to different frameworks. Thomasson's attitude is rather that there is only one set of linguistic conventions, and existence-questions should be addressed uniformly with respect to that set. In this respect, Thomasson seems more Quinean. One is reminded of Price (2009), where Quine is portrayed as asking Carnap rhetorically: "[W]hat is to stop us treating all ontological issues as internal questions within a single grand framework? Why shouldn't we introduce a single existential quantifier, allowed to range over anything at all, and treat the question of the existence of numbers as on a par with that of the existence of dragons?" (2009, p. 328). (The interested reader is strongly encouraged to consult Thomasson's own chapter in this volume.)

Another contemporary Carnapian is Hofweber (2009, 2016). Hofweber begins by observing that 'There is' in (N) is polysemous, admitting of both an "internal" and "external" reading. But as a disanalogy to Carnap, Hofweber's "external" reading has 'there is' expressing an objectual or Quinean existential quantifier. (Though like Carnap, Hofweber's internal reading has it expressing an inferential-role or substitutional "some"-quantifier.[14]) The leads to a further disanalogy, namely, that statements about existence *are* meaningful on Hofweber's "external" reading. Nonetheless, this should not be an encouragement to metaphysicians, since Hofweber thinks that their truth should be settled by empirical science, not armchair speculation. In this, he subscribes to what he calls metaphysical "modesty." (For more on modesty, see Hofweber's chapter "Is Metaphysics Special?" in this volume.)

Nonetheless, he simultaneously decries "unambitious" metaphysics, which merely "works out the consequences" of scientific theory (2009, p. 264). Metaphysics should be "ambitious;" it should have its own set of questions and its own discoveries about the world to offer. I interpret Hofweber as criticizing Quinean "regimentation," where we translate scientific theory into quantificational logic, and then read off its ontological commitments as per (QC). My own view, however, is that regimentation is not simply a *translation* of scientific theory, but a *refinement* of it, subject to various desiderata. In which case, regimentation is not just the stale task of logical symbolization (see Parent 2015a for details).

There are several other prominent Carnapians on the contemporary scene, such as Hirsch (2011), Chalmers (2009; 2012), Yablo (1998; 2009), etc. See also Putnam (1987) for an earlier but influential Carnapian view. In addition, while Carnapians seem to be in ascendency, new criticisms are also emerging; see, e.g., Eklund (2016). However, it is not possible to cover all these ideas here. But see Manley & Sud's chapter on "Quantifier Variance," as well as Balcerak Jackson's chapter on "Verbal Disputes and Metaphysics" in this volume.

3. Meinong and his successors

Quine, recall, spoke of "Wyman" as one of his foils. Wyman holds that (~P) is true in virtue of a non-existent object which nonetheless has "being," thus clearly aligning him with Meinong (1904/1960). But thanks to Quine's critique (and Russell's 1906 scorn for those lacking a "robust sense of reality") Meinongianism remains a fringe view on the Problem of Non-Being. Yet Meinongianism has been strikingly persistent, and it creates some intriguing metaontological issues. First, however, let us take a look at what Meinong himself said.

Generally, Meinong (1904/1960) was focused less on *linguistic* representations like (~P), and more on *knowledge* of non-existents. But like Quine and Carnap, Meinong paid particular attention to mathematical objects, which for him, were undoubtedly objects of knowledge. He writes:

> the totality of what exists…is infinitely small in comparison with the totality of the Objects of knowledge… [This] is supported by the testimony of a very highly developed science—indeed the most highly developed one: mathematics. [Yet] We would surely not want to speak of mathematics as alien to reality, as though it had nothing to do with what exists. (pp. 79-80)

Meinong thus suggests that mathematical objects indeed have a kind of being called "subsistence," despite their nonexistence. Some contemporary Meinongians, the "Noneists," reject subsistence; they prefer to say that mathematical objects do not exist in any sense at all (e.g., Routley 1980, Priest 2005/2016).[15] Now even Meinong rejected subsistence for fictional objects like the golden mountain and for impossibilia like the round square.[16] Yet Meinong himself did not wish to demote numbers and the like in quite the same way; thus, they are bestowed with subsistence.

