Metaontological Deflationism in the Aftermath of the Quine-Carnap Debate

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Abstract

With metaphysical philosophy gaining prominence in the aftermath of the Quine-Carnap debate, not only has it become assumed that the Quinean critique leaves ontological pluralism behind as an untenable approach, but also that the same is true of deflationism more generally. Building on Quine's criticisms against the analytic-synthetic distinction and the notion of quantifier variance, contemporary metaphysicians like van Inwagen and Sider continue to argue for the untenability of deflationary approaches to metaontology. In this paper I will argue that Quine's criticisms do not provide sufficient grounds for revitalizing metaphysics, as the aforementioned metaphysicians conceive them as doing, and that they also don't eliminate all hope for Carnapian pluralism. Furthermore, Carnap's initial position may even yield the most promising route for the pluralistically inclined. Moreover, pluralism is often conceived as being equivalent with the narrower notion of quantifier variance, often associated with Hirsch and Putnam. As this notion often is attributed not only to Carnap and other pluralists, but also is taken to be an essential feature of deflationism, explicating how their merits in fact don't necessarily coincide with those of quantifier variance will clarify matters. I will conclude by noting how neither pluralism nor deflationism is committed to quantifier variance, and thus how arguments against the latter don't entail a refutation of the former.

Keywords: *deflationism, Quine-Carnap Debate, Ontological Pluralism, Quantifier Variance*

1 Introduction

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Kriterion – Journal of Philosophy, 2015, 29(2): 33–52.
http://www.kriterion-journal-of-philosophy.org

Building on Quine's criticisms against the analytic-synthetic distinction and the notion of quantifier variance, contemporary metaphysicians like van Inwagen and Sider continue to argue for the untenability of deflationary approaches to metaontology. In this paper I will argue that Quine's criticisms do not provide sufficient grounds for revitalizing metaphysics, as the aforementioned metaphysicians conceive them as doing, and that they also don't eliminate all hope for Carnapian pluralism. Furthermore, Carnap's initial position may even yield the most promising route for the pluralistically inclined.

As the most prominent deflationary approach, my arguments will employ ontological pluralism as the default deflationary position. But despite the close associations between pluralism and deflationism, where the latter often is conceived as being dependent on the former, deflationary approaches do not require pluralism as a necessary prerequisite, thus opening for the possibility that the positions might suffer different philosophical fates. Moreover, pluralism is often conceived as being equivalent with the narrower notion of quantifier variance, often associated with Hirsch and Putnam. As this notion often is attributed not only to Carnap and other pluralists, but also is taken to be an essential feature of deflationism,[1] explicating how their merits in fact don't necessarily coincide with those of quantifier variance will clarify matters. I will conclude by noting how neither pluralism nor deflationism is committed to quantifier variance, and thus how arguments against the latter don't entail a refutation of the former.

2 Carnap's Deflation of Metaphysics

In order to see how Carnap deflates the semantics of metaphysical questions and discourse, we should start, as he himself does, by introducing the notion of linguistic frameworks. The introduction aims at squaring his empiricism with the acceptance of abstract objects without committing him to any metaphysical position, be it either platonism or nominalism.[2] The thesis here propounded states that the intelligibility of ontological questions is dependent on the questions being asked within a linguistic framework. Such a framework is a formal language, with semantic rules for forming and evaluating statements. The semantic rules operational within a given linguistic framework determine the range of meaningful sentence formation (involving a certain kind of entities) and assign truth-conditions to its sentences. Of the sentences and expressions involving terms and predicates that refer or apply to a certain kind of

entities, the semantic rules further specify the observational conditions which count as confirming or disconfirming them.[3] By conceiving the semantics of existence-questions as determined by their overall relation to linguistic frameworks, Carnap posits "a fundamental distinction between two kinds of questions concerning the existence or reality of entities" ([3, p.17]).

