

# Metaphysics After Carnap: the Ghost Who Walks?<sup>†</sup>

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## I THE CARNAP CASE

Imagine a well-trained mid-twentieth-century American philosopher, caught in a rare traffic jam on the New Jersey Turnpike, one still summer afternoon in 1950. He dozes in his warm car . . . and awakes in the same spot on a chill Fall evening in 2008, remembering nothing of the intervening years. It is as if he has been asleep at the wheel for almost sixty years!

Suppose that he sees the upside of his peculiar situation. Phenomenologically, it is on a par with time travel, and what red-blooded philosopher could fail to be excited by that? Of course, he realises that it is far more likely that he is suffering from amnesia than that he has actually been transported more than half a century into the future, or survived for that long on the Turnpike – but all the more reason to savour the experience while he can, lest his memory should soon return.

Indeed, he soon becomes a celebrity, written up by Oliver Sacks in *The New Yorker*. Irreverent graduate students call him (with apologies to Beth 1963, 478) the Carnap\* of contemporary philosophy, and everyone is interested in his impressions of modern life. What will surprise him about the society in which he finds himself? Any Australian philosopher who knows contemporary New York will find it easy to imagine some of the things that might stand out: the number of people who ask for change for a cup of coffee, the mind-numbing range of options available when he buys his own cup of coffee, the sheer size of even the smallest, and so on. But let's suppose that Carnap\* has the true philosopher's ability to ignore all of this. He wants to know what has

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happened to his own beloved discipline. “To hell with the beggars and the Starbucks!”, he exclaims, “Where are the big strides in philosophy this past half century?”

At this point, I think, Australian intuitions are less reliable. Australian philosophical audiences find familiar one of the features of contemporary philosophy that Carnap\* will find most surprising, viz., the apparent health of metaphysics. Back in the late 1940s, Carnap\* recalls, metaphysics, like poverty, was supposed to be on its last legs. Yet everywhere that he turns these days, there is a philosopher espousing a metaphysical position – someone claiming to be a ‘realist’ about this, an ‘irrealist’ about that, a ‘fictionalist’ about something else. Out in the college towns of New Jersey and New England, Carnap\* finds, there are more ontological options than kinds of coffee, more metaphysicians than homeless people. And it isn’t simply an affliction of the aged, infirm and mentally ill. Like the Great War of his parents’ generation, contemporary metaphysics seems to have claimed the best and brightest of a generation. “When will they ever learn?”, Carnap\* hums to himself – a sign perhaps to us, if not to him, that his memory of the intervening years is beginning to return.

If Carnap\* were to ask where the battle against metaphysics was lost in twentieth-century philosophy, he would do well to turn his attention to a skirmish between his famous namesake and Quine in the early 1950s. In philosophy, as in less abstract conflicts, single engagements are rarely decisive, but this particular clash does seem of special significance. By the late 1940s, Carnap’s position seems to represent the furthest advance of the anti-metaphysical movement, at least on one of its several fronts. The fact that the position was never consolidated, and the ground lost, seems to owe much to Quine’s criticism of Carnap’s views. Ironically, Quine’s criticism was friendly fire, for (as I want to emphasise below) Quine, too, was no friend of traditional metaphysics. But the attack was no less damaging for the fact that it came from behind, and its effect seems to have been to weaken what – at that time, at any rate – seems to have been Quine and Carnap’s common cause.

Indeed, Carnap\* would soon find another reason for blaming Quine for the apparent health of metaphysics. In fact, he’d discover that Hilary Putnam had recently answered his question explicitly:

“How come,” the reader may wonder, “it is precisely in *analytic* philosophy—a kind of philosophy that, for many years, was *hostile* to the very word ‘ontology’—that Ontology flourishes?”

If we ask *when* Ontology became a respectable subject for an analytic philosopher to pursue, the mystery disappears. It became respectable in 1948, when Quine published a famous paper titled “On What There Is.” It was Quine who single handedly made Ontology a respectable subject. (Putnam 2004, 78–79)

At least in part, then, the contemporary confidence and self-image of metaphysics rests on a conception of its own history in which Quine plays a central role. According

to this popular narrative, it was Quine – perhaps Quine alone – who rescued metaphysics from positivism and other threats in those dark days after the Second War (when the World itself seemed at risk). With one hand, Quine wrote ‘On What There Is’, and thus gave Ontology a life-saving transfusion. With the other, he drove a stake through the heart of Carnap’s ‘Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology’ (Carnap 1950), and thus dispatched the last incarnation of the Viennese menace.

In my view, this metaphysical rebirthing myth is in large part bogus, in the sense that neither of Quine’s achievements actually supports what is now widely taken to rest on it. On the one hand, the Ontology that Quine revived in ‘On What There Is’ is itself a pale zombie, compared to the beefy creature that positivists since Hume had been trying to put down. And on the other, Quine’s stake missed the heart of Carnap’s metaphysics-destroying doctrine completely, merely lopping off some inessential appendages, and leaving the argument, if anything, stronger than before.

If I’m right, then the truth that confronts Carnap\* about the fate of philosophy is disturbing indeed. What’s haunting the halls of all those college towns – capturing the minds of new generations of the best and brightest – is actually the ghost of a long-discredited discipline. Metaphysics is actually as dead as Carnap left it, but – blinded, in part, by these misinterpretations of Quine – contemporary philosophy has lost the ability to see it for what it is, to distinguish it from live and substantial intellectual pursuits. As his memory begins to return, Carnap\* finds himself gripped by a terrifying thought. What if he, too, should soon relapse into blindness, unable to see metaphysics for what it is? What if he, too, should be reclaimed by the living dead?

My main theme in this paper is, as I put it a moment ago, that metaphysics is as dead, or at least deflated, as Carnap left it. In support of this thesis, I want to do two things. First, I want to show that Quine’s famous criticisms of Carnap leave Carnap’s anti-metaphysical doctrines substantially intact. I’ll argue that the twin-chambered heart of Carnap’s view comprises, a deflationary view of metaphysics, with which Quine concurs; and a pluralism about the functions of existentially-quantified discourse, with which Quine does not concur, but against which he offers no significant argument.<sup>1</sup>

Second, I want to call attention to what seems to me to be a persistent misinterpretation of Quine’s views on ontology – a way of taking them that would indeed support inflationary metaphysics, but cannot be what Quine intended. I’ll argue that

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<sup>1</sup>While it will be clear that I am sympathetic to Carnap’s criticisms of metaphysics, I want to stress that my aim here is not to offer new positive arguments in support of Carnap’s conclusions, but simply to show that they are not undermined by Quine’s famous objections. (On the contrary, I’ll argue, Quine and Carnap are playing for the same team.) In principle, it would be compatible with this conclusion that there might be other objections to Carnap’s arguments, and hence that metaphysics survives for other reasons. My claim is simply that Quine is not its saviour.

the misinterpretations rest on a failure to resolve an important ambiguity, between what we may call thick and thin readings of Quine's conclusions in 'On What There Is' It seems to me that many who appeal to Quine in support of their metaphysical investigations rely on the thick reading, while at the same time displaying a kind of false modesty – helping themselves to a cloak of plain-speaking ontological frugality that belongs to the thin reading. Metaphysics thus gets away with working both sides of the street, because the two readings are not properly distinguished. It is therefore important to take the trouble to draw the distinction, and to show that only the thin reading can really be regarded as legitimate, by Quine's own lights.