But even apart from subsistence, some critics (e.g., van Inwagen 1977; Lycan 1979) protest that the very idea of a "nonexistent object" is unintelligible, even to the point of being "literally gibberish" (Lycan 1979, p. 290.). However, some Meinongian ways of speaking are familiar to ordinary speakers. It is not esoteric philosophy-talk to say "Some things are the stuff of myth." Granted, Meinong did not help his cause with the notorious pronouncement: "Those who like paradoxical modes of expression could very well say: *'There are objects of which it is true that there are no such objects'*" (1904/1960, p. 83, italics mine). Later, I shall refer to the italicized claim as "Meinong's shocker." But as made clear by the clause prefixed to it, Meinong himself took the claim with a grain of salt.

Besides such defensive maneuvers, Meinongians have positive reasons in their favor. A striking case has been made by Brock (2004), showing that the widely respected Kripkean anti-descriptivist arguments work best on referentially "empty" names like 'Pegasus'—even better than on Kripke's own examples of non-empty names like 'Aristotle'. Such considerations might lead one to think of 'Pegasus' as *directly referential*, i.e., as a rigid designator for an unreal object.

So again, for Meinong, some things do not exist, like the golden mountain and round squares. But n.b., although a round square neither exists nor subsists, Meinong still admits that it is *an object of knowledge*: "Any particular thing that isn't real must at least be capable of serving as the Object for those judgments

which grasp its *Nichtsein*" (1904/1960, p. 82). For Meinong, then, objects fall into *three* ontological categories: Those that exist, those that subsist but do not exist, and those that do not exist in any sense at all (cf. Chisholm 1973).[17] But thus far, all this concerns the Problem of Non-Being, a problem in first-order ontology. It does not yet directly addres metaontology, and writers sometimes do not clearly separate Meinongian ontology from Meinongian metaontology.[18] Yet, as with van Inwagen in section 1, we may first observe that Meinong's metaphysics of existence naturally suggests a view about existence-terminology. This, in turn, is important to regimentation and to a criterion of ontological commitment. Thus, regarding (N) ("There is an even prime,") Meinong would interpret the range of 'There is' as including objects that do *not* exist, contra the Quinean. But Meinong can still allow that 'There is' sometimes concerns only existing objects. Thus unlike Quine, we have a variability in what such terminology means. (And unlike Carnap, none of these uses are deemed meaningless.)

The variability in existence-terms is made explicit in the Meinongianism of Priest (2005/2016). Priest's regimentation includes not only the Quinean existential quantifier '∃', but also the distinctively Meinongian quantifier '℘', standing for "some" in the sense of "at least one." The range of the latter includes the range of '∃', but includes more as well. (In Lewis' 1986 terms, '℘' is Priest's unrestricted quantifier, and '∃' is restricted to existing members of that domain.) Berto's (2013) regimentation is similar, except 'Σ' is used as the Meinongian quantifier. Thus, the Priest-Berto regimentation of (~P) would be something like '~∃x x = p', where 'p' names Pegasus, a non-existent in the range of the Meinongian quantifier. Whereas Meinong's shocker, in Berto's notation, could be regimented as:

(7) Σy ~∃x x = y

Yet (7) is quite consistent, for it just expresses that some (non-existent) object in the unrestricted domain of 'Σ' is not in the restricted domain of '∃.'

Other Meinongians also portray existence-terminology as variable in meaning, although Parsons (1980) and Zalta (1983, 1988, etc.) deploy only one "particular" or "some"-quantifier, namely '∃'. And they interpret '∃' as the *Meinongian* quantifier. To express existence, Parsons and Zalta instead use an existence-*predicate* 'Ex'. Thus on the Parsons-Zalta approach, (~P) would be regimented as '~Ep', and from this, Meinong's shocker follows by ∃-generalization:

(8) ∃x ~Ex

But like (7), this is logically consistent as well, and for an analogous reason.

Berto and Priest each note that a Meinongian could use an existence-predicate in lieu of having two "some"-quantifiers. But when illustrating this, Berto-Priest continue to use '∃' as the *Quinean* quantifier, and use the existence-predicate to define it. Whereas again, Parsons-Zalta use '∃' as the *Meinongian* quantifier. This may seem to be just a disagreement about notation, but it brings to the fore a key metaontological question: Is quantifying over an object using '∃' criterial for a commitment to the object? Since different Meinongians interpret '∃' differently, it seems they should not give the same answer.

Things are further complicated by the fact that, for a Meinongian, an *ontological* commitment is apparently not the same as an *existential* commitment. (This is made clear especially by Berto 2013.) Consider again Meinong's shocker. It does not express an *existential* commitment, since the commitment it directed at a non-existent object. Nevertheless, since it states that *there is* a non-existent object, one might naturally think it is ontologically committing.