The distinction famously marks the difference between internal and external questions;[4] the former occurring "within *the framework*", while the latter concern "the existence or reality of the *system of entities as a whole*" ([3, p.17]). Although formally presented as a dichotomy, I would argue that Carnap's conception of existence-questions can be analyzed in a more fruitful manner as being trichotomized.[5] Referring to a certain kind of entities, existence-questions can be understood in three ways. Firstly, they can be understood as *internal* questions, in which case their answers are provided by the semantic rules governing the use of the terms which refer to the postulated objects in question. If the postulated objects are concrete, their meaning, in accordance with the semantic rules governing the linguistic framework employed, specify the evidence that would empirically confirm or disconfirm statements attributing, e.g., the predicate "apple" to physical objects. If, on the other hand, the postulated objects are abstract, as in the case of numbers, then their meaning, which is found "by logical analysis based on the rules for the new [numerical] expressions", alone determines the answer. Thus, answers to *internal* questions will be, depending on the nature of the objects in question, either determined by scientific-empirical investigations, or, as in the case of numbers, analytic. If the question rather is *external*, it might be so in two ways. It might be understood as *factual-external*, in which case its purport is to ask an ontological question about, e.g., numbers *prior* to the adoption of *any* framework. But, as Carnap made explicit with his notion of linguistic framework, speaking of a certain kind of entities implies a system of certain ways of speaking, subject to certain semantic rules of use. And in meaningfully asking if there really are numbers, one has already adopted the framework of numbers. Unless the philosopher purporting to ask a factual-external question is willing to recognize that his question really is of an internal kind with a trivial answer, he has not provided any cognitive content for it and so it must be regarded as a pseudo-question. As such, *factual-external* questions ought to be reinterpreted as *pragmatic-external* questions about which linguistic frameworks we ought to adopt.[6] As Carnap says in the case of such pseudo-questions:

> [They are] disguised in the form of theoretical question[s] while in fact [they are] non-theoretical; in the present case it is the practical problem whether or not to incorporate into the language the new linguistic forms which constitute the framework of numbers. ([3, p.19])

As is stated above, the semantic, framework-internal rules governing the use of, e.g., number words, analytically entail trivial answers to arithmetical questions and to existence-questions concerning numbers. But how, one might ask, can the introduction of a linguistic framework yield definitive answers to questions of ontology? Carnap's answer is rather straightforward: the analyticity which makes internal questions and answers trivial places no constrains on reality and thus does not really make any (ontological) claims about it. "The introduction of the new ways of speaking does not need any theoretical justification because it does not imply any assertion of reality." ([3, p.21]) But still commentators have found it plausible to regard the employment of different linguistic frameworks to entail commitment to different ontological entities. While some, e.g. Echehart Köhler ([11]), have taken Carnap's employment of the framework of numbers to commit him to platonism, others, e.g. Andre Gallois ([7]), consider the possibility of him really being a nominalist. But in placing the discussion between platonism and nominalism within the trichotomized version of the I/E distinction drawn above, we can easily see how the discussion really either is trivial, nonsensical, or pragmatic, depending on how it is framed.[7]

To further explicate how the I/E distinction deflates metaphysics, we may describe it in terms of the use/mention distinction,[8] which clearly shows how existence-questions are linguistically framed. Using certain material terms, such as "number" and "physical object", meaningfully presupposes conformity to the semantic framework-internal rules which both constitute legitimate use and deflate their alleged ontological status. On the other hand, as external questions don't conform to these rules they only succeed in mentioning such terms; which only suffices to serve a substantial function if they are posed as *pragmatic-external questions*. In light of Carnap's notion of linguistic frameworks, coupled with the I/E and the U/M distinctions, it becomes clear that he operates with a functional version of ontological pluralism. As different frameworks speak of different kinds of entity, they only do so in a functional and nonmetaphysical sense. Hence the reason why his pluralism construes ontological questions as really being of a linguistic kind. Carnap is neither saying that ontological objects of any particular kind do

exist nor that they don't exist; his metaontology is deflationary through and through and he only concerns himself with ways in which we *talk* about ontological objects. In coupling his ontological pluralism and his deflationary attitude towards metaphysics, he moves away from the traditional realism/anti-realism dichotomy in the construal of a broader, non-metaphysical position.