## 2 CARNAP'S DEFLATIONISM

First, then, to Carnap. Carnap thought that much of traditional metaphysics and ontology rests on a mistake. In explaining why, he relies on the notion of a linguistic framework. Roughly, a linguistic framework is the set of rules (supposedly) governing the use of a group of terms and predicates – say, the terms we use in talking about medium sized objects, or in talking about numbers. Carnap thought that adopting such a framework, or way of talking, typically brings with it ontological methods and questions. These are 'internal' questions, questions that arise within the framework, and their nature depends on the framework in question. They may be empirical, as in science, or logical, as in mathematics.

However, Carnap continues, these internal questions do not include the metaphysical questions typically asked by philosophers: 'Are there material objects?', for example, or 'Are there numbers?' Carnap says that in this form these 'external' questions are simply mistakes: 'They cannot be asked because they are framed in the wrong way.' The only legitimate external questions are pragmatic in nature: Should we adopt this framework? Would it be useful?

In my view, it is helpful to frame Carnap's point in terms of the use–mention distinction. Legitimate *uses* of the terms such as 'number' and 'material object' are necessarily internal, for it is conformity (more-or-less) to the rules of the framework in question that constitutes use. But as internal questions, as Carnap notes, these questions could not have the significance that traditional metaphysics takes them to have. Metaphysics tries to locate them somewhere else, but thereby commits a use–mention fallacy. The only legitimate external questions simply *mention* the terms in question.

Carnap thus becomes a pluralist about ontological commitment – explicitly so, in the sense that he associates distinct ontological commitment with distinct linguistic frameworks, and at least implicitly so in a deeper 'functional' or pragmatic sense. After all, the key to Carnap's accommodation of abstract entities is the idea that the

framework that introduces talk of such entities may serve different pragmatic purposes from the framework that introduces talk of physical objects – and this could only be so if there is some sense in which the two frameworks ‘do different jobs’.<sup>2</sup>

However, Carnap’s view is not simply a recipe for more inclusive realism. For if what is meant by realism is a metaphysical view, in the old sense, then Carnap’s position amounts to a *rejection* of all such views. By that realist’s lights, then, Carnap’s view is a form of global irrealism. Yet his view is not traditional anti-realism, either. It is a third position, which rejects the traditional realist–anti-realist dichotomy. Here is Carnap’s own negotiation of this critical point, from ‘Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology’:

The non-cognitive character of the questions which we have called here external questions was recognized and emphasized already by the Vienna Circle under the leadership of Moritz Schlick, the group from which the movement of logical empiricism originated. Influenced by ideas of Ludwig Wittgenstein, the Circle rejected both the thesis of the reality of the external world and the thesis of its irreality as pseudo-statements; the same was the case for both the thesis of the reality of universals (abstract entities, in our present terminology) and the nominalistic thesis that they are not real and that their alleged names are not names of anything but merely *flatus vocis*. (It is obvious that the apparent negation of a pseudo-statement must also be a pseudo-statement.) It is therefore not correct to classify the members of the Vienna Circle as nominalists, as is sometimes done. However, if we look at the basic anti-metaphysical and pro-scientific attitude of most nominalists (and the same holds for many materialists and realists in the modern sense), disregarding their occasional pseudo-theoretical formulations, then it is, of course, true to say that the Vienna Circle was much closer to those philosophers than to their opponents.<sup>3</sup>

Thus Carnap’s view combines pluralism about ontological commitment with a strikingly deflationary attitude to metaphysics in general. This is a combination that needs to be espoused with some care. If Carnap’s pluralism were cast as pluralism about ontology *per se*, it would sound like a metaphysical position in its own right: pluralism about the furniture of reality, as it were. Hence the need to stress that it is a plural-

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<sup>2</sup>I’m not sure to what extent this kind of pluralism was actually explicit in Carnap’s own views about these issues. My claim here is that it is a necessary corollary of his view, if the suggestion that these pragmatic issues are addressed on a framework-by-framework basis is not to collapse into triviality. Henceforth, on this basis, I’ll treat this pragmatic pluralism as part of the Carnapian package.

<sup>3</sup>Carnap (1950, 215). Carnap is here endorsing the views he ascribes to the Vienna Circle, of course.

ism about language – about the linguistic frameworks in which, and the purposes for which, we go in for the business of ontological *commitment*.

This pluralist aspect of Carnap's view is one of Quine's main targets. Elsewhere, Quine is also a critic of other manifestations of pluralism about existence and existential quantification, notably that of Ryle. I want to show that these Quinean arguments contain little to trouble Carnap's combination of deflationism about metaphysics and pluralism about the functions of linguistic categories. As a result, they provide no serious obstacle to the suggestion that in virtue of such pluralism, not all first-order ontological commitment need be scientific ontological commitment.

Quine's objections to Carnap on this matter also offer an apparent defence of metaphysics against Carnap's criticisms – a defence in tension, it may seem, with my suggestion that Quine, too, is really a deflationist about ontological issues. Before turning to the issue of pluralism, I want to show that in fact there is no tension here. For all practical purposes, Quine agrees with Carnap about the status of metaphysical issues. If anything, he is more of a pragmatist than Carnap, arguing that Carnap is mistaken in assigning a more robust status to scientific matters.

### 3 QUINE'S DEFENCE OF METAPHYSICS – THE BAD NEWS

Much of Quine's attack on Carnap – indeed, the “basic point of contention” (1966, 133), as Quine puts it – rests on the objection that Carnap's notion of a linguistic framework presupposes the analytic–synthetic distinction. Quine argues that in virtue of the failure of the analytic–synthetic distinction, even internal questions are ultimately pragmatic. Referring to Carnap's view that, as Quine puts it, ‘philosophical questions are only apparently about sorts of objects, and are really pragmatic questions of language policy’, Quine asks: ‘But why should this be true of the philosophical questions and not of theoretical questions generally? Such a distinction of status is of a piece with the notion of analyticity, and as little to be trusted.’ (1960, 271) In other words, Quine's claim is that there are no purely internal issues, in Carnap's sense. No issue is ever entirely insulated from pragmatic concerns about the possible effects of revisions of the framework itself. Pragmatic issues of this kind are always on the agenda, at least implicitly. In the last analysis, all judgements are pragmatic in nature.

