TESIS DOCTORAL

Essays Concerning Objects.
A Non-Representationalist View in Metaontology

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Resumen

Tal vez debido al trabajo de Quine, que se pensó que había derrotado la amenaza del neopositivismo, en las últimas décadas ha habido un gran resurgimiento entre los filósofos de los debates sobre la existencia de varias entidades, incluyendo no sólo los debates tradicionales sobre la existencia de Dios o el libre albedrío, sino también los debates sobre si existen objetos ordinarios como personas o artefactos, así como los debates sobre si existen los números, las partes temporales o las sumas mereológicas. Una consecuencia natural ha sido el creciente interés en la reflexión sobre la viabilidad de la ontología, como el estudio filosófico de lo que existe. Van Inwagen acuñó recientemente el término "Metaontología" para referirse a la metadisciplina que se ocupa de la legitimidad y el estado cognitivo de la ontología, así como de su propia tarea y metodología. A grandes rasgos, mientras que los ontólogos preguntan "¿Qué hay?", la pregunta de la metaontología es "¿Qué quieren decir los ontólogos cuando hacen preguntas ontológicas?".

El objetivo principal de esta tesis es proponer una visión no representacionalista/no descriptivista en metaontología, según la cual no existe una relación de representación entre las reivindicaciones ontológicas (afirmaciones de existencia realizadas por los ontólogos) y el mundo, y no tienen como objetivo principal describir aspectos del mundo como objetos, propiedades, hechos o estados de cosas. Más bien, argumento, su uso puede implicar un tipo distintivo de función expresiva metalingüística; en particular, pueden utilizarse para expresar compromisos con la adopción o rechazo de marcos lingüísticos. Es decir, las afirmaciones ontológicas expresan, al menos en parte, nuestro compromiso con un conjunto específico de normas o políticas para la formación de creencias. Como tal, contrasta con la visión representacionalista/descriptivista dominante en metaontología, según la cual debe haber una

relación de representación entre las reivindicaciones ontológicas y el mundo, y su objetivo primordial es representar algo así como hechos metafísicos sobre el mobiliario último del mundo o propiedades metafísicas que esculpen la naturaleza en su conjunto.

Al mismo tiempo, sin embargo, también mi tesis contrasta con otros relatos no representacionistas de la literatura, como el minimalismo metaontológico (es decir, el deflacionismo). Porque, sostengo, aunque el discurso ontológico no se entiende principalmente como un intento de describir, esto no hace que la ontología sea ilegítima o carezca de valor. De hecho, a diferencia de las posiciones escépticas en metaontología, el punto de vista presentado en esta disertación niega que las oraciones ontológicas carezcan de sentido o sean triviales – en las que la trivialidad se entiende como estrechamente relacionada con la falta de información**.** En breve, en esta disertación intentaré criticar el representacionalismo/descriptivismo en metaontología y evaluar las perspectivas de una versión del no-representacionalismo en metaontología que no conduzca a endosar ni conclusiones reduccionistas, que pretenden eliminar el discurso ontológico, ni conclusiones escépticas, que consideran irrelevante el discurso ontológico.

Esta tesis es un compendio de ensayos cortos y se divide en tres partes. En la primera parte, compuesta por los dos primeros artículos, aplicaré tal enfoque expresivo (metalingüístico) a las afirmaciones ontológicas, entendidas como afirmaciones externas a cualquier marco lingüístico (en la terminología de Carnap). En la segunda parte, que consiste en los documentos tres y cuatro, sugeriré que también algunas afirmaciones sobre la existencia particularmente espinosas (dentro de marcos lingüísticos) pueden ser sensibles a una lectura expresiva. La tercera parte, que se compone de los ensayos quinto, sexto y séptimo, adoptará una forma algo diferente. Me centraré en el problema de cómo hacer frente a la rivalidad entre las diferentes ontologías.

Un poco más en detalle, en el primer ensayo de esta tesis ("**The Practical Dimension of Ontological Discourse**", en evaluación en *Dialectica*), me centro en la función del discurso

ontológico. Partiendo de la distinción entre el lenguaje descriptivo y el normativo, sostengo que las oraciones ontológicas son a menudo secretamente normativas y, como tales, su uso es principalmente práctico más que representativo. De ello se deduce que la función del discurso ontológico (discurso sobre los tipos de entidades que realmente existen) no es describir fragmentos de realidad o declarar hechos ontológicos profundos, sino más bien proporcionar a los agentes una orientación intencional. En particular, se puede decir que tiene el propósito de influir y regular el comportamiento lingüístico del otro**.**

En el segundo ensayo de la tesis ("**Expressivism without Mentalism in Metaontology**", [2018], *International Journal of Philosophical Studies,* 25 (5): 781-800), escrito junto con Pedro Antonio García Jorge, desarrollamos algunas de las ideas planteadas en el primer ensayo que proporcionan un enfoque expresivo de las oraciones ontológicas externas (en términos de Carnap). Como tal, se trata de un enfoque no descriptivo y no representacionalista del significado de las mismas. Es no-representacionalista ya que no asume que debe haber una relación de representación entre las oraciones ontológicas y el mundo, y no son no-descriptivas ya que no asumen que la única función de una oración ontológica es igualar hechos mundanos o describir cómo son las cosas en el mundo. Aunque el representacionalismo y el descriptivismo están estrechamente correlacionados o entremezclados en la explicación del significado, son un poco diferentes. El representacionalismo es una tesis metasemántica; es decir, el representacionalismo explica en virtud de qué lenguaje es significativo, mientras que el descriptivismo es una tesis sobre lo que hacemos con el lenguaje. Dada esta comprensión del Expresivismo, damos cuenta del significado de las oracions ontológicas que explican su papel en la comunicación, cómo los hablantes las utilizan en la comunicación, mientras que nosotros rechazamos la semántica psicológica. Sin embargo, Al mismo tiempo, no negamos que, a pesar de tener un uso paradigmáticamente no representativo, tienen una semántica propositiva. Sin embargo, para el relato expresionista que tenemos en mente, los hechos semánticos están

determinados en última instancia por los hechos sobre el uso. Además, evitamos acusaciones también de mentalismo (a nivel de metasemántica) en la medida en que explicamos el significado de las reivindicaciones ontológicas externas en términos de los compromisos prácticos para la adopción de ciertas formas lingüísticas que expresan, en lugar de expresar algún tipo de estado mental (dentro de la cabeza).