> [I reject] both the thesis of the reality of the external world and the thesis of its irreality as pseudo-statements; the same [is] the case for both the thesis of the reality of universals 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 also must be a pseudo-statement). ([3, pp.21-22])

In the next section I will begin my discussion of Quine's critique of Carnap's metaontology and if it vindicates metaphysical philosophy, as we later will see some prominent metaphysicians believe it to do. The section's main focus will be on Quine's attack on the notion of analyticity.

3 Quine and the Problem of Analyticity

Covering the first four parts of Quine's [18] article we find the circle argument, which purports to show how the notions of necessity and apriority, which Carnap's use of analyticity is supposed to explain,[9] really is presupposed by the analytic/synthetic distinction.[10] His claim is that attempts to define the notion analyticity by using terms thought to be synonymous or explicating, wind up employing terms without any greater intelligibility. Quine argues this to be the case when investigating formal definitions, cognitive synonymy, and semantical rules, none of which are able to provide any further understanding of analyticity without circularly appealing to the notion of analyticity in the explanation; in some cases the terms thought to be synonymous are "intelligible only if the notion of analyticity is already clearly understood in advance" ([18, p.30]).

In attempting to save analyticity and synonymy from the Quinean critique, Carnap, by arguing that intension is scientifically verifiable and legitimate, attempts to show how the meanings of coextensive predicates in principle are empirically distinguishable. Thus, by appeal to a scientifically respectable notion of meaning, Carnap argues that we can define the concepts of synonymy and analyticity; and so he does:

> Two expressions are *synonymous* in the language L for X at a time t if they have the same intension in L for X at t. A sentence is *analytic* in L for X at t if its intension [...] in L for X at t comprehends all possible cases. ([2, p.42])

But intuitively, Quine's initial objection still seems strong, even against this formal definition of analyticity. Here I agree with the status of the situation as Scott Soames ([25, p.437]) puts it: namely, that it is far from clear that Carnap escapes the circle argument as his "defense of intension rests heavily on modal claims about what a predicate *would* apply to [...] were certain *possible circumstances* to obtain".[11] Now, if Carnap was to sever the I/E distinction from the A/S distinction by throwing this broad conception of analyticity over board, the problem remains that even if trivial answers to existence-questions are somehow ("analytically") entailed by their meanings, their status as metaphysically innocent is not. The reason for this is that if (the modal notion of) necessity is abandoned when leaving the broad conception of analyticity presupposed by the I/E distinction, one can never be sure that ontological questions/answers fall neatly into either side of the distinction. And this is the exact point conveyed by Quine's gradualism, as he envisages there being a continuum of existence questions, where the differences between them only are "in degree and not in kind" ([17, p.72]). But where does Quine's merging of existence-questions leave metaphysics?[12]

As Quine later in his *Word and Object* makes explicit, he merges the opposites of Carnap's (I/E) model by maintaining that all theoretical questions in general are of a pragmatic nature, hence rendering the category of purely internal questions empty ([22, p.271]). In drawing the conclusions of pragmatism further than Carnap did, the main effect of Quine's argument is that questions of scientific and mathematical matters lose some of their logical purity, and not that metaphysical questions experience any such gain. The point missed by metaphysicians gladly quoting Quine when he states that the conflation of the A/S distinction implies that "ontological questions then end up on a par with questions of natural science" ([17, p.71]), is that he does not conceive questions of metaphysics to regain the status of empirical investigations as traditionally conceived (i.e., as theoretical), but that empirical, scientific and mathematical questions are like Carnap's conception of metaphysical questions (i.e., pragmatic). Thus, in the spirit of what Huw Price ([12, p.327]) has called a "more thoroughgoing post-positivist pragmatism," Quine, rather than vindicating traditional metaphysics, rather expands the boundaries of what Carnap's deflationism initially allowed: "Carnap

maintains that ontological questions [...] are questions not of fact but of choosing a convenient conceptual scheme or framework for science; and with this I agree only if the same be conceded for every scientific hypothesis." ([17, p.72])