Grant that this is true. What effect does it have on Carnap's anti-metaphysical conclusions? Carnap's internal issues were of no use to traditional metaphysics, and metaphysics does not lose if they are disallowed. But does it gain? Science and mathematics certainly lose, in the sense that they become less pure, more pragmatic, but this is not a gain for metaphysics. And Quine's move certainly does not restore the non-pragmatic external perspective required by metaphysics. In effect, the traditional metaphysician wants to be able to say, ‘I agree it is useful to say this, but is it true?’

Carnap rules out this question, and Quine does not rule it back in.<sup>4</sup>

Quine sometimes invites confusion on this point. He says that

if there is no proper distinction between analytic and synthetic, then no basis at all remains for the contrast which Carnap urges between ontological statements [i.e., the metaphysical statements that Carnap wants to disallow] and empirical statements of existence. Ontological questions then end up on a par with the questions of natural science. (1966, 134)

This sounds like good news for ontology, but actually it isn't. Quine's criticism of Carnap cannot provide vindication of traditional metaphysics, for if all issues are ultimately pragmatic, there can't be the more-than-pragmatic issue of the kind the metaphysician requires. The main effect of abandoning the analytic–synthetic distinction is that Carnap's distinctions are no longer sharp – there are no purely internal (non-pragmatic) issues, because linguistic rules are never absolute, and pragmatic restructuring is never entirely off the agenda. But a metaphysician who takes this as a vindication of his position – who announces triumphantly that Quine has shown us that metaphysics is in the same boat as natural science, that 'ontological questions [are] on a par with the questions of natural science' – is someone who has not been told the terrible news. Quine himself has sunk the metaphysicians' traditional boat, and left all of us, scientists and ontologists, clinging to Neurath's Raft.

As Quine himself puts it in the same piece:

Carnap maintains that ontological questions . . . are questions not of fact but of choosing a convenient scheme or framework for science; and with this I agree only if the same be conceded for every scientific hypothesis.<sup>5</sup>

Thus Quine is not returning to the kind of metaphysics rejected by the logical empiricists. On the contrary, he is moving forwards, embracing a more thoroughgoing post-positivist pragmatism. In this respect, far from blocking Carnap's drive towards a more pragmatic, less metaphysical destination, Quine simply overtakes him, and pushes further in the same direction.

It might be objected that news still looks much better for metaphysics than Carnap would have had us believe. Granted, there is no longer any pure, non-pragmatic

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<sup>4</sup>Roughly, Carnap allows us to ask about truth only for internal questions. Quine agrees, but says that there are no such questions, in the last analysis, because there are no firm linguistic rules. As we shall see, some people attribute to Quine a stance according to which truth re-emerges from the pragmatist fire, as it were, in the sense that *usefulness* is taken to be a *reason* for believing *true*; but as I want to argue, this is surely a misinterpretation.

<sup>5</sup>Quine 1966, 134. Note Quine's revealing use of the phrase 'for science'. It is far from clear that for Carnap, the convenience of adopting a linguistic framework is always convenience *for science*.

science to be had, and no non-pragmatic metaphysics, either. But if metaphysics nevertheless ends up ‘on a par’ with the kinds of questions investigated at CERN and Bell Labs, isn’t that a kind of respectability worth having?

However, this suggestion trades on an excessively optimistic reading of the phrase ‘on a par’. After all, consider the implications of Quine’s rejection of the analytic-synthetic distinction (on which the present objection to Carnap depends): in one sense, it means that the question whether there exist bachelors either female or married is now ‘on a par’ with the kind of matters investigated at CERN, such as the existence of the Higgs boson. But ‘on a par’ simply means ‘not sharply distinguished, as empiricism had traditionally assumed’. Nobody should take the news to recommend a serious sociological investigation into the gender and marital status of bachelors.

Conversely, the news that science is ultimately pragmatic does not mean that CERN and Bell Labs should be hiring pragmatists. There is still a big difference, in practice, between the day-to-day business of empirical science and the sort of rare occasions on which Quinean science has to confront its pragmatic foundations. At best, it is with these rare situations that Quine’s response to Carnap can compare metaphysics – and patently, they are no serious challenge Carnap’s objections to traditional metaphysics. Once again, the force of Quine’s remarks is not that metaphysics is like science as traditionally (i.e. non-pragmatically) conceived, but that science (at least potentially, and at least in extremis) is like metaphysics as pragmatically conceived.

#### 4 AGAINST PLURALISM?

But Quine has another card to play. Carnap’s objections to traditional metaphysical issues turns in part on the idea that they involve an illegitimate theoretical stance, “external” to the linguistic frameworks that give their concepts sense. I’ve suggested above that for Carnap, this external stance is disallowed because if we step back this far, we step outside the relevant game altogether, and can no longer use the notions that have their home there. But how do we count linguistic games? In particular, what 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?

This is Quine’s objection to Carnap’s pluralism. Quine characterises Carnap’s views as follows:

It begins to appear, then, that Carnap’s dichotomy of questions of existence is a dichotomy between questions of the form “Are there so-and-so’s?” where the so-and-so’s purport to exhaust the range of a particular



style of bound variables, and questions of the form “Are there so-and-so’s?” where the so-and-so’s do not purport to exhaust the range of a particular style of bound variables. Let me call the former questions *category* questions, and the latter ones *subclass* questions. I need this new terminology because Carnap’s terms ‘external’ and ‘internal’ draw a somewhat different distinction which is derivative from the distinction between category questions and subclass questions. The external questions are the category questions conceived as propounded before the adoption of a given language; and they are, Carnap holds, properly to be construed as questions of the desirability of a given language form. The internal questions comprise the subclass questions and, in addition, the category questions when these are construed as treated within an adopted language as questions having trivially analytic or contradictory answers. (1966, 130)

Accordingly, Quine continues,

the question whether there are numbers will be a category question only with respect to languages which appropriate a separate style of variables for the exclusive purpose of referring to numbers. If our language refers to numbers through variables which also take classes other than numbers as values, then the question whether there are numbers becomes a subclass question, on a par with the question whether there are primes over a hundred . . . .

Even the question whether there are classes, or whether there are physical objects, becomes a subclass question if our language uses a single style of variables to range over both sorts of entities. Whether the statement that there are physical objects and the statement that there are black swans should be put on the same side of the dichotomy, or on opposite sides, comes to depend on the rather trivial consideration of whether we use one style of variables or two for physical objects and classes. (1966, 131)

In effect, then, Quine is arguing that there is no principled basis for Carnap’s distinction of language into frameworks, where this is to be understood in terms of the introduction of new quantifiers, ranging over distinct domains of entities. If there is only one existential quantifier, ranging over entities of any kind, then there would appear to be nothing to whose existence we are necessarily committed by virtue of using a particular system of concepts. We can always step back, consider the broader range of entities, and ask ourselves whether anything within this range answers to the concepts in question.