This distinction between existential vs. ontological commitment might help adjudicate what a Meinongian criterion should be. The Meinongian could say that her "ontological commitments" are incurred by quantifying over objects using the Meinongian quantifier, and that "existential commitments" are incurred by quantifying over objects using the Quinean quantifier (or if preferred, by having the objects in the extension of an 'exist'-predicate). As for the interpretation of '∃', the dispute indeed starts to look merely terminological. Since '∃' is part of an artificial language, we are free just to *legislate* that '∃' express whichever quantifier we want (cf. Crane 2013, ch. 2).

Yet in the same way, it starts to look merely terminological whether the regimented language should express existence using a predicate vs. a quantifier. Again, since we are talking about an artificial language, we appear at liberty to designate existing objects using either type of symbol. But in this instance, it is more contentious to dismiss the issue this way. There is a long tradition (which some trace back to Kant) on whether existence is a predicate. Or more perspicuously, it is a debate on whether existence-terms ascribe a genuine *property* to an object. It is not obvious, however, why this "existence-as-property" debate should bear on which symbolization we should use in our regimentation. But the matter is involved, and there are considerations on both sides which we are not able to cover here. (See Moltmann 2015, Berto op. cit., and Crane, op. cit., for recent discussions.)

In any event, can Meinongians at least agree that a criterion of *ontological* commitment is membership in the range of a *Meinongian* quantifier? It seems not, for two reasons.

One is that Meinongians seem equally well-placed to revive a *name*-based criterion of ontological commitment, of the sort that Russell and Quine opposed. After all, a Meinongian would see any named object as in the range of the Meinongian quantifier. In which case, having a name would be sufficient for a Meinongian ontological commitment. However, it is dubious whether having a name is *necessary* for such a commitment. (The real numbers are uncountable, and in a regimented language, one can introduce only countably many names.[19]) Nevertheless, if having a name is enough for a Meinongian ontological commitment, then such a commitment would be apparent from a sentence like 'Pegasus has wings.' There would be no need to fuss with the meaning of quantifiers and about how quantifier-rules should interface with the sentence.

The second reason to hesitate over a Meinongian criterion is that a Noneist like Routley (1980) explicitly refuses that his Meinongian quantifier indicates his ontological commitments (see, e.g., p. 424). On his view, round squares have no being in any sense at all—so it would be awkward for him to accept an "ontological commitment" to them. After all, even if one tolerates "there are shapes which don't exist," it is a further step to tolerate "there are shapes which are not." Be that as it may, Routley still claims the capacity to say "*some* shapes are not." In this, his Meinongian quantifier is really just a *quantifier*, used to designate a *quantity*, and there is no built-in assumption that the quantity of stuff has any sort of being. Yet if an ontologically neutral quantifier strikes you as a contradiction in terms, you are not alone. It is Routley's "neutral" quantifier which prompted Lewis (1990) to ask whether Routley was really a *None*ist. Perhaps he is better characterized as an "*All*ist," given that he countenances *everything* as an object.

On the other hand, if Routley's neutral quantification is jarring, it may be that you have been "tainted by philosophy." As Azzouni (2007) argues, there is good reason to think that quantifiers in natural language are ontologically neutral. (See also Priest 2008.) Further, Azzouni thinks the semantics for a neutral quantifier is unproblematic. Just take the neutral quantifier in your native tongue as part of the metalanguage, and use it to define a neutral quantifier into your regimented object language! (See Azzouni 2004; 2007, etc.) (Azzouni also thinks such a definition obviates the need for "Meinongian objects," but whether he is right about that is another matter.)

4. Closing remarks

I have devoted more space to Meinong, given that the metaontological aspects of his view remain underappreciated. (In the present volume, his name likely occurs at a fraction of the rate of 'Quine' or 'Carnap'.) I also confess more sympathy for Meinong, although the importance of Quine's method of regimentation cannot be overstated. I also applaud the pragmatism of Quine and Carnap. "Pragmatism" here does not imply a controversial instrumentalist thesis about the nature of truth. Rather, it is a recognition that we are always working "internal" to a theory—and our choice of theory is rationally guided only by (theory-laden) observation and so called "pragmatic" constraints like conservativeness, simplicity, scope, etc. (Cf. Parent 2017b, ch. 1, section 3.) This need not be at odds with Meinong, though he tended to speak as if we had direct access to reality, or unreality as the case may be.