4 Is Carnap's Ontological Pluralism Tenable? Quine's Charge and Ryle's Defense

If Quine's critique of the A/S distinction doesn't only blur the lines that separate theoretical from pragmatic questions, but also implies that framework-internal questions are *indistinguishable* from pragmatic-external questions, what is to stop us from treating all questions as internal to a single grand framework? And this is precisely Quine's second charge against Carnap's (I/E) model. Whereas one of the purposes of Carnap's model is allowing theories committed to abstract entities to feature as metaphysically innocent ([3, pp.16-17]), the point made by Quine's famous slogan "to be assumed as an entity is [...] to be reckoned as the value of a variable" ([16, p.12]), is not that the reality of what exists is reduced to being the value of a bound variable, but that to be ontologically committed to the existence of something is to assert the existentially quantified claim that there are entities of the asserted kind. Hence, while Carnap believes his commitment to numbers is unworthy of ontological worry, Quine makes explicit how such a commitment entails platonism ([16, p.13]). By conceiving Carnap's linguistic frameworks as continuous language fragments within a single grand framework in which a single univocal quantifier ranges, Quine claims the fact that quantification over mathematical entities is indispensable to our best scientific theories ought to commit us to the ontological existence of such entities.[13] Continuing, let's turn to how exactly Quine purports to show that we only operate with a single existential quantifier that, rather than only being operational within a distinct domain, is allowed to range over anything.

In recasting Carnap's I/E distinction as "derivative" from the more fundamental distinction between *category*- and *subclass* questions[14] ([17, pp.68-69]), Quine argues that the introduction of distinct frameworks into language is dependent on the "rather trivial consideration of whether we use one style of variables or [several]" ([17, p.69]). To use his own example: "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," ([17, p.69]) is completely

determined by arbitrary choices of quantificational apparatus. By homogenizing the existential quantifier, so that various kinds of object are expressed by the same kind of variables, even general questions of existence and metaphysics may be allowed the status as subclass. Thus, by homogenizing the existential quantifier, Quine again threatens the deflationism entailed by Carnap's model. Whereas we saw his rejection of the A/S distinction far from worsening the deflationist's claim, rather advancing its initial pragmatic concerns to cover new ground, Quine's attack on Carnap's pluralism rejects the idea that different language fragments are semantically isolable in virtue of the quantifiers they employ. As Carnap doesn't provide a principled method for distinguishing subclass questions from category questions, if he is to recover his position and fend of Quine's charge against his pluralism, he somehow has to be able to turn the weakness of his model into its strength. In other words, he has to maintain his initial position meanwhile denying that there aren't any boundaries to be marked regarding existence-questions prior to our quantificational choices. I believe the most promising option for recovering Carnapian deflationism and removing the sting from Quine's criticism, is to argue that the pluralism in question is determined by other aspects of linguistic functionality rather than being a matter of arbitrary quantificational choice: namely, that his pluralism is of a functional nature in that the differences (of kind) between existence-questions (e.g., about whether there are any apples in my kitchen, or whether natural numbers exist,) makes the quantificational pluralism expressed in his model determined by this more basic linguistic fact.[15]

As recently suggested by Price,[16] this sort of defense has been advanced by Gilbert Ryle in *The Concept of Mind*. The pluralism here endorsed makes explicit that we may allow our existential quantifier to be homogenized, as Quine suggests, while maintaining that the same concept of existence plays different functional roles in our language.