If Quine is right, then supposedly metaphysical issues – “Are there numbers?”, for example – would seem to be on a par with the ontological issues that Carnap wants

to regard as internal. It is true that all ontological questions have a pragmatic ingredient, by Quine's lights, but this is no longer quite the comfort that it was before. At that stage, the point was that Quine's attack on the analytic–synthetic distinction seemed to worsen things for science, without improving things for metaphysics – it didn't challenge the idea that metaphysics involves a linguistic mistake. But it now looks as though Carnap's main objection to metaphysics rests on an unsupported premise, namely the assumption that there is some sort of principled plurality in language which blocks Quine's move to homogenize the existential quantifier.

So far as I can see, Carnap himself does not have a satisfactory defence of this doctrine. In Quine's terms, he does not have any principled way to distinguish between category questions and subclass questions. What he needs, in effect, is an argument that there is some sort of *category mistake* involved in assimilating issues of the existence of numbers (say) and of the existence of physical objects. He takes for granted that this is so, and his model for the construction of languages reflects this assumption: roughly, speaking, the model requires that we mark the category boundaries in our choice of syntax – a different quantifier for each category, for example. But he does little to defend the assumption that the boundaries are there to be marked, prior to our syntactical choices – and this is what Quine denies.

Tradition seems to assume that Quine has an argument for the opposing view – an argument for *monism*, where Carnap requires *pluralism*, as it were. I want to show that this is a mistake, and rests on a confusion between two theoretical issues concerning language. For Carnap's pluralism operates at two levels. On the surface, most explicitly, it is a doctrine expressed in terms of the logical syntax of language – the view that language may be significantly factored into distinct linguistic frameworks, each associated with 'a particular style of bound variables', as Quine puts it. (1966, 130) Underlying this logico-syntactical pluralism, however, is the pragmatic or functional pluralism that provides its motivation. Carnap holds that there is some sort of category mistake involved in assimilating issues of the existence of classes, say, and the existence of physical objects. His model for the construction of linguistic frameworks reflects this assumption, requiring that we mark the category boundaries in our choice of syntax – a different quantifier for each category, for example. But the distinctions in question are not grounded at the syntactical level.

This is important, because Quine's challenge to Carnap's pluralism rests on a challenge to its logico-syntactical manifestation. Quine argues that it cannot be more than 'a rather trivial consideration' whether we use different quantifiers for numbers, classes and physical objects, for example, or use a single existential quantifier ranging over entities of any of these kinds. I want to argue that we can allow that Quine is right about this, while insisting that it makes no difference at all to the issue that really matters: viz., whether Carnap is right about the underlying functional distinctions, and right about category mistakes.

## 5 CARNAP, QUINE AND RYLE ON THE 'MIXING OF SPHERES'

The notion of a category mistake was familiar to the logical positivists of the 1920s and 1930s. In the *Aufbau* of 1928, Carnap himself uses the term 'mixing of spheres' (*Sphärenvermengung*) for, as he puts it later (Schilpp 1963, 45), 'the neglect of distinctions in the logical types of various kinds of concepts'. But for contemporary audiences the notion is particularly associated with Ryle. Ryle is quite clear that it has implications for ontological issues, and in a famous passage in *The Concept of Mind*, touches on the question as to whether existence is a univocal notion:

It is perfectly proper to say, in one logical tone of voice, that there exist minds, and to say, in another logical tone of voice, that there exist bodies. But these expressions do not indicate two different species of existence, for "existence" is not a generic word like "coloured" or "sexed". They indicate two different senses of "exist", somewhat as "rising" has different senses in "the tide is rising", "hopes are rising" and "the average age of death is rising". A man would be thought to be making a poor joke who said that three things are now rising, namely the tide, hopes and the average age of death. It would be just as good or bad a joke to say that there exist prime numbers and Wednesdays and public opinions and navies; or that there exist both minds and bodies. (Ryle 1949, 23)

Given Quine's response to Carnap, it isn't surprising that he has little sympathy for Ryle's apparent ontological pluralism. In a section of *Word and Object* devoted to ambiguity, Quine takes the opportunity to put on record his objection to Ryle's view:

There are philosophers who stoutly maintain that "true" said of logical or mathematical laws and "true" said of weather predictions or suspects' confessions are two uses of an ambiguous term "true". There are philosophers who stoutly maintain that "exists" said of numbers, classes and the like and "exists" said of material objects are two uses of an ambiguous term "exists". What mainly baffles me is the stoutness of their maintenance. What can they possibly count as evidence? Why not view "true" as unambiguous but very general, and recognize the difference between true logical laws and true confessions as a difference merely between logical laws and confessions? And correspondingly for existence?<sup>6</sup>

But what is the disagreement between Quine and Ryle? For Quine, matters of ontology reduce to matters of quantification, and presumably Ryle would not deny that

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<sup>6</sup>Quine 1960, 131. The above passage from *The Concept of Mind* is one of two places to which Quine refers his readers for 'examples of what I am protesting.'

we should quantify over prime numbers, days of the week and dispositions. Indeed, Ryle might reinforce his own denial that there are ‘two species of existence’ by agreeing with Quine that what is essential to the single species of existence is its link with quantification. Ryle simply needs to say that what we are doing in saying that beliefs exist is not what we are doing in saying that tables exist – but that this difference rests on a difference in talk about tables and talk about beliefs, rather than on any difference in the notions of existence involved. So far this is exactly what Quine would have us say. The difference is that whereas Quine’s formulation might lead us to focus on the issue of the difference between tables and beliefs *per se*, Ryle’s functional orientation – his attention to the question as to what a linguistic category *does* – will instead lead us to focus on the difference between the *functions* of talk of beliefs and talk of tables; on the issue of what the two kinds of talk are *for*, rather than that of what they are *about*.

Moreover, it is open to Ryle (and again, entirely in keeping with his use of the analogy with ‘rising’) to say that in one important sense, it is *exactly the same* existential quantifier we use in these different cases. It is the same logical device, but employed in the service of different functional, pragmatic or linguistic ends. This move is important, because it goes a long way to defusing Quine’s objection to Carnap.

By way of comparison – picking up on Quine’s own second concern in the passage above – consider the familiar view that the truth predicate is a grammatical device to meet certain logical and pragmatic needs: a device for disquotational or prosentential purposes, say. As a number of writers have noted (see, e.g., Horwich 1990, 87–88; Blackburn 1984) this account is compatible with the view that declarative sentences can perform radically different functions, in a way which isn’t captured merely by noting differences in content. Consider projectivism about moral or causal claims, for example. A deflationist may say that although it is the same deflated notion of truth we use when we say there are moral truths, or that there are causal truths, moral and causal claims have quite different functions (both with respect to each other, and with respect to other kinds of declarative claims).