Importantly, pragmatism in Quine and Carnap leads to a *deflationist* view of ontology, making them surprisingly similar metaontologically.[20] Price (2009) expresses this well:

> Carnap's internal issues were of no use to traditional metaphysics…And Quine's move certainly does not restore the non-pragmatic external perspective required by metaphysics…Quine himself has sunk the metaphysician's traditional boat, and left all of us, scientists and ontologists, clinging to Neurath's Raft…[T]he force of Quine's remarks is not that metaphysics is like science as traditionally (i.e. non-pragmatically) conceived, but that science…is like metaphysics as pragmatically conceived. (pp. 326-327)

Neither this brand of pragmatism nor deflationary metaontology is wildly popular today. But in what remains, let me say something in support of the view. I am able to provide here only a sketch of what has been elaborated elsewhere. Yet I hope I might draw some attention to these issues.

Much of ontology looks like semantic theory. Talk about the "furniture of the world" soon turns into talk about our talk, and in particular, about what our terms denote. Thus, the reference of 'Pegasus' immediately became the focus in the Problem of Non-Being; similarly, the range of 'There is' in (N) is what draws scrutiny. The method regimentation only encourages this. But there is something odd in interpreting our (linguistic or mental) representations, using those very representations. The limit case of this is a homophonic interpretation. Consider here Carnap's own example (1950/1956, p. 217):

(f) 'five' designates five.

Since the term 'five' is interpreted by the self-same term, (f) is uninformative.[21] At least, it is hard to see how it could advance our understanding of ontology. But matters do not improve much if, during regimentation, we use the ordinary term to define a formal name:

(f*) 'f' designates five.

Our concern is usually with the ontology underlying English, yet (f*) primarily informs us about a formal symbol. However, things may look better if we instead use a heterophonic interpretation like:

(9) 'five' designates the successor of four.

Yet in a key sense, this only "pushes back" the question onto the definite description on the right-hand side. What sort of object, if any, does 'the successor of four' denote (assuming the question is meaningful[22])? Indeed, since the ontology of numbers is at issue—and since the right-hand side of (9) helps itself to a number-term—it effectively ignores the real question.

The example of (9) suggests a broader lesson. If the aim is to specify the ontology of a language L, an interpretation cannot answer what object an expression of L denotes, if the interpretations are themselves L-expressions. Briefly, that's because the ontology of such interpretations would naturally be in question as much as the expressions they interpret. So in order to settle the question of ontology, the interpretations themselves would need to be interpreted, and thus a regress.[23] For the purposes of specifying the ontology of L, there is no escape from the "circle of language."

Again, I cannot defend this line in detail here, but see Parent (2015b). Hopefully, it is at least suggestive of why one might be attracted to a "pragmatism" like that in Carnap and Quine. Before closing, however, let me quickly consider one important objection.

It is clear that the following addendum would not distinguish a Carnapian view from a Platonic one:

(10) There is a successor of four.

After all, Carnap might embrace this as an analytic consequence of the number framework, just like his acceptance of (N). But—why can't we introduce a regimented quantifier to express *bona fide* ontological commitments, a quantifier that unequivocally concerns what exists *external* to our theory? For instance, we could regiment (10) as '$\exists x\, S(4) = x$', and make explicit the interpretation of the quantifier as follows:

(*) "$\exists x\, \Phi x$" is true iff *there really is* an object that is Φ.

This seems to be how the Neo-Carnapian Hofweber (op. cits.) escapes the "circle of language." But the problem is this. An unequivocally committal quantifier would need to be defined by an unequivocal English expression. Unfortunately, however, that *all* existence-terminology is equivocal between the "internal" and "external" readings—or between the ontologically neutral and committal readings. (It is not as if we are forbidden from using some of these terms in writing a novel.) Context can always "defang" existence-terminology so that it is ontologically non-committal. That is so, even if the existence-terms are italicized, iterated, put in caps, etc.

To illustrate, suppose we are discussing the play-within-a-play in Act V.i of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. (This example comes from Parent 2014). Suppose you insist that there is no lion in the nested play. Then, I might reply emphatically by saying:

(11) I'm *not making this up!* THERE REALLY AND TRULY IS a lion named 'Snug'!

My utterance would be true, even though we all know that that Snug is fictional. Indeed, he is fictional even within the fiction of the play.[24] The point, again, is that if all existence-talk has both the neutral and committal readings, then any definition like (*) will be similarly equivocal. Whence the regimented language cannot contain a strictly unequivocal quantifier to function in a criterion of ontological commitment.