En el tercer ensayo de esta tesis ("**Scientific Models and Metalinguistic Negotiation**", [en prensa], *Theoria: an International Journal for Theory, History and Foundations of Science*), investigo la relación entre el tipo de relato de los juicios ontológicos avanzados en los dos ensayos anteriores y las controversias ontológicas. En particular, tomo el debate entre los enfoques dominantes del realismo y el anti-realismo (especialmente el ficcionalismo) sobre el estado ontológico de los modelos científicos como un estudio de caso y exploro la posibilidad de entender tal debate como un ejemplo de negociación metalingüística.

En el cuarto ensayo de esta tesis ("**Categorial Disambiguation**", [en prensa], in J. Cumpa, eds., *Categorial Ontologies: From Realism to Eliminativism*, Routledge), me concentro en el vocabulario ontológico-categorial, es decir, los términos ontológico-categoriales tradicionales, tales como "sustancia", "tipo", "cosa", "objeto", y otros similares. Presento un relato del papel desempeñado por esos términos sugiriendo que desempeñan una función expresiva metalingüística distintiva. Sin embargo, mantengo que tal relato opera principalmente a nivel pragmático: como parte de una teoría del uso de estas expresiones. Por consiguiente, no nos compromete necesariamente a conclusiones nominalistas (semánticas u ontológicas). Una forma de simple realismo sobre las categorías ontológicas es, por lo tanto, al menos compatible con un análisis expresivo del uso del vocabulario ontológico-categorial.

En los tres últimos ensayos de esta tesis, mi objetivo es comprender mejor, desde la perspectiva esbozada anteriormente, lo que los metafísicos están haciendo cuando tratan de abordar la supuesta rivalidad entre diferentes ontologías, en particular entre la ontología de

sentido común y la ontología científica. En los casos en que la investigación científica parece tener afirmaciones de sentido común refutadas, los metafísicos a menudo han ofrecido paráfrasis eliminativistas. Por ejemplo, la oración "Hay una silla aquí" se parafrasearía como "Hay partículas dispuestas en forma de silla aquí", cuantificando así sólo sobre partículas, no sillas, evitando así supuestamente el compromiso con las sillas. Sin embargo, es posible esperar que en el uso ordinario (por ejemplo, en el habla inglesa normal) la verdad de la primera sea analíticamente suficiente para asegurar la verdad de la segunda: es decir, del hecho de que hay (según la teoría eliminativista) simples disposiciones en cuanto a la silla, podemos inferir que hay una silla. En el quinto ensayo de esta tesis ("**Transparent Contents and Trivial Inferences**"**,** en evaluación en *Studia Semiotyczne*), sostengo que, si lo anterior es correcto, entonces podemos concluir que la relación inferencial entre las dos oraciones consideradas debe ser, hasta cierto punto, epistémicamente transparente. Esto significa que debe estar epistémicamente disponible para el hablante simplemente sobre la base de la competencia lingüística y conceptual. Además, en la medida en que una oración parece comprometernos a la existencia de cosas que no se mencionan en la otra oración, este tipo de relación inferencial, aunque trivial, puede revelar compromisos ontológicos. Es decir, resulta ser de alguna manera "ontológicamente amplia". Por lo tanto, en tales circunstancias, los oradores competentes están obligados a llegar y adquirir conclusiones ontológicas (internas) sobre la existencia (*simple*) de las entidades en cuestión a priori, sin necesidad de conocer más verdades empíricas.

En el sexto ensayo de esta tesis ("**Cross-Sortal Identity Claims**", en evaluación en *Axiomathes*), trato de mostrar que los sorteos empleados por la imagen manifiesta y la imagen científica a menudo tienen condiciones de co-aplicación diferentes, aunque, como se dijo en el ensayo anterior, pueden compartir las mismas condiciones de aplicación. De ello se deduce que la relación entre los objetos a los que se refieren las dos imágenes difícilmente puede ser identidad. Sin embargo, al mismo tiempo, sugiero que también los intentos de encontrar una

rivalidad entre las dos imágenes son engañosos. Normalmente, los argumentos que relacionan las ontologías de sentido común y las ontologías científicas se basan en la idea de que podríamos hacer una referencia neutra de categoría a alguna de las cosas de las que estamos hablando. Pero "cosa", en su uso neutro, no es un término genérico, por lo que no puede permitirnos establecer una referencia a algo en lo que la ciencia y el sentido común puedan entonces estar de acuerdo o en desacuerdo. Para superar este callejón sin salida, abogo por una comprensión diferente de las reivindicaciones que vinculan a las dos imágenes. En línea con la mayoría de las ideas presentadas en los ensayos anteriores, tomo su papel principal para ser una función expresiva (metalingüística).

Finalmente, en el último trabajo de esta tesis ("**Categories and the Language of Metaphysics**", [2019], *Organon F*, 26, [3]: 1-21), intento mostrar cómo la estrategia metaontológica global desarrollada a lo largo de esta tesis puede ser utilizada para arrojar luz sobre el trabajo en el que participan ontólogos sobre algunas discusiones contemporáneas en metafísica analítica. Tomo los recientes intentos de Cumpa (2014) de descubrir la estructura fundamental del mundo como un estudio de caso. En la medida en que concibe esta pregunta como una pregunta sobre la categoría capaz de unificar la imagen manifiesta y científica del mundo, su análisis resulta de particular interés para el relato metaontológico aquí presentado. Concluyo que la respuesta que da, que apela a la categoría de "hechos", tendría sentido si se entendiera que cumple la función expresiva (metalingüística) esbozada en los ensayos anteriores de esta disertación.

En conclusión, si los argumentos de esta tesis tienen éxito, la visión metaontológica que ofrezco gana una ventaja importante sobre el representacionalista/descriptivista. De hecho, al entender la práctica ontológica de acuerdo con su función pragmática, a diferencia de sus creadores de verdades, no necesitamos proporcionar un análisis de la naturaleza de algunos estados metafísicos de las cosas que se supone que hacen verdaderas las afirmaciones

ontológicas. Pero las afirmaciones ontológicas tampoco se entienden en términos de las actitudes evaluativas que expresan. Si en cambio entendemos las reivindicaciones ontológicas observando los compromisos prácticos que el ontólogo asume al hacerlas, encontraremos una manera de dar sentido al razonamiento ontológico que asegure las ventajas del no-representacionalismo sin el bagaje del emotivismo y las versiones tradicionales del expresivismo.