> 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'. ([23, p.12])

The insight here provided by Ryle may allow our (singular) concept of existence to feature both in talk of concrete and abstract objects,

while recognizing that the difference in admitting the existence of both kinds of entity is due to the difference in talk about, e.g., apples and numbers, rather than using different concepts of existence. Ryle's functional version of ontological pluralism, rather than focusing on what is talked *about* in differently framed discourses, is more sensitive to the function a given framework serves and what its talk is *for*.[17] With this in mind, even by discarding the I/E distinction *à la* Quine, the Carnapian who accepts Ryle's argument might be able to account for different quantifiers that feature in different parts of language, if the different quantifiers can be understood as being determined by the functional character of the language fragments in which they occur. And in this way the Carnapian position may be tenable and a more modest notion of linguistic framework may be reintroduced, even if we take Quine's criticisms into account; for, as we have seen, it is possible to differentiate between existence-questions prior to quantificational choices. To summarize, Ryle's argument may be taken to support an account of existential quantification where quantificational semantics is functionally determined by other parts of language.

If we understand Carnap as entertaining the idea of different existence-concepts capable of various senses, better known as quantifier variance, we may say that his frameworks introduce different senses of "exists", such as "exists$_q$", "exists$_r$", "exists$_s$", and so on, where "$\exists_q xFx$" will be true in a linguistic framework I if "$\exists xFx$" is true at the furnished framework $\langle I, f(I)\rangle$, where f is a certain furnishing function. (The Carnapian should, of course, provide a plausible account of the furnishing function without appeal to analyticity.) But it should be noted that his pluralism doesn't seem to commit him to quantifier variance. The introduction of a new material concept into language does not entail any significant change in the rules of use governing the formal "existence" concept. Now, of course, the introduction of a new material concept may increase the domain in which the existential quantifier is allowed to range and thus effect a rather minimal change in its meaning, but it does not follow that the general rules of use for the quantifier radically differ from one linguistic framework to the other, as is supposed by quantifier variance. Furthermore, as Amie Thomasson has argued rather plausibly ([27]; Cf. [26, pp.69-79,159]), Carnap does not conceive the nature of ontological debates as verbal because quantifiers vary between different frameworks, but because the different parties of the debate fall on different sides of the U/M distinction with regard to the relevant material concepts being debated. The major concern of Carnap's pluralism

does not pertain to the minor changes in how our use of the "existence" concept varies between different frameworks – say the nominalist and the platonist framework – but rather how the latter accepts and makes *use of* material concepts with reference to abstract objects, while the former, insofar as he wants to say something substantial about the material concepts in question, only may *mention* them. On this reading the nominalist cannot consistently make use of the concept of number meanwhile denying the existence of numbers; for in using the concept he also has to assent to the existence of numbers, as the rules of use governing the concept entail.[18] On the other hand, I take Ryle's functional version of ontological pluralism to be committed to quantifier variance; the view that the sense of "existence" may vary. Both accounts of existential quantification are of course limited to lightweight quantification, meaning that they regard answers to questions of ontology as trivial, while discarding the absolute quantifier as meaningless.

In this section I have shown that Ryle's argument, in making the pluralistic semantics of "exists" functionally determined prior to quantificational choices, may be appropriated by Carnapianism in response to Quine's criticism. Whichever route is preferable, also of how to understand Carnap's pluralism, as for now, both remain available for deflationism. In the next section I will consider some common objections to ontological pluralism and possible answers. As will become clear, the importance of pluralism's role in deflationism should be of great concern, and providing certain remarks on the issue will become necessary.

5 The Criticisms of Ontological Pluralism: Still a Viable Candidate for Deflationism?

The first problems to be noted should be the ones that loom large over my representation of Ryle's pluralistic conception of language-use: namely, that we've neither provided any criteria for the presence of functional differences in our language, nor for what constitutes these differences. These problems do not only require further philosophical reflection, but, more importantly, also rigorous empirical investigations of how we use language. I will therefore put this problem aside as one worthy of more detailed discussions and further empirical studies, while moving on to other difficulties the pluralist faces.