An analogous move seems to provide the best way to preserve the pluralist insights of Carnap and Ryle in the face of Quine’s objections. We should concede to Quine that there is a single logico-syntactic device of existential quantification, just as there is a single device of disquotational truth – if Carnap was really committed to the view that there are different existential quantifier, one for each framework, then he was wrong about that.<sup>7</sup> But we should insist that this device has application in a range

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<sup>7</sup>Though it is hard to see that there could really be a substantial difference of opinion here. We could index our disquotational truth predicates in a way which distinguished the predicate we apply to moral claims from the predicate we apply to causal claims, but this trivial syntactical exercise wouldn’t prevent it from being the case that the resulting predicates both serve the same disquotational function. It is surely uncharitable to Carnap to suggest that he was confused about the analogous point, in the case of the existential quantifier. A champion of less deflationary metaphysics might think that there were

of cases, whose functional origins are sufficiently distinct that naturalism is guilty of a serious error, in attempting to treat them as all on a par.

On this view, the subject–predicate form, and indeed the notion of an object itself, have a one–many functional character. In one sense, it is the same tool or set of tools we employ wherever we speak of objects, or whenever we use the subject–predicate form, or – what seems part of the same package – whenever we use the existential quantifier. However, there’s no further unitary notion of *object*, or *substance*, or metaphysical bearer of properties, but ‘only a subject position in an infinite web of discourses’.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, it is the same tool or set of tools we use whenever we speak of truth, whenever we make a judgement or an assertion. But in each case, the relevant tool or set of tools may have incommensurable uses, if there are important senses in which the bits of language they facilitate have different functions (in a way which doesn’t simply collapse into differences in the objects *talked about*).

Thus the right way to read Ryle seems to be something like this. Terms such as “exists” and “true” are not ambiguous, for they serve a single core purpose in their various different applications. In that sense, they are univocal but very general terms, as Quine himself suggests. In virtue of the pre-existing functional differences between the concepts with which they associate, however, the different applications of these terms are incommensurable, in an important sense. Many terms in language seem to fit this pattern, in having a single core meaning or function, with application in several quite distinct cases. A good example is the term Ryle himself offers by way of comparison with “exists”, namely “rising”. “Rising” certainly has a core meaning. It refers to the increase in some quantity over time. But in virtue of the incommensurability of different kinds of quantities, different risings may themselves be incommensurable. It doesn’t make sense to ask whether the average age of death is rising faster than the cost of living, for example.

Similarly for existence, Ryle seems to want to say. The term has a single core meaning or function, tied to that of the existential quantifier. But because the notions of mind and body “belong to different logical categories” – i.e., as I would put it, have importantly different functions in language – it doesn’t make sense to think of the existence of minds as on a par with the existence of bodies. Ryle himself glosses this incommensurability in terms of the oddity of conjunctions such as “There are beliefs and there are rocks”, but this doesn’t seem to get to the heart of the matter.

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significant distinctions for such syntactical conventions to mark, but why should Carnap think so?

<sup>8</sup>To reverse the sense of a remark by one of David Lodge’s characters, who is characterising the view that there is no such thing as the Self. In this context, I note that Hilary Putnam does want to distinguish between ‘speaking of objects’ and ‘using the existential quantifier’, and wants to use the term *object* in a more restricted sense (see Putnam 2004, 52ff, and Putnam 2001, 140–194). However, there doesn’t seem to be much at issue here. Certainly, the Carnapian view I am recommending seems close to Putnam’s ‘pragmatic pluralism’ (2004, 21–22)

The crucial point is that attempts to make ontological comparisons between entities in the two domains go wrong in just the way that attempts to compare different kinds of risings go wrong.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, more needs to be said about the relevant notion of linguistic function. In some sense, talk of chairs serves a different function from talk of tables, simply because chairs and tables are different kinds of furniture. Yet Ryle (and I) don't want to say that "chair" and "table" belong to different logical categories. So we need a story about which functional differences are the important ones. Indeed, we want a story on two levels. We want an account of the kind of logical and linguistic symptoms that indicate the presence of one of the distinctions in question – a joint between logical categories. And we want to know what underlies and explains those symptoms – what *constitutes* the distinctions in question.<sup>10</sup>

Whatever the best story about these matters, an appealing thought is that if there are joints of this kind in language to be mapped and explained, they will turn out to line up with what, viewed from a different angle, present as some of the "hard cases" of contemporary metaphysics – the status and nature of morality, modality, meaning and the mental, for example. Ryle himself certainly thought that proper attention to categorical distinctions could deflate such metaphysical issues; and so too, at least to a limited extent, did Carnap. (So too did Wittgenstein, of course.) What's striking, from the point of view we imagined at the beginning of the paper, is how invisible this approach became in the later decades of the twentieth century. Much of analytic philosophy came to forget about Wittgenstein, Carnap and Ryle, and to take for granted, once more, that the relevant issues are metaphysical: Are there *really* entities or facts of the kinds in question (and if so, what is their nature)?

True, some people who began with these questions would go on to ask about linguistic functions. If we want to say that there are no such entities, for example, what account can we give of the language which seems to refer to such things? Even here, however, the linguistic point is subsidiary to the ontological point. It isn't Carnap's point, or Ryle's point, namely that the ontological question itself rests on a philosopher's confusion about language – on a failure to notice the joints.

Quine seems poorly placed to reject the suggestion that there might be important functional differences of this kind in language. The issue is one for science. It is the anthropologist, or perhaps the biologist, who asks, "What does this linguistic construction do for these people?" Quine can hardly argue that the results of such investigations may be known *a priori*.

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<sup>9</sup>In both cases it is debatable whether we should say that the comparisons are senseless, or merely false. I suspect that it makes little difference, as long as we recognise that even if we call it falsity, it involves a different kind of error from that involved in mistaken intra-category comparisons.

<sup>10</sup>Ryle himself seems to pay much more attention to the former question than to the latter; see especially his 'Categories' (1938).

True, Quine himself often seems to take for granted that language has a well-defined core descriptive function, common to all well-founded assertoric discourse. This assumption underpins his claim that some apparently assertoric discourses – those of intentional psychology or morality, for example – do not serve this function, being rather expressive or instrumental. But as Chris Hookway (1988, 68–69) notes, it is far from clear that this assumption is defensible, in Quine’s own terms. For example, given Quine’s own minimalism about truth, it is no use his saying that descriptive discourse aims at truth. Why shouldn’t a minimal notion of truth be useful in an expressive or instrumental discourse? In other words, why shouldn’t a minimalist allow that truth itself is a multifunctional notion, in our earlier sense? And why shouldn’t the notion of description be as minimal as that of truth – thus undermining the assumption that description itself comprises a significant functional category? These are difficult matters, but that fact in itself supports the rather weak conclusion I want to draw. Quine’s criticism of Carnap and Ryle’s ontological pluralism is inconclusive, to say the least, because the issue depends on substantial issues about language on which the jury is still out.