Al mismo tiempo, también obtiene ventajas sobre otros enfoques no representacionistas, como el realismo ligero y el cuasi realismo. Contrariamente a estos últimos enfoques, que se limitan a dejar de lado las cuestiones metafísicas, el presente ofrece un relato más conciliador del discurso ontológico y da sentido al discurso ontológico y a las verdades ontológicas. Luego ofrece una visión que da sentido a la práctica ontológica, especialmente en relación con los fenómenos de razonamiento ontológico. Del mismo modo, no desdeña los debates ontológicos y no considera que las disputas sobre lo que realmente existe no tengan sentido y estén fuera de lugar, sino que, en cierta medida, pretende preservarlos.

Overview

I think about this, not as one who thinks,
But as one who doesn't.
And I look at the flowers and smile…
(Fernando Pessoa)

1. Introduction

The subject matter of this dissertation is metaontology**.** Metaontology is the study of the nature of ontological questions (and claims). The basic question of ontology is: "What exists?" (or better, "What entities or kinds of entity exist?"). Thus, the basic question of metaontology turns out to be: "What do ontologists mean when they ask (and answer) ontological questions?" Other metaontological questions closely related to the former are: "How do they establish that something exists?", "How could they ever hope to answer such a question?" and "Is there any general and systematic criterion to answer the questions of ontology?" From these comes the following: "Is there an ontological account more correct than any other?", that is to say: "Do the questions asked by ontologists have *objective* answers?"

To the latter question, metaontological realists answer "yes" and metaontological anti-realists answer "no".[1] Most of the contemporary metaontological realist views stem from the work of Quine (1948; 1951). Instead, metaontological anti-realism is traced, often improperly, to Carnap (1950). Actually, in *Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology,* Carnap even seems to favor a total rejection of metaphysical issues:

> Influenced by ideas of Ludwig Wittgenstein, the [Vienna] 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

[1] Note that, for instance, "[meta]ontological anti-realism about numbers should be distinguished from the sort of anti-realism about numbers that denies that numbers exist—somewhat confusingly, this form of anti-realism about numbers is a form of ontological realism about numbers!" (Chalmers 2009, 93)

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*. (Carnap 1950, 215)

In this dissertation, I will defend a peculiar sort of metaontological anti-realism which, although it is part of the Carnapian tradition of denying ontological questions have determinate answers, bears important differences from it. In particular, it does not favor the rejection of metaphysical issues, but rather it aims to understand them in a totally different way from how they are traditionally understood. As such, it shares relevant features with a recently developed metaontological approach, which is in a sense intermediate between the two major groups of views mentioned above: the so-called "lightweight realism".[2] Lightweight realists hold that while there are objective answers to ontological questions, these answers are somehow shallow or *trivial* (in the sense of not requiring substantive philosophical investigation). Views of this kind provide a broad class of non-theoretical arguments in ontology, usually referred to in the literature as "ordinary language arguments", which simply advert to how we ordinarily speak. According to them, deep ontological practice in a certain sense reflects (or at least should reflect) our ordinary ontological practice. What lightweight realists reject is thus the presupposition that the existence of the purported entities (such as ordinary objects, numbers, fictional characters, and the like) has a substantive nature tied to possessing some feature (such as being physical, causally relevant, mind-independent, endorsed by science, etc.), which one could hope to uncover with a metaphysical theory. Then, doubts about whether there *really* are the purported entities (doubts grounded in worries about their failing to meet some presumed general criterion of existence) are misplaced and properly put aside. In particular, they do not need to deny that there are facts about what exists, what they question is that we really have a grip on what it would be for something to *really* exist, given that we are holding true its lightweight (ordinary) existence. For "really" is not supposed to avert to some deep and substantive criteria that might fail to be met. In this way, they think that not only can we know

[2] Thomasson (2015, 157) labels this view as "simple" realism (as contrasted with "explanatory realism").

the answers to ontological questions, but that they are too easily resolved to be the subjects for deeper investigation.

Metaontological views of this sort have been developed mainly by Thomasson (2015), Schiffer (2003), Wright and Hale (2001), and Hirsch (2002; 2005)[3]. Thomasson, for instance, denies that the concept of existence is even attempting to refer to a substantive property the nature of which we can investigate and hope to discover. These views contrast with the so-called "heavyweight realism" of Fine (2009), Horgan and Potrc (2006), Dorr (2005), Sider (2001; 2011), van Inwagen (1990; 1998; 2002), Lewis (1986), and others, according to which there is a non-trivial way (that is, a general, systematic and substantive criterion) to answer ontological questions. As result, they consider ontological questions to be deep questions whose answers are not just determined, but also reflect the ultimate furniture of the world. One example is the common neo-Quinean approach of arguing that we should accept/deny the existence of the purported entities since we do/do not need to quantify over them in our best scientific theories. Heavyweight realism is roughly the conjunction of ontological realism and metaphysical realism, where we can go so far as to characterize metaphysical realism by saying that on this view "the world consists of some fixed totality of mind-independent objects" (Putnam 1981, 49). According to heavyweight realists, the method of ontology is somehow assimilated to the method of science. As Horgan (1993) says, "an adequate ontological theory – like an adequate scientific theory – should itself be systematic and general."(695)

Both lightweight and heavyweight realism contrasts with metantological anti-realism of Chalmers (2009), Yablo (1998; 2000), Sidelle (2001), Sosa (1999; 2003), Putnam (1987; 1981),

[3] Must be noticed there can be good reasons to doubt that Hirsch's pluralist view on ontology should really be regarded as deflationary, rather than simply anti-realist. According to Hirsch, there are different languages, with different concepts of existence expressed by their respective existential quantifiers, and none of them is privileged. Hirsch expresses his thesis ("the doctrine of quantifier variance") as the denial of the claim that there is a "metaphysically privileged sense of the quantifier" (2002, 61). Anyway, here I focus mainly on Neo-Fregean line with respect to ontological assertions (such as the one endorsed by Thomasson, Schiffer, Wright and Hale).