As ontological pluralism often goes under the guise of (one of its members,) quantifier variance,[19] that is where we'll begin. In recent discussions the most prominent names associated with quantifier vari-

ance have come to be Hilary Putnam and Eli Hirsch. As proponents of the doctrine, they both agree that existence may be expressed by different, but logico-syntactically similar,[20] concepts: "[The] phenomenon [of conceptual relativity/quantifier variance] turns on the fact that *the logical primitives themselves*, *and in particular the notions of object and existence*, *have a multitude of different uses rather than one absolute 'meaning'*." ([13, p.19]; [15, p.37,43]; Cf. [8]; [10].) For present purposes we'll sweep their differing conceptions of quantifier variance under the rug[21] and focus on some of the criticisms their position(s) has generated. By using Peter van Inwagen's criticisms as an example, it will become clear how the point of contention of metaphysicians defending heavyweight quantification[22] is that there is only one univocal, existential quantifier and that its meaning is invariant. In drawing analogies between our use of "number" and our use of "existence", van Inwagen suggests that "the univocacy of number and the intimate connection between number and existence should convince us that there is at least very good reason to think that existence is univocal" ([30, p.482]). Continuing, he further claims that the "operator 'there exists' is intimately related to disjunction [and 'all']" ([30, p.484]). He gives us the following example: "'There exists a prime number between 16 and 20' is equivalent to '17 is a prime or 18 is prime or 19 is prime' only given that 17, 18, and 19 are *all* the numbers between 16 and 20"' ([30, p.484]). Due to the univocal "all" and its interdefinability with "exists", the argument purports to show that "exists" also is univocal. As mentioned, the point of the arguments of van Inwagen and other metaphysicians seems to be that we only operate with a single concept of existence and that its meaning is invariant. Intuitively, this and other arguments against quantifier variance seem to plausibly account for our logical vocabulary as not being vague and varying in meaning, but in that Carnap needn't be interpreted as a quantifier variantist, it is not clear that *his* deflationism loses its legitimacy.

Before I consider another objection to ontological pluralism, I should note that I believe one of the reasons why the metaphysical branch of philosophy emerged victorious from the Quine-Carnap debate is that criticisms of the kind above are falsely taken not only to count against Carnap, but also more generally to refute ontological pluralism and deflationism. The reason for all this seems to be that Carnapianism, pluralism and deflationism often are conceived as entailing and relying on quantifier variance. As Ted Sider remarks:

> The deflationist must claim that the participants in ontolog-

> ical debates mean different things by the quantifiers. And so, the deflationist must accept that quantifiers *can* mean different things, that there are multiple candidate meanings for quantifiers. In Hirsch's phrase, deflationists must accept quantifier variance." ([24, p.391]; Cf. [10])

As we have seen above, Carnap most likely does not need to commit himself to the doctrine, despite philosophers like Matti Eklund ([4, p.137]) and Kit Fine ([6, p.164, fn2]) explicitly attributing it to him. Such considerations should not only make it obvious that ontological pluralism doesn't depend on quantifier variance, but also, and even more importantly, that deflationism doesn't. So, when prominent contemporary metaphysicians like Sider argue against deflationism and ontological pluralism by appealing to the weaknesses of quantifier variance, we should not take this to provide sufficient reasons for refuting such positions, but rather as halting one of their most recent forms in its track.

Before I conclude with a short note on the role of pluralism in deflationism, I will consider one last criticism of pluralism forwarded by Eklund in a recent paper ([4]). Here the problematic nature of ontological pluralism is made explicit by how he defines the position; which really is Hirsch's version of ontological pluralism:[23]

> What any ontological pluralist view involves is – *roughly*, see immediately below – the following: There are a number of different languages we could speak, such that (a) different existence sentences come out true in these languages, due to the fact that the ontological expressions (counterparts of "there is", "exists", etc.) in these languages express different concepts of existence, and (b) these languages can somehow describe the world's facts equally well and fully (maybe some of these languages are more convenient to use than others but that is a different matter). ([4, p.137])

As I have already dealt with the first part of the definition, (a), under the name of quantifier variance, I'll be focusing on the second part, (b). Eklund's reason for including it, even though he admits that "ontological pluralists tend not to explicitly introduce a condition like this when they describe their doctrine" ([4, p.139]), is that he conceives it as "needed".[24] If I understand his reasoning correct, Eklund believes this to be the case because we cannot make adequate sense of a language with more/less expressive powers than our own. This he further takes to commit the pluralist to the counterintuitive view that "with respect to

all subject matters [...] there will be equally good theories formulated in these possible equally good languages" ([4, p.140]).[25] As will be obvious to any reader, the reason why pluralists often don't explicate any such condition is that its "anything goes"-attitude seems, at worst, untenable, and, at best, quite unsettling.