Perhaps it would be better to say that the jury has been disbanded, for contemporary philosophy seems to have forgotten the case. I have argued that there is no justification for this amnesia in Quine’s response to Carnap and Ryle. We have seen that Quine agrees with Carnap in rejecting an external, non-pragmatic standpoint for metaphysics (and that Quine’s appeal to the failure of the analytic–synthetic distinction is largely a red herring at this point). Carnap’s claim that traditional metaphysics is also guilty of a more local kind of error turns out to rest on foundations which Carnap himself does not supply – in effect, functional foundations for Ryle’s notion of a category mistake. Nothing in Quine’s criticism of Carnap’s and Ryle’s pluralism seems to count against the existence of such foundations, and so the verdict on the Carnap–Ryle view must await excavations – first-order scientific enquiries into the underlying functions of language in human life. The importance of this kind of investigation is much less appreciated in contemporary philosophy than it was in the 1950s, I think; and Quine, or at least his interpreters, deserve some of the blame.

## 6 SAVING ONTOLOGY?

I noted at the beginning that there seem to be two main grounds to hold Quine responsible for the apparent health of metaphysics in contemporary philosophy, of which the first was the impact of his criticisms of Carnap. The second was the impact of ‘On What There Is’, with which, as Putnam puts it, “Quine . . . single handedly made Ontology a respectable subject.” In the remainder of the paper I want to call attention by example to what seems to me a persistent misinterpretation of the sig-

nificance of Quine's position on ontology – a misinterpretation that has the effect of making Quinean ontology a much more substantial metaphysical program than it really is. I offer two examples. Each is associated with one of the major figures of the post-Quinean analytic philosophy – Hilary Putnam and David Lewis, respectively – and perhaps the weight of these giants has contributed to the persistence of the misinterpretation.

## 7 IS THERE AN ARGUMENT FROM INDISPENSABILITY?

The first example comes from philosophy of mathematics. In debates between realists and anti-realists about mathematical entities, both sides commonly concede the force of the so-called Quine-Putnam indispensability argument. Here's a formulation of this argument from Hartry Field – perhaps the leading contemporary writer on the irrealist side of these debates – who attributes it particularly to Putnam:

Putnam 1971 is the *locus classicus* for the view that we need to regard mathematics as true because only by doing so can we explain the utility of mathematics in other areas: for instance, its utility in science . . . and in metalogic . . . . The general form of this Putnamian argument is as follows:

- (i) We need to speak in terms of mathematical entities in doing science, metalogic, etc.;
- (ii) If we need to speak in terms of a kind of entity for such important purposes, we have excellent reason for supposing that that kind of entity exists (or at least, that claims that on their face state the existence of such entities are true). (Field 2001, 328–329)

Field takes it that in order to avoid the conclusion of this argument – i.e., as he sees it, to avoid mathematical realism – anti-realists need to deny the truth of the first premise. (Hence his interest in the project of “science without numbers”.)

Here's another formulation of the indispensability argument, this time from Mark Colyvan (2003), on the realist side of the debate:

For future reference I'll state the Quine-Putnam indispensability argument in the following explicit form:

- (P1) We ought to have ontological commitment to all and only the entities that are indispensable to our best scientific theories.



- (P2) Mathematical entities are indispensable to our best scientific theories.
- (C) We ought to have ontological commitment to mathematical entities.

In my view, as I said, these arguments involve a subtle misinterpretation of Quine, and perhaps also of Putnam – though admittedly a misinterpretation that neither Quine nor Putnam seems to have done much to discourage. Here is Putnam’s own version of the argument, from the source cited by Field:

So far I have been developing an argument for realism along roughly the following lines: quantification over mathematical entities is indispensable for science, both formal and physical; therefore we should accept such quantification; but this commits us to accepting the existence of the mathematical entities in question. This type of argument stems, of course, from Quine, who has for years stressed both the indispensability of quantification over mathematical entities and the intellectual dishonesty of denying the existence of what one daily presupposes. (1971, 347)

Let’s pay particular attention to Putnam’s final remark here – his gloss of Quine. Putnam says that if quantification over mathematical entities is indispensable, it is ‘intellectually dishonest’ to deny the existence of such entities. The crucial point – a point missed by Putnam himself here, so far as I can see – is that a principled exclusion of arguments *against* the existence of entities of a certain kind does not in itself comprise an argument *for* the existence of such entities, of the kind supposedly captured by the above formulations.<sup>11</sup>

One way to highlight this distinction is to note that if there were an argument usable by ontologists in this vicinity, then by Quine’s lights it would also be an argument usable by scientists and mathematicians themselves. After all, Quine insists that philosophy is not separate from science – we’re all adrift in the same boat. But think about the (supposed) argument as used by scientists themselves. To secure premise (P2) (in Colyvan’s notation), they must come to accept that quantification over mathematical entities is indispensable – not merely something that they just happen to go in for as scientists, but something that survives under reflection – something they think that they don’t have a choice about, if they are to continue to do science at all.

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<sup>11</sup>In other words, what Putnam’s gloss of Quine actually entitles us to is not (Pr), but a strictly weaker principle something like this:

(Pr\*) Philosophers have no business disowning entities indispensable in science.

The crucial point I want to make is that although (Pr\*) prohibits *anti-realist* metaphysics, it doesn’t support or mandate *realist* metaphysics; for it doesn’t exclude Carnap’s deflationary alternative to both.

But for Quine, of course, there is no space between ontological commitment – belief that there are mathematical entities – and acceptance of quantification over mathematical entities. So, by Quine’s lights, to be in a position to accept (P<sub>2</sub>) is to accept not only that one believes that there are mathematical entities, but that one is justified in doing so, by the lights of best (philosophically informed) scientific practice. It is to believe not only that there are mathematical entities, but that one ought to believe that there are (by the standards of scientific practice), having properly considered the alternatives.

Imagine our scientists, thus equipped with premise (P<sub>2</sub>). If they accept premise (P<sub>1</sub>), they are thus led to the conclusion, (C), that they ought to believe that there are mathematical entities. But they believed that already, by assumption, if ‘ought’ means something like ‘by the internal standards of science’. So the argument could only take them somewhere new if there were some other standards – some other standpoint, from which to assess the question as to whether there are mathematical entities.

There are two problems with this last idea (i.e., that there is some other standpoint from which to assess the question). One is that it flatly contradicts Quine, who insists that there is no separate standpoint for ontology, outside that of science. The other is that by introducing two standards for ontological commitment – the second-rate ‘as-if’ kind of commitment at the first stage, as compared to the first-rate, meaty kind of commitment at the second – it pulls the rug from beneath the entire argument. If there is a second-rate kind of ontological commitment, why should *that* kind of commitment be a guide to what there is? On the contrary, presumably, what makes it second-rate is that it isn’t a (first-rate) guide to what there is.

In defence of the argument from indispensability, it might be said that Quine insists that if science reaches that stage of accepting (P<sub>2</sub>), then there is no philosophical standpoint from which it makes sense to doubt that there are mathematical entities – to ask ‘But are there REALLY mathematical entities?’ Doesn’t this imply that if science reaches the stage of accepting (P<sub>2</sub>), then we are justified in affirming that there are mathematical entities – after all, aren’t we justified in affirming what it makes no sense to doubt?