and others. As it is the denial of both forms of metaontological realism, we can say that metaontological anti-realists deny both that one should expect there to be a non-trivial way to answer ontological questions and that such answers are objective. Hence, they deny ontological assertions to be objective, where to say that an ontological assertion is objective is roughly to say that it has a truth-value (true or false) and such a truth-value does not depend on a context of utterance or a context of assessment. However, there are important and significant differences among anti-realists. In the first place, among them there are who take ontological assertions to be meaningless qua assertions (in line with Carnap's original insights) and who take them to be faultlessly meaningful. The former take them to be somehow defective, so that they express empty or defective concepts, or do not express propositions at all (Chalmers 2009).[4] This assumption is obviously rejected by both forms of metaontological realism. The latter, on the other hand, hold that ontological questions are well-formed and legitimate questions: it's just that there is nothing to determine the answers. In this way, ontological assertions turn out to be significant, but they lack truth-values at all. In particular, since they hold that there is no fact of the matter as to which ontological view is correct, they contrast ontological heavyweight realism (Yablo 2009). For example, they think that there is no fact of the matter about whether Platonism or nominalism is correct: ontological assertions of "Numbers exist" lack a determinate truth-value. Likewise, there is no fact of the matter about whether universalism, nihilism, or some other view about the status of mereological sums is correct: ontological assertions of "A mereological sum of X and Y exists" typically lack a determine truth-value. At the same time, though, they contrast lightweight realism in that they do take ontological questions to be deep, genuine and philosophically significant questions concerning the ultimate furniture of the world, and the answers to ontological questions to be neither shallow nor *trivial.*

[4] More in detail, Chalmers holds that the absolute quantifier expresses either a defective or an empty concept: "[…] the absolute quantifier is defective. Either it does not express a concept at all, or if it expresses a concept, that concept is defective, too. In particular, the absolute quantifier does not have a determinate extension" (2009, 102).

Of course, the latter views form a plenitude that presents within it considerable differences. In fact, there are different versions of metaontological anti-realism according to which ontological assertions are meaningful and have truth-values, but such truth-values fail to be objective. A metaontological contextualist, for instance, holds that their truth-values are context-dependent. A metaontological relativist holds that these truth-values are assessment-dependent.[5] And an ontological indeterminist holds that these truth-values are indeterminate (assessable, for example, by supervaluating across all admissible precisifications).[6] Lastly, some of the metaontological anti-realists take ontological questions to be meaningful but epistemically unanswerable: we simply lack justification for answering them (Kriegel 2013; Bennett 2009).[7] Needless to say, these are but rough sketches of the relevant argumentative routes.

In light of the above characterizations, in this dissertation I will defend an anti-realist view in metaontology that in one way or another differs from all forms of anti-realism listed above. First of all, (deep) ontological assertions are taken to be faultlessly meaningful. Secondly, I deny they lack truth-values at all. At the same time, though, their truth-values are not considered determinate. But that is not because there is no fact of the matter as to which ontological view is correct; not because, for example, there is no fact of the matter about whether Platonism or nominalism is correct (or likewise, because there is no fact of the matter about whether universalism or nihilism is correct).

Rather, answers to questions raised by ontologists fail to be objective because, I will argue, their primary function is a non-representational one.[8] That is to say, they should not be

[5] In other words, according to relativists, the relevant standards or parameters (to *which truth*-values are *relativized)* are those of a context of assessment of the utterance, which need not be the context of the utterance itself.

[6] On the assumptions that, for instance, there are multiple possible precisifications of the (unrestricted) existential quantifier, in the manner of vague predicates, one of the standard ways to handle with the semantic indeterminacy of questions about what there is to use supervaluation (Chalmers 2009, 111).

[7] Actually, I am not sure it is totally right to classify this view as anti-realist view, rather than heavyweight realist. Anyway, given the purpose in this dissertation, this further complication can be set aside.

[8] Although, as I will try to show mainly in the second paper of this dissertation, we should avoid falling into the mistake of confusing function with meaning, so that we do not need to identify that function with their meaning.

understood as straightforwardly factual claims aimed to describe some metaphysical facts or represent deep features of the world.[9] It follows that there is no pressure to look for what states of affairs correspond to our true claims, or what objects they are about in order to explain what makes them true or false. Even though anti-realist, this position shares with lightweight realism the non-representationalist character. Hence, it can easily be defined as a kind of lightweight anti-realism**.** That is to say, a metaontological view according to which the answers to ontological questions fail to be objective, but for lightweight reasons.

In a nutshell, what I suggest is that there is something wrong in the way ontological practice is usually understood (to the extent that it is understood as being founded in the assumption that there is a substantive criterion of existence to draw on in defending ontological claims). But this does not mean that there is anything wrong with the ontological practice itself and that therefore it should be rejected. As I will try to show, lightweight anti-realism does not lead us to give up ontological practice, in favor of a sort of metaphysical quietism.[10] Although not motivated by heavyweight assumptions, lightweight realists reach a different conclusion. For, as we will see, they seem to endorse a quietest approach aimed at deflate any robust metaphysical position and ontological practice designed at determining what *really* exists. Accordingly, as radical as it may be, lightweight anti-realism is perhaps a metaontological view a little more palatable than lightweight forms of realism for ambitious metaphysicians, insofar as it does not lead to the conclusion that ontological discourses and debates are so pointless that we should not be interested in retaining them. For this reason, from now on I shall avoid referring to the proposal made in this dissertation as "lightweight". In fact, such a label may give rise to confusion, as it is understood as a synonym for "deflationary" or "minimalist", rather than as a synonym for "non-

[9] Factual claims in some sense form "pictures," or "cognitive maps," or "representations" of how objects or events in the world are related (O'Shea 2007, 144). For Carnap, on the other hand, "A statement *p* is said to have 'factual content' if experiences which would support *p* or the contradictory of *p* are at least conceivable, and if their characteristics can be indicated" (1967, 327).

[10] For a contemporary defense of metaphysical quietism, see Price (2011, 235-236).

representationalist". And, as I will point out better below, although non-representationalist my proposal is not rightly characterized as deflationary or minimalist.

Despite this and other subtle (but important) differences, my account clearly shares more points of contact with lightweight realism than with its heavyweight counterpart. I will therefore focus mainly on the semantics and metaphysics of the former. Anyway, throughout this dissertation, I will examine the language used to state ontological claims, differentiating as much as possible among heavyweight realism, lightweight realism, and ontological anti-realism. I will point to considerations for favoring non-representationalist anti-realism, but I will not provide a full-scale argument against realism and other versions of anti-realism. This is just a seminal work and further work is certainly needed in that direction. My concern will be to elaborate the view, making the case that it is internally coherent and that there are no strong reasons to reject it.