Notes

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[1] Typically in the literature, one speaks of the ontological commitments of a *statement* or a *theory* (a collection of statements). rather than the ontological commitments of a *person*. However, I vacillate between these two modes of expression, harmlessly I assume, since the ontological commitments of a person can be parlayed into ontological commitments of the theory the person believes.

An anonymous reviewer points out that the notion of a "commitment" remains somewhat unclear, although this often is not noticed in the literature. For instance, if I see an orange and sincerely assert "there is an orange," I seem ontologically committed to at least one orange. But am I ontologically committed to *that particular* orange which I am seeing? It may seem so, although writers often speak as if I have just a commitment to oranges, and not any specific oranges. I detail similar complexities with "ontological commitment" in Parent (2017), section 1. See also Berto (2013) for further discussion along these lines.

[2] Recently, some have argued that "ontology" should instead be understood as the study of "what grounds what." We shall ignore this here, but the interested reader should consult Trogdon's chapter on "Grounding" in this volume. Also relevant is Mormodoro's chapter on "Neo-Aristotelean Metaphysics' and Bliss' chapter on "Fundamentality."

[3] Following Tahko (2015), we can distinguish metaontology and metametaphysics with help from the more customary distinction between ontology and metaphysics. Ontology is roughly the study of what exists, and is seen as a sub-discipline of metaphysics, which is concerned more broadly with the nature of reality, and with especially puzzling bits of reality (time, universals, freewill, etc). Thus understood, metaontology can then be seen as the study of ontology and metametaphysics as the study of metaphysics.

[4] When asked, Quine stated that 'McX' and 'Wyman' were not pseudonyms for any specific philosophers—they simply represent two views that were in the air at the time. (See Boynton Quine 2017, #22 under Email Updates.) Regardless, the resemblance between Wyman and Meinong is undeniable. And to my mind, McX seems inspired by Frege's view that a name in intensional discourse refers not to its ordinary referent, but to its "sense" (which is basically a mental content for Frege). Though in deference to Quine, we should not insist on identifying McX or Wyman with any actual philosopher.

[5] This exemplifies the famous Quinean dictum "no entity without identity." See Quine (1969, p. 23). By the way, this dictum also explains why Quine's regimentation was limited to *first*-order quantificational logic. In higher-order logics, one quantifies over properties, yet properties are individuated intensionally, thus frustrating attempts to give straightforward identity-conditions. E.g., the property of being triangular and the property of being trilateral are different, yet they are extensionally individuated by the same set of polygons.

[6] "Ordinary" proper names is meant to contrast with Russell's notion of a "genuine" proper name. The latter sort of name was *not* analyzed into a definite description; its referent was instead "known by acquaintance" rather than "known by description." In this vein, Russell held that the only objects that had genuine proper names were sense-data, since only these could be "known by acquaintance." However, for our purposes, I shall ignore the case of genuine proper names in main text. Indeed, Quine himself did not distinguish between names in this way, as all names were paraphrased into descriptive material. (This was in keeping with his strong stance that the *only* way to incur ontological commitment was by bound variables.)

[7] In the end, the descriptivist should also analyze away the name 'Bellerophon' into a definite description, but we may ignore this for simplicity's sake.

[8] The clause in parentheses can be put more colloquially as "there is at most one such horse," which is necessary to secure the "uniqueness" implied by the definite article 'The' in (~P). Also, Russell's view suggests adding a third conjunct '$\exists z\, z=x$' to (4). But this is logically redundant in classical logic, and so I have omitted it to reduce clutter.

[9] In *Word and Object*, Quine comes to prefer 'ontic commitment' over the term 'ontological commitment'; see p. 120n. But 'ontological commitment' is the more common term by far.

[10] In an earlier version of Quine's paper, the sentence here reads "To be is to be the value of a bound variable." This formulation is a bit more catchy, and is better known among philosophers. But I have quoted the revised version of the statement since it captures better Quine's intent. His point is not that existence is somehow *constituted* by the fact that an object lies in the range of a bound variable. Instead, this determines whether the theory *says* that the object exists.

[11] One difficulty for (QC) concerns a non-existent without an associated definite description, e.g., if we use 'Tom' as a name for "some unicorn or other" without specifying which one. Quine's fix is to introduce a predicate 'x Tom-izes' so that the relevant negative existential is rendered as "there is no unique x that Tom-izes." However, there are many other rough spots in (QC) which would need further sharpening. For helpful discussion, see Rayo (2010).