Well, it depends. Perhaps we are justified in repeating what science says. But even if so, this involves no inference from the fact that science says it: no argument, simply concurrence. The Quinean doctrine that if science reaches that stage of accepting (P<sub>2</sub>), then there is no philosophical standpoint from which it makes sense to doubt that there are mathematical entities – to ask ‘But are there REALLY mathematical entities?’ – does put paid to a certain sort of ontological scepticism, or anti-realism. But it doesn’t imply that there is an argument *from* the needs of science *to* ontological conclusions – *for* realism. On the contrary, it deflates or disallows a certain sort of ontological debate: a debate taking place outside science, about whether there are things of the kind science quantifies over. After all, think of ‘REALLY’ as a metaphysician’s term of

art. The argument that it makes no sense to ask ‘But are there REALLY mathematical entities?’ does not imply that we should say ‘There REALLY are mathematical entities.’ Perhaps we should simply forget about ‘REALLY’.

The difficulty with the argument just given is that our realist opponents will deny that they ever meant anything special (viz., ‘REALLY’) by ‘really’. A familiar dispute then ensues about whose position is the more modest – about who holds the metaphysical low ground, so to speak. From the deflationist’s point of view, the right strategy is to present one’s opponent with issues on which she must take a stand, one way or the other. The aim is to show that if she agrees, she is being more deflationist than she wants to be; while if she disagrees, she holds commitments sufficiently inflated to be targets.

The claimed argument from indispensability provides one such choice point, in my view. Once we distinguish the strong (realist metaphysics supporting) version of the argument from the weak (anti-realist metaphysics rejecting) version of the argument, then we deflationists can offer an opponent a choice between the two. If she chooses the strong version, we argue, as above, that she is no true Quinean. While if she insists, instead, that she accepts the argument only in the modest, anti-realist dismissing sense, then we have no reason to disagree. On the contrary, we should welcome her to the anti-metaphysical club – to the enlightened circle who agree with Carnap, in rejecting ‘both the thesis of the reality of the external world and the thesis of its irreality’.

## 8 HOW METAPHYSICAL IS MODAL REALISM?

I now turn to a second appeal to the Quinean recipe for ontology – perhaps the most famous in twentieth century metaphysics. It is David Lewis’s argument for modal realism. Lewis begins by emphasising that his modal realism is simply an ontological thesis:

[M]y modal realism is simply the thesis that there are other worlds, and individuals inhabiting those worlds; and that these are of a certain nature, and suited to play certain theoretical roles. It is an existential claim, not . . . a thesis about our semantic competence, or about the nature of truth, or about bivalence, or about the limits of our knowledge. For me, the question is of the existence of objects – not the objectivity of the subject matter. (1986, viii)

“Why believe in [such] a plurality of worlds?”, Lewis asks. “Because the hypothesis is serviceable”, he replies, “and that is a reason to think that it is true.” (1986, 3) He compares this argument to the mathematical case, cast explicitly in Quinean form:

Set theory offers the mathematician great economy of primitives and premises, in return for accepting rather a lot of entities unknown to *Homo javanensis*. It offers an improvement in what Quine calls ideology, paid for in the coin of ontology. It's an offer you can't refuse. The price is right; the benefits in theoretical unity and economy are well worth the entities. Philosophers might like to see the subject reconstructed or reconstrued; but working mathematicians insist on pursuing their subject in paradise, and will not be driven out. Their thesis of the plurality of sets is fruitful; that gives them good reason to believe that it is true. (1986, 4)

In sum, then, Lewis's argument for modal realism comes down to this:

[There are] many ways in which systematic philosophy goes more easily if we may presuppose modal realism in our analyses. I take this to be a good reason to think that modal realism is true, just as the utility of set theory in mathematics is a good reason to believe that there are sets. (1986, vii)

The first point I want to make about this argument is that it simply ignores the distinction a Carnapian will want to draw between pragmatic and traditional evidential reasons for "believing true". Clearly, a Carnapian might accept that the utility of talk of possible worlds (or sets) is a good *pragmatic* reason for adopting the vocabulary in question, without reading this as in any sense an argument for the *truth* of a metaphysical conclusion. To distinguish his position from such a Carnapian case for talk of possible worlds, Lewis needs to interpret the argument in a stronger sense. The question is, does Quine really offer any grounds for doing so?

Defenders of the argument from indispensability would answer 'Yes' at this point, and see Lewis as an ally in their own cause. But I have argued that this misrepresents Quine: the right conclusions to draw from the appeal to indispensability are simply the illegitimacy of any *metaphysical* stance, whether positive or negative on the ontological matter in question; coupled with the affirmation of the *pragmatic* case for continuing to use the vocabulary in question. Once more, this is entirely in keeping with Carnap's pragmatism and metaphysical deflationism.

If I am right, then the rather surprising upshot is that Lewis's 'modal realism' – the most visible and controversial thesis of perhaps the most respected figure in late twentieth-century metaphysics – doesn't really need to be thought of as *metaphysics* at all, in the sense of the subject that Carnap and his predecessors attacked. I don't claim this as an original insight. Simon Blackburn, for one, has long urged that the distinctively metaphysical "oomph" of Lewis's modal realism is surprisingly hard to pin down (and hard to distinguish, in particular, from Blackburn's own quasi-realism about modality). But the message has fallen on deaf ears. Many people *think* that they

are doing metaphysics, in Lewis's footsteps – as Lewis himself intended, obviously, when he took those steps in the first place.

Lewis himself was aware of the threat from this quarter, and in one of his last papers (Lewis 2005), he seeks to equate quasi-realism with a self-consciously metaphysical position, namely fictionalism.<sup>12</sup> He notes that both views (fictionalism and quasi-realism) endorse the first-order folk claims of a target discourse, but then offer us a second-order qualification. Thus in the modal case, for example, it goes like this: “There are ways things could have been” – that's the first-order claim – “but only in the modal fiction in which we all participate” – that's the fictionalist rider. Lewis seems to suggest that fictionalism and quasi-realism are therefore inferior to the view which accepts such statements without qualification – i.e., as he interprets the unqualified view, to realism.

Set aside for the moment the question as to whether Lewis is right to interpret quasi-realism as a form of fictionalism, and focus first on the nature of this unqualified alternative, to which Lewis contrasts fictionalism and quasi-realism. What is this unqualified “realism”? Is it the view that *just* says, with the folk, ‘There are ways things might have been’? Or is it the view that says ‘There are **REALLY** ways things might have been’ – where the capital letters mark some distinctively philosophical claim? If there's a difference between these two possibilities, and if it's the unqualified position we're after, then it must be the weaker position. Why? Because the stronger also requires an additional qualification, though this time of a positive rather than a negative kind. (The folk don't add the capital letters, if adding the capital letters adds philosophical theory.)