1.2 Ontological and Existence Assertions

As already stated, an ontological assertion is an utterance of a sentence that appears to assert (or deny(the existence of certain entities, of the form: "Xs exist" ("Xs do not exist"). It is moreover a standard assumption that existence is expressed by quantificational expressions like "there is" and "some" (viz., by existential quantifier). Given this assumption, "There are Xs" ("There are not Xs") is interchangeable with the former. I will start by distinguishing between two different sorts of ontological assertions: ordinary and deep ontological assertions. For the sake of terminological clarity, from now on let's call "existence assertions" the ordinary ontological assertions and "ontological assertions" the deep ontological assertions**.**

An existence assertion, to a first approximation, is an ontological assertion of the sort typically made in ordinary first-order discussions of the relevant subject matter. For example, an assertion of "There are about 3500 different species of mosquitoes worldwide" as uttered by a biological

scientist or a mathematician's assertion of "There are four prime numbers less than ten" are typical existence assertions. An ontological assertion, to a first approximation, is an ontological assertion of the sort typically made in broadly philosophical discussions where ontological considerations are paramount. For example, the typical philosophers' assertions such as ''There are no ordinary objects" or 'Numbers do not exist" are ontological assertions. We can think of existence assertion as those made outside the "ontology room" and ontological assertions as those made inside the "ontology room". This characterization stems from Carnap's well-known distinction between internal and external questions (and claims), from *Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology*.[11] Although such a distinction might be disputable, it is relatively pre-theoretical and seems to reflect a distinction in our practice of raising questions about existence.

Anyway, the distinction is orthogonal to the realism/antirealism debate. This means that it should be acceptable to ontologists and metaphysicians of many different stripes. In particular, the distinction between existence (internal) and ontological (external) assertions is usually recognized by theorists who endorse a so-called "revisionary metaphysics"**:** one which denies the coincidence between commonsense (ordinary) ontology and correct ontology. Therefore, they allow that the same existence sentence can have different truth-conditions and truth-values depending on whether it is uttered in ontological or ordinary contexts. On the contrary, the distinction is most likely to be questioned by theorists who endorse a "descriptive metaphysics": one on which correct ontology coincides with commonsense (ordinary) ontology. In this dissertation, I will accept the distinction between existence and ontological assertions (and between different ways that these are associated with truth-conditions), but at the same time, it will not be totally correct to conclude that I endorse a revisionary metaphysics of that sort.

[11] Distinctions closely related to the distinction between existence and ontological assertions have been made by a significant number of philosophers. Apart from Carnap, see for example Thomasson 2016, Chalmers 2009, Dorr 2005, Hofweber 2005, Horgan 2001, Yablo 2000, and many others.

Mainly in the first parts, I will hold that existence assertions such as “There is a computer in front of me” or “There are prime numbers” are typically true or false. Their truth might be taken to coincide respectively with a sort of correctness in light of relevant empirical discoveries (for example, about the qualitative distribution of matter) or first-order reasoning (for example, mathematical reasoning). Thereby, in some cases, such as mathematics, they will be analytically true or false. In other cases, such as claims concerning ordinary objects, they will be empirically true or false, with their truth or falsity determined by empirical investigation. And, of course, their truth-value depends on the state of the world, and not just on what a speaker currently finds acceptable; nor, at least intuitively, they have truth-conditions in light of any distinctively ontological truths and distinctively ontological reasoning.

This analysis of existence assertion is roughly accepted by theorists of different stripes. The analysis of ontological sentences, on the other hand, varies considerably. Theorists who endorse a descriptive metaphysics argue that the analysis of ontological assertions should be sensitive to the way existence assertions function in our ordinary discourse (outside the ontology room). They then give an analysis of the way existence assertions function in ordinary discourse, and use this to support ontological realism (inside the ontology room). In this way, they take ontological assertions to be trivial, in the sense of not requiring substantive philosophical investigation. For they usually accept ontological (external) assertions just in light of empirical information and first-order reasoning needed to answer existence (internal) assertions. There is no further nontrivial truth to resolve concerning whether a certain entity really exists. Given the above, it follows that those who typically endorse a descriptive metaphysics are the lightweight realists.

Both heavyweight realists and anti-realists, on the other hand, seem to endorse mainly a revisionary metaphysics. According to revisionists, once we make the distinction between existence and ontological claims, it becomes obvious that they function in our discourse in very

different ways. The arguments for lightweight analysis may apply only to existence assertions but not to ontological assertions. For if one sees ontology as an attempt to discover something like the fundamental structure of reality then it is natural to hold that ontological assertions are never trivially true. Rather, their truth or falsity depends on substantive philosophical considerations that go well beyond elementary reasoning. That is, they have truth-conditions in light of distinctively ontological reasoning. Then, as already mentioned, heavyweight realists hold that there is such a further truth that would not be trivially knowable, so that the answers to ontological questions are objective with determinate truth-values, while anti-realists deny it.

One, though, might question whether we actually have a grip on what it would be for something to *really* exist (that is, to hold that an ontological assertion is true) given that we are holding that the ordinary existence of it is true (that is, given that we are holding that the existence assertion is true). For example, one might question whether we actually have a grip on what it would be for my computer to really exist, given that we are holding that the existence of my computer is true, that is, given that we are holding that the ordinary assertion of "My computer exists" is true. Likewise, one might question whether we really have a grip on what it would be for numbers to really exist, given that we are holding the existence of mathematics. Accordingly, one might deny ontological assertions to be faultlessly meaningful and question the very notion of correctness as applied to ontology. This is, roughly, Carnap's conclusion: internal questions (viz. existence assertions) have determinate truth-values, but external questions (viz. ontological assertions) are meaningless and as such lack truth-values at all.[12] Therefore, he maintains, there is no fact of the matter as to whether, for example, a physicalist or a phenomenalist view is correct. In the first papers of this dissertation, the picture I suggest is