But I do not think the pluralist needs to be committed to any such condition. If the condition (b) under discussion means to say that "these languages can somehow describe the world's [*metaphysical*] facts equally well and fully", then it is clear that the pluralist doesn't require appealing to it. For Carnap, being such a pluralist, may say that different linguistic frameworks do not describe the "world's [*metaphysical*] facts" at all, but rather concern their own furnished contents. Whether some frameworks come closer to describing these facts, or even if there aren't any such facts to somehow describe (idealism), it is evident from Carnap's position that such speculation, including the (b) condition, is senseless. This is evidently the case because it requires the adoption of a neutral position outside all frameworks, which would not conform to any semantic rules constitutive of meaningful sentence formation. If the (b) condition on the other hand not is taken as appealing to metaphysical correspondence[26] for providing a standard of judging "different languages", it seems that the convenience of "different languages", which Eklund explicitly takes to be another matter, provides us with the only possible standard for language choice. By excluding metaphysics from meaningful discourse the ontological pluralist may still insist on the utility of certain languages despite not operating with the notion of metaphysical correspondence, as for example Carnap, earlier noted, seems to do. [27] Thus, it will be clear how (less pragmatic) talk of water deprived of chemical sophistication at some point was traded for the (the more pragmatic) talk of water that furnished our concept with the property H_2O, without having to consult the metaphysician in order to consider the latter of greater expressive power.

Although ontological pluralism and even deflationism more generally often are conceived as necessarily sharing the fate of quantifier variance, they certainly do not. On the contrary, it does not only seem like both positions still are viable, but also that the initial position forwarded by Carnap ([3])[28] still may yield one of the most prominent pluralist approaches to metaontology. Moreover, not only is pluralism still a viable candidate for deflationism, it is just one among several. Although I won't provide any detailed account of the positions here, other viable candidates may, e.g., be ontological maximalism – which is the view

that anything that could be said to exist in any given language in fact does exist – and radical fictionalism[29] – according to which ontological statements always lack literal content. This is not to say the deflationist *should* accept Carnapian pluralism, or maximalism or fictionalism for that matter, but rather that he *could* do so. The tenability of deflationism in general does not depend exclusively on the merits of pluralism, and especially not those pertaining to quantifier variance.

6 Conclusion

I have argued that Quine's critique of Carnap's deflationary approach to ontology, while weakening the initial position, does not leave it without possibility for recovery. The pluralistic approach so often criticized, despite the objections of metaphysicians like van Inwagen and Sider, may still find a tenable approach in Carnap's initial position forwarded in *Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology*. But even if this position is found wanting, there are still other ways for the deflationist to go. We can learn from the Quine-Carnap debate, and the metaontological discussions in its aftermath, that despite metaphysics (unofficially) being crowned the victor, deflationism still provides viable approaches against the contemporary philosophical establishment.

Notes

1 [24, p.391].

2 [3, pp.16-17].

3 [3, p.17].

4 Continuing, the distinction will be abbreviated as "the I/E distinction".

5 For a similar approach, see [4, pp.131-132].

6 See [3, pp.18-19] for Carnap's discussion on numbers.

7 The main point of the trichotomized version of the I/E distinction, as I have presented it here, is to show how metaphysical (i.e. *factual-external*) questions differ from pragmatic (i.e. *pragmatic-external*) questions. Although Carnap did believe that both kinds of question were devoid of cognitive content, only the latter kind is able to serve any substantial function at all: namely, the pragmatic function of evaluating the merits of linguistic frameworks not yet adopted.