What if there isn't a difference between the weaker and stronger views? That would imply that as Carnap thought, there isn't any distinctively theoretical viewpoint that philosophy can bring to such matters of ontology. In other words, it implies that there isn't any distinct (and legitimate) stronger position. Again, then, the unqualified position is the weaker position.

All the same, Lewis's argument may seem to pose a threat to what I am offering as the most attractive version of the Carnapian program, in the following sense. I have suggested that in order to meet Quine's objections to pluralism, a Carnapian needs to emphasise what I called the functional pluralism that already seems implicit in Carnap's view. In other words, the Carnapian needs to emphasise the plurality of the things we do with language (and with existentially quantified language, in particular).

However, this functionalist or genealogical orientation seems to have much in common with Blackburn's quasi-realism. And this raises the possibility that Lewis's argument might be able to establish that my Carnapian position is more metaphysical

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<sup>12</sup>I am not sure whether Lewis thought of this paper as a response to the threat just mentioned; but he can hardly have been unaware that if his argument succeeded, it would serve this purpose.

than I take it to be: metaphysical in the negative sense, in that – like fictionalism – it is committed to metaphysical claims of an anti-realist nature.

Lewis's argument turns on the observation that there are qualifications we can add to what would otherwise be an assertion (or series of assertions), which have the effect of cancelling the assertoric force. He gives several examples – e.g., “I shall say much that I do not believe, starting *now*”, and “According to the Sherlock Holmes stories . . .” (2005, 315) – and notes that an expression of metaphysical fictionalism (about moral discourse, say) has the same effect: it amounts to preceding one's moral assertions with the remark that they are not really true. Lewis claims that the same is true of quasi-realism – it, too, amounts to a “disowning preface” (2005, 315) of this kind: “That preface is to be found in the endorsement of projectivism that precedes and motivates [Blackburn's] advocacy of quasi-realism. . . . It is something the quasi-realist says that the realist will not echo.” (2005, 315)

In the present context, the relevant question is whether projectivism, or some other broadly functionalist or expressivist genealogy for a Carnapian domain of existential commitment, does amount to a “disowning preface”, in a way which creates any sort of difficulty for the combination I have recommended, of functional pluralism and metaphysical deflationism. Can we adopt a domain of existential quantification in a pragmatic Carnapian spirit, and *say* that that is what we are doing, without cancelling the assertoric force of the claims (including the existential claims) that we make in that domain?

The first point to note is that such a functional story will certainly count as a disowning preface to some claims that a metaphysical realist might want to make – in particular, claims which entail, explicitly or implicitly, some alternative account of the function and genealogy of the language in question. But no problems here for a deflationist, presumably, who won't be endorsing such claims in the first place.<sup>13</sup> The relevant issue isn't whether quasi-realism disowns what the capital-R Realist *adds* when he affirms that there are REALLY moral truths. It is whether it disowns the ordinary unqualified affirmation of moral truths.

So: does genealogy amount to taking something back, or merely to adding more? Note, first, that not all ways of adding more take something back. Consider this case, for example:

The butler wasn't at Starbucks on the night of the murder. (I've known that since last week.)

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<sup>13</sup>This issue is a tricky one for Blackburn, perhaps, in that his quasi-realism may commit him to some implicit metaphysical picture associated with the idea of genuinely representational discourse – the cases to which he wants to contrast the domains in which *quasi*-realism is the appropriate strategy. But no such problem arises for global quasi-realism, a view that Blackburn sometimes seems tempted by (and associates with Wittgenstein), and that I myself have recommended. See Blackburn (1998a, 166–167, 1998b, 77–83), Price (1992, 2004b) and Macarthur and Price (2007).

This shows that there are some ways we can ‘fill in some of the background’ to an assertion, without disowning that assertion. More interestingly, it appears that there are some ways in which we can diminish the force of an assertion by adding a qualification, without in any sense undermining its *truth*:

It turns out that the butler did it. (I speak, of course, as a fallible human being.)

Here, the addition does indeed seem to diminish the force of the preceding assertion. But the corresponding addition would be true (and in normal circumstances we would know perfectly well that it would be true) for almost any assertion whatsoever. So although *mentioning it* counts as some sort of retraction, that’s no reason to doubt the truth of the qualification itself, or to question a straightforwardly realist construal of the original sentence. This shows that there is space for (true) genealogy to be both conversationally ‘disowning’, and yet entirely compatible with realism – at least if realism here means simply taking a claim at face value, rather than adding some rival genealogy.

The lesson seems to be that we need to distinguish a broad sense of ‘disowning’ or diminishing the force of an assertion, from a stricter sense which amounts to something like *contradicting*, or *implying the falsity*, of the original assertion. The examples above suggest that in some but not all cases, genealogy disowns in the former sense. It is not entirely clear which side of the line quasi-realist genealogy falls on, I think, but for present purposes it doesn’t matter. For present purposes the latter kind of disowning – “implying the falsity”, as I put it – is the crucial one.

Fictionalism certainly disowns in this latter sense, but quasi-realism does not. One way to convince ourselves of this is to keep a clear eye on the use–mention distinction. Fictionalism needs to *use* moral vocabulary, in order to deny that there are values, literally speaking; whereas Carnapian or Blackburnian genealogy need only *mention* it (in explaining what the folk do, when they *use* it). Quasi-realism talks *about* the talk, as it were, without actually talking the talk. Hence it simply lacks the vocabulary to say (or imply) that moral claims are false.

If Lewis were right to equate quasi-realism with fictionalism, it would be much harder to be a metaphysical deflationist than Carnap takes it to be – contrary, clearly, to his own intentions, Carnap’s view would be metaphysics in disguise. But Lewis hasn’t made a case for the equation. And in a sense, his argument fails precisely because it is blind to the distinction between what we might call a metaphysical stance with respect to a vocabulary – a stance which takes the primary question to be whether the claims distinctive of the vocabulary are *true* – and a genealogical or anthropological stance, which is interested in *why* creatures like us come to employ the vocabulary in the first place. Reflections from the latter stance may not always be neutral with respect to the moves we make within the game – the assertions we make as we employ

the vocabulary ourselves. (In some cases, indeed, they cause us to abandon the game altogether.) But as long as we keep the stances distinct in the first place, there's no excuse for confusing this lack of neutrality for the adoption of a position within the game itself.

Thus it appears that neither Lewis's own argument for modal realism, nor his late attempt to equate quasi-realism with fictionalism, offers any significant obstacle to a Carnapian combination of metaphysical deflationism and pragmatic functional pluralism. Once again, it turns out to be simply an illusion to think that Quine offers a recipe for any more substantial kind of metaphysics. I conclude that Quine's objections notwithstanding, metaphysics remains where Carnap left it. The challenge of 'Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology' remains unanswered.

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