[12] Such a distinction tends to suggest two different sorts of sentences, whereas, as I understood Carnap's insight, the most important distinction is between different uses of sentences. For example, a sentence such as "Do prime numbers exist?" might be used to pose an internal question (by a mathematician, say) or to pose an external question (by a metaphysician, say). The same goes in principle for sentences such as "Numbers exist" and "There are four prime numbers less than ten."

parallel to Carnap's. On both anti-realist views (his and mine), no answer to ontological questions asked in the ontology room is objective, although the answers to existence questions asked outside the ontology room may well be objective. Moreover (in line with pluralist views, such as Putnam's and Hirsh's), I reject the claim that there is an ontological characterization of the world more correct than any other. Yet, unlike Carnap, I do not reach the conclusion that ontological discourse is meaningless. Ontological (external) assertions are neither so hopelessly defective that they do not express propositions at all nor lack true-values. Quite the contrary, they are faultlessly meaningful and have truth-values (although, according to this view, they turn out to be assessment-dependent and hence indeterminate). Rather, as I will point out in the first part of this dissertation, the distinction between existence (internal) assertions and ontological (external) assertion lies in the different functions they perform within the linguistic practice. While the former aim to state some facts or describe the world around us, the latter play a role that is fundamentally non-representational.

1.3 Disagreement in Ontology

Once the meta-ontologist has figured out how to interpret the work of those engaged in hard ontological investigations, one of the pressing tasks for her will then be how to properly understand hard ontology debates. Ontological debates are protracted debates about the existence of numbers, properties, propositions, mereological sums, or even ordinary objects. So what sense is to be made of such debates? Is there anything wrong with disagreements in ontology? It is certainly not an easy task to determine what the best interpretation of an ontological dispute is, and it seems clear that different solutions are possible depending on the particular metaontological view we endorse. Of course, according to heavyweight realists, disagreements in ontology are straightforwardly factual. This means that, in any instance of

genuine ontological disagreement, there must be some sort of error on the part of at least one of the disputants, and this feature is explained by the heavyweight truthmakers that ontological claims aim to represent. Indeed, as already stated, a heavyweight approach posits some unified set of entities or states of affairs that stand as truthmakers for ontological claims (to uncover with a philosophical theory). And such entities or states of affairs (which makes ontological claims true or false) identify the ultimate furniture of the world, which we may go on to investigate. The heavyweight explanation is appealing: one of the two disputants is just wrong. How are we to understand this wrongness? Again, very simply: there is some mind-independent fact of the matter, waiting for a factually correct claim to correspond to it.

The main disadvantages of this sort of view are epistemological: for we need to acknowledge methods for settling ontological debates other than empirical investigation and conceptual/linguistic analysis. In fact, heavyweight realists generally assume that ontological questions about the existence of disputed entities cannot be answered by examining the way we usually talk and think about the entities in question and that is exactly what is supposed to make those questions deep (or "serious") metaphysical questions and not just questions about the meaning of expressions we use in linguistic practice. Yet, they also deny that ontological questions can be directly resolved empirically—making them questions for philosophers, not scientists. Indeed, unlike in the case of most scientific theories, most metaphysical theories are empirically equivalent. Sider calls existence questions of this nature, which cannot be resolved either by linguistic/conceptual or straightforward empirical means, "epistemically metaphysical" (2011, 87). Such a way of understanding the epistemology of metaphysics is far from clear, though. Heavyweight realist thus leaves us with a mystery about how we could possibly come to know who was right in ontological debates, or what the answers to ontological questions could be.

Orthodox anti-realists, instead, tend to suggest that the clash of ontological assertions by different ontologists should be understood as the (apparent) clash of assertions expressing either different contents (with different truth-conditions)[13] or no content at all. The former (and, to some extent, the latter too) would give us an instance of verbal dispute (Chalmers 2011): a dispute that disappears once different senses for the problematic terms are distinguished. That is to say, in the case parties share all the empirical and conceptual evidence, their (pluralist) conclusion is that disputants are better understood as simply talking past each other by using some terms with different meanings. A difference in ontology characterizations of the world thus reflects a difference in classificatory practices rather than a difference in deep commitments. The important point to highlight here is that according to anti-realists there is neither a more correct meaning than any other for the terms at stake nor any best classificatory practice. Disputants are using the relevant sortal terms (or the quantifier)[14] with different senses, and each is speaking a truth.

Likewise, lightweight realists hold that something is wrong with the vast majority of ontological debates. For, as already mentioned, they find it wrong-headed to appeal to some substantive criterion of existence in order to settle such a kind of debate. As a consequence, metaphysical debates about existence questions are seen as quite out of place. But they think that they go wrong not because there is nothing to settle them, but rather because they are so obviously and easily settled that there is no point debating them. Unlike anti-realists (and like heavyweight realists), indeed, they hold that just one disputant is speaking a truth. Insofar as there is any genuine dispute, it is about which sentence expresses a truth in ordinary

[13] The latter does not have to be confused with a relativistic treatment of ontological debates, which takes clashing assertions to be assertions of a common content, but true or false only relative to certain standards. See, MacFarlane (2005, 2014), and Stanley (2005) for more on relativism.

[14] Hirsch, among others, holds that there are different languages, with their different existential quantifiers. He expresses his thesis (the doctrine of quantifier variance) as the denial of the claim that there is a "metaphysically privileged sense of the quantifier" (2002, 61).

conversations about what exists. Therefore, according to lightweight realists, most of the ontological disputes may be settled straightforwardly, simply checking how the relevant terms are used, for example, in ordinary English.[15]

Nevertheless, some could reject such a minimalist approach to ontological debate on allegations that it means we should accuse those who do hard ontology of semantic incompetence: that is, of misusing either the relevant sortal terms or the quantifier in their statements (or both). For, if they grasped and used the terms properly, they would evidently find the ontological questions *easy* to answer (Thomasson 2015, 173-174). Quite the contrary, according to the view I will put forward, we do not need to say that the disputants are semantically incompetent—even when they use the relevant terms in ontological debates.

At the same time, I do not take a relaxed attitude toward ontological disagreements and I have no inclination to consider the dispute resolved once moves of that sort are made. Against those conclusions, I find ontological questions (properly understood) to be the subject of substantive and distinctively debates. Accordingly, unlike lightweight realists, I will not suggest that something is wrong with disputes about what *really* exists and that therefore they should be dismissed as shallow and pointless.