8 Continuing, the distinction will be abbreviated as "the U/M distinction".

9 Cf. [1, chapter 4].

10 Continuing, the distinction will be abbreviated as "the A/S distinction".

11 "All *logically* possible cases come into consideration for the determination of intensions." ([2, p.38]).

12 After all he does "suspect that the notion of such a [analytic/synthetic] dichotomy only encourages confused impressions of how language relates to the world." ([22, p.67]).

13 For more on how we ought to be ontologically committed to the entities which our best scientific theories quantify over, and especially entities of mathematics, see [16]; [19]; [20]; [21]; Cf. [14].

14 The main difference to be noticed here is that internal questions don't only comprise subclass questions, but also category questions when these are asked in conformity to the semantic rules within the adopted framework, thus entailing either "trivially analytic or contradictory answers" ([17, p.69]).

15 Later in this section I will remark that Carnap's view, contrary to what I just stated, isn't committed to what I called quantificational pluralism, or what is better known as quantifier variance. The reason why I treat him as having such a commitment is that Carnap, ontological pluralism, and deflationism more generally often are seen as necessarily presupposing such a commitment.

16 [12, pp.330-335].

17 It is lack of such sensitivity to linguistic functionality, as is manifest in metaphysical philosophy, he believes to cause *category mistakes* – i.e., mistakes in which something belonging to a particular category is described as if it belonged to a different category.

18 Cf. [27].

19 As an example, Jason Turner ([28, pp.9-10]; [29, pp.419-420]) even seems to assimilate the notions.

20 E.g. [8, p.53].

21 The main difference, as I see it, is that whereas Putnam argued in favor of actual quantifier variance ([13, p.19]), Hirsch argues for the more modest position of possible quantifier variance ([8, p.60]). It should also be noted that whereas Putnam wrongly thought of conceptual relativity as incompatible with realism ([13, pp.35-36]), Hirsch in fact exposed how this assumption rested on a U/M mistake. (See [8, pp.52-53]).

22 The claim that there are answers to ontological questions and that they are nontrivial.

23 See [8, p.57]; Cf. [9, p.231], for Hirsch's agreement with "(b)".

24 In a more recent article [5] makes explicit that "what is needed is an equivalence relation intermediate in strength" between different theories formulated in different languages.

25 Since Eklund doesn't see Carnap as fulfilling this requirement, he sees him as an erring pluralist ([4, pp.141-142]).

26 Many of the problems Eklund identifies with ontological pluralism and deflationism comes from the fact that he conceives them as metaphysical theses that picture "reality as an amorphous lump" ([5]). But, as I have attempted to show, the theses could be restricted to our use of ontological concepts and needn't have any metaphysical entailments. In other words, the pluralist might be said to endorse semantic vagueness, without having to endorse ontic vagueness. This view would also refute the claim of [5] that the pluralist should adopt maximalism; the thesis that anything which possibly could exist in fact does exist. A natural problem for "the picture of reality as an amorphous lump", which counts against

deflationism as conceived by Eklund, is that incompatible or contradictory descriptions of the world in different languages might not leave any room left for the lump metaphor. For if, as I argue, the pluralist *only* needs to be able to differentiate between different and incompatible languages on *pragmatic grounds*, without having to make assumptions about any underlying reality, it seems that considerations of parsimony should leave out any metaphysical commitments.

27 Such a position could possibly also be compatible with a view on semantics that involves a rethinking of both the role and concept of reference in such a way that would eliminate the threat from what [5] calls "the *Tarskian* argument" and "the *sameness* argument".

28 In modified form if interpreted as being committed to quantifier variance, as noted above.

29 I forward this position as a radicalization of the fictionalism endorsed by Stephen Yablo ([31]). According to Yablo's more modest position, instead of being ontologically committing, ontological statements *might* rather be of a make-believe or fictional nature.

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