[12] Unfortunately, this section presents only a portion of Quine's systematic and fascinating views on ontology. But for further details, see Egerton's chapter on Quine, this volume.

[13] As with the section on Quine, this section on Carnap is quite minimal. See Kraut's chapter on Carnap, this volume, for more details.

[14] Briefly, a substitutional "some"-quantifier "Ex" can be defined as: "Ex Φx" is true iff "Φα" is true for at least one name α (where α can be an empty name or not.)

[15] Routley's Nonism is especially clear that mathematical objects, while qualifying as "objects," do not even have *being*. Commentators have of course wondered about the intelligibility of this view.

[16] Technically, a "round square" is a geometrical object, hence, a mathematical object. But in the main text, talk of "mathematical objects" shall be restricted to consistent mathematical objects only.

[17] The round square is a key moment in Meinong (1904/1960) for other reasons. For instance, he holds that we know the "essence" (*Sosein*) of the round square, and that this essence subsists—even though, again, the round square does not subsist (pp. 82, 84-85). Indeed, the *Sosein* of the round square is one key reason he is led to his well-known "independence principle" viz., that the subsistence of a *Sosein* does not require the (definitive) being of the object.

  N.B., some of the most interesting debates among Meinongians concern the *Sosein* of non-existents. Do Meinongians really want to say Pegasus is a winged *horse*, a flesh-and-blood mammal? That seems to make him too real. Accordingly, the way in which Pegasus is a "horse" has been reinterpreted in various ways. (See Parsons 1980 on "watered-down" properties, Zalta 1988 on "encoding," Parent (ms.) on actual+ yet non**actual** property-instances, etc.). Also, Priest (2005/2016) has shown that restrictions must be placed on the "characterization principle" for *Sosein*s, the principle that any characteristic defines a *Sosein*. Otherwise, the principle allows us to prove anything whatsoever.

[18] Two recent introductory works that are occasionally unclear on Meinongian metaontology vs. ontology are Tahko (2015) and Berto & Plebani (2015). Though in general, I highly recommend these books, especially given their generous coverage of Meinong.

[19] This was a sore spot for Barcan Marcus (1961/1993), who needed all objects to have names in order to adequately define her substitutional quantifiers. She humbly calls attention to the "awful simplicity" of this assumption, given the uncountability of the reals (p. 12). Although remarkably, when the issue comes up later (in the discussion with Quine and Kripke, added as an appendix), she instead expresses misgivings about the uncountability of the reals (p. 27)! What is also remarkable is that Quine responds by sympathizing with such misgivings (ibid.).

  At any rate, if any posit of a theory has a name, then the appearance of a name would be both necessary and sufficient for an ontological commitment. See Janssen-Lauret (2015) who interprets Barcan Marcus as holding such a criterion for ontological commitment, at least in relation to those names which Barcan Marcus calls "tags."

[20] Soames (2009) also stresses the metaontological similarity of Quine and Carnap. But he traces it back not to a shared pragmatism (although that may be implicated), but rather to a shared verificationism about meaning. One surprising consequence is that for both Quine and Carnap, theories which are observationally equivalent are ipso facto equivalent in ontology. (Any apparent ontological disparities would be merely verbal.) Soames memorably calls this equivalence-thesis shared between Quine and Carnap their "stunning counterintuitive bedrock of ontological agreement" (p. 441).

[21] Carnap himself calls the sentence "analytic," but I would rather just say it is uninformative. Both judgments assume, of course, that 'x designates y' is not ontologically committing on the value for y, except perhaps relative to a framework.

[22] For my part, such an "external" metaphysical question is intelligible in that it is not gibberish; its interest and its force can be felt by first-year undergraduates. This aspect of my view marks a contrast with Carnap's own "pragmatism."

[23] The regress argument here bears some kinship with the one in Quine (1969, ch. 2). However, Quine's regress arises in the context of his semantic indeterminacy, and no such assumption is made here.

[24] The example also makes clear how the argument bears on Yablo (1998). Yablo hopes to do Carnapian ontology by defining internal vs. external in terms of the figurative/literal distinction, rather than the analytic/synthetic distinction. My example, however, reveals that existence-terminology can always be given a "non-literal" spin, even when all the signs are that they should be taken "literally." (The scare quotes here indicate that I also do not really believe that the fiction-internal uses of existence-terms are non-literal uses. I sympathize with Azzouni's view, noted at the end of section 3, that English language quantification in its "natural" state is ontologically non-committal.)

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