As I will argue in the first three papers of this dissertation, while ordinary disputes about the existence of entities (outside the ontology room) are straightforwardly factual disputes, ontological debates (inside the ontology room) are non-straightforwardly factual debates.[16] Indeed, while the former are rightly conceived as disagreement about what there is in the world, the latter are sensibly understood as disagreements about what we should do, hence as normative disagreements. In particular, ontological disputes about what really exists turn out to

[15] Note that such an account does not necessarily rely on the doctrine of quantifier variance. For instance, Thomasson (2015) posits only one meaning for "exists" and the existential quantifier. According to her, they are formal expressions (viz. logical constants) that are used univocally by disputants in ontological -debate

[16] For a detail characterization of non-straightforwardly factual debates, see mainly Field (2009).

be practical debates about whether or not we should make use of some relevant linguistic resources.

1.3 Minimalism and Deflationism in Metaontology

Again, the metaontological view advocate in this dissertation is anti-realist. This means that ontological assertions are taken to bear somehow indeterminate truth-values. As such, it contrasts with both forms of realism: lightweight and heavyweight realism, which take ontological assertions to bear determinate truth-values. Certainly, however, it shares with lightweight realist positions, such as Thomasson's, important insights. My approach, as well as Thomasson's, is in fact non-representationalist in character. This means that ontological (external) discourse is not primarily understood as aiming to describe some deep metaphysical facts. Nevertheless, the two positions (mine and Thomasson's) still differ about what the function of ontological discourse actually is. In particular, as we will see in the first paper of this dissertation, I reject Thomasson's deflationary (or minimalist) interpretation of ontological talk.

Despite such differences, Thomasson's view still plays a key role in both the development and exposition of the metaontological account sketched here it could be helpful to introduce her motivations in more detail. According to the so-called "easy" approach to ontology,[17]

> We can argue for the existence of entities of [a disputed] kind by arguing that there are true statements involving expressions of the relevant kind. If, for example, there are true statements incorporating expressions functioning as singular terms, then there are objects of some corresponding kind. If the singular terms are such that, if they have reference at all, they refer to numbers, there are numbers (Hale 2010, 406).

Given these entailments, the related existence claims certainly seem true. Doubts about their truth are only raised (except by the mathematically or perceptually incompetent) for

[17] This terminology is Thomasson's (2015). The same approach to the philosophy of mathematics is commonly called "neo-Fregean" (Hale and Wright 2001).

metaphysical reasons: doubts, for example, about what the truthmakers for the relevant claims could be or whether we should countenance the alleged truthmakers (given that they may not be causally efficacious, physical, endorsed by science, etc.). Roughly, an easy approach to ontological questions is applied by Hale and Wright (2001) for the case of numbers; by Schiffer (2003) for propositions, events, properties, states, and the like; and by Thomasson (2007) for ordinary objects.

More recently Thomasson (2015) has focused directly on general existence questions, as those that are normally at issue in ontological debates (although singular sentences would be addressed not that differently). In more detail, she holds that some general existence questions (e.g., "Computers exist?") are answerable simply by empirical investigation and making use of our conceptual competence (e.g., by recognizing certain observational conditions, and so concluding that the concept refers and that there are computers). Others, such as the highly general questions about the existence not just of ordinary objects, but also of numbers, properties, propositions, events, and entities of many other sorts, may be answered by making use of our competence with the rules of use for the concepts in question, combined with our knowledge of uncontroversial truths. For, given conceptual mastery of the rules that introduce a certain concept (e.g., "number", "properties", and the like) we can make trivial inferences from an uncontroversial truth that does not involve the concept in question (e.g., "There are three computers", or "The computer is black") to conclude that the introduced concept ("number", "property") refers and that there are entities of the disputed sort (numbers, properties). This latter argument follows the familiar pattern of easy ontological arguments, in holding that many existence questions may be answered (generally in the positive), by undertaking trivial inferences from uncontested truths.

One of the recurring objections raised against such a minimalist form of realism is that, on that view, it turns out there are no genuine *facts* about the existence of the purported entities. But, as

Horwich (2006, 45) points out, "there is a perfectly legitimate deflationary sense of 'fact' in which 'p' is trivially equivalent to 'It is a fact that p'". It makes it obvious, then, that they do not need to deny that there are facts about what exists. For if we combine it with the easy approach to ontology we can make use of trivial inferences in each case to move from "p" to "It is a fact that p", to "There is a fact [namely that p]" and be thereby assured that there are facts (in a sense constituted by these inferences that license the introduction of the term and the concept).

Given this deflationary sense in which of understanding the question "Do the facts about what exists obtain?", critics can no longer say that easy ontologists deny the very existence of relevant facts. But, while we can then accept that there are such facts, this does not mean we are forced to accept the picture according to which "contrary to minimalism, statements are made true by the existence of facts to which they correspond" (Horwich 1998, 105). For, while there are such facts (the fact that p) for each truth (p), facts so understood cannot play a role in explaining (p or the truth of "p"). Talk of facts is just seen on this view as derivable by way of trivial inferences (from p).

The important point to highlight here is that we can speak of such states of affairs without committing ourselves to use them as explanations for what makes ontological claims true. Therefore, we can retain that there are genuine facts about the existence of the purported entities without falling into a kind of heavyweight realism according to which such facts explain what makes ontological statements true. On this deflationary view, we should thus give up the search for some criterion of existence telling us what it is for something to exist, just as semantic deflationists give up the search for the nature of reference, meaning or truth. Arguably, the disquotational theory of truth provides a suitable example. As for Horwich's (1990) version of the deflationary approach to truth predicate, they simply serve as a device of generalization. The idea is just that we do not need, according to the truth deflationist, a substantive theory to move from "Snow is white" to "'Snow is white' is true". We may move from saying that "Snow is

white" is true to saying that it is a fact that snow is white, but the fact that snow is white then cannot be invoked to explain why snow is white, or why "snow is white" is true. Similarly, we do not need a substantive theory to move from "Xs exist" to "It is a fact that Xs exist" (or "Xs *really* exist").[18]

All substantive theories of existence (whether they identify existence with having causal powers, being mind-independent, physical, observable or trackable), would alike be rejected as wrong-headed, much as the semantic deflationist rejects all of the diverse proposals about what the property of truth or the relation of reference really consists in (Horwich 2010). Therefore, the deflationist may conclude, across different cases in which a sentence is true or an object exists, there is no common substantive property (of truth or existence) the nature of which we can investigate.

In short, adopting the relevant form of deflationism leads one to reject any philosophical proposals to identify the deeper or more substantive nature of existence, which one could hope to uncover with a metaphysical theory. This means is that we should expect no robust across-the-board criteria for existence and thus reject all theories about what it is to exist. On the deflationary view, existence is not a property or activity the deeper nature of which one could hope to uncover with some philosophical theory.[19] As a result, many of the most disputed ontological questions may be answered quite straightforwardly; any non-trivial answer is considered by them pointless and any deeper investigation out of place.

[18] In particular, we can engage in a kind of empirical and/or conceptual investigation or explanation in order to seek what it is for something to exist. But in no way this means to give a robust theory of existence any more than, explaining why snow is white involves us in giving a substantive and across-the-board theory of truth (at least, according to the deflationary approaches to truth).

[19] According to such deflationary/minimalist views in metaontology, the feeling that there is such a theory to be found is based on mistakenly treating metaphysical positions on analogy with scientific discoveries. And this, in turn, may be based on an unwarranted functional monism, that assumes that all predicative terms serve the same role of identifying some uniform feature of the world that we may go on to investigate, rather than serving very different functions.

Minimalist views thus avoid difficult placement problems about metaphysical facts, without denying that ontological sentences have truth-values. That is, minimalism shows us how to attach the truth predicate to ontological sentences without paying any metaphysical price. I do not think, however, minimalism allows us to move from "Xs exist" to "Xs *really* exist" (or "It's a fact that Xs exist"), in such a way that that former is understood as an ordinary existence assertion and the former as a deep ontological one (jumping from the outside into the ontology room). Thomasson's position maintains that a lightweight (viz. minimalist) account can explain and make legitimate sense of the realist-sounding discourse without relying on heavyweight realist metaphysics. As already stated, the idea is that lightweight realism deflates the metaphysical language. The lightweight realist is a realist in these deflated terms, and denies that there are any other terms available—in particular, that there are any meaningful terms in which he might properly be said to be an anti-realist. But the very fact that we can (truly) speak of there being metaphysical facts does not entail that such reductive analyses make any sense as applied to deep ontological (external) assertions as made by ontologists (that is, in the ontology room); it merely reflects the ordinary way of use of existence (internal) assertions (that is, inside the ontology room). What Thomasson offers is a kind of minimal, lightweight analysis of ontological talk.[20] But we might say that she is merely "putting aside" metaphysics. We can easily imagine an opponent who, in turn, brushes this analysis to one side, and attempts to return to metaphysical questions: "Is there a metaphysical fact about the existence of Xs?", "Is it a metaphysical fact that there are Xs?" In this dissertation, I will take this possibility seriously and, especially in the first paper, I will try to offer an account of ontological discourse according to which these questions do not turn out to be misguided.

2. Main Objectives

[20] In this respect, it is much like Blackburn's (1993) quasi-realism about moral and modal talk (though the prefix "quasi" here can be misleading).

Before outlining its structure, let me present the fundamental aim of this dissertation. As counterintuitive as it might sound, in this dissertation my aim will be to develop a non-representationalist (and non-descriptivist)[21] view in metaontology. This approach is non-representationalist in that it denies that ontological assertions function to represent metaphysical objects, properties, facts or states of affairs. However, as mentioned above, it contrasts with other non–representationalist accounts in the literature, such as metaontological minimalism (or deflationism) endorsed by lightweight realists, according to which, very roughly, in making an ontological claim (in the ontology room) one is merely reaffirming an ordinary existence claim, without taking on any metaphysical burden of explanation. Unlike lightweight realists, such as Thomasson, in arguing for a non-representationalist understanding of ontological assertion, I will instead make use (at least in the first paper of this dissertation) of the kinds of pro- and con-attitudes (such as dispositions to follow a rule) that are the hallmark of an expressivist account. I will, therefore, provide an expressivist reading of the existence assertions made by ontologists and metaphysicians. More in detail, the metaontological account I support can be defined as a sort of (metalinguistic) expressivism, according to which ontological assertions do not primarily aim to represent something like metaphysical facts (viz. deep facts about the ultimate furniture of the world) or metaphysical properties (viz. properties that "carve nature at its joint" [Sider 2011, *passim*]), but instead they function to express non-cognitive attitudes like approval or disapproval towards the adoption of certain linguistic frameworks. In making an ontological claim, one is no depending on any matters of fact, but is instead simply expressing approval for the adoption of a certain linguistic usage.

Expressivism in metaontology, as well as expressivism in metaethics, traces its roots to the metaethical emotivism of A.J. Ayer (1952). On his account, propositions with moral predicates do not primarily function to express beliefs, but instead express evaluative attitudes like

[21] Here "descriptivism" should not be confused with the notion of "descriptive metaphysics" previously pointed out in opposition to "revisionary metaphysics".

approval or disapproval: "Sentences which simply express moral judgements do not say anything. They are pure expressions of feeling and as such do not come under the category of truth and falsehood" (108). Accordingly, to Ayer, moral statements turn out to be essentially evaluative and not truth-apt. They have no more content than exclamations of "Boo!" or "Hooray!" For this reason, emotivism has usually been considered a version of "non-cognitivism".

Similarly, a metaontological non-cognitivist holds that ontological claims cannot be either true or false, because they function to express mental states other than beliefs. From a strictly non-cognitivist perspective, ontological assertions do not express cognitive mental states—that is, beliefs—and so are not appropriately understood in terms of their truth values. Or better, like the sentence "Hurrah for Betis!" they are not truth-apt at all. Kraut, for instance, seems to accept that, on Carnap's view, substantial claims of existence express attitudes, in particular "to the explanatory ineliminability of specific linguistic frameworks" (2016, 43). But even though they are supposed to express such conative mental states, they are still declared devoid of any cognitive content. It follows they are still regarded as lacking in truth values. As Kraut sees it, Carnap's theory should therefore be construed as the metaphysical counterpart of non-cognitivist and emotivist theories of morality.

Ontological non-cognitivism, though, is a far too radical position. For, if that was right, it would be hard to make sense of some of the very basic features of ontological discourse in a way that would not deeply undermine the discourse. That is, if ontological claims had no cognitive content, the structure of ontological discourse would be grammatically and logically misleading**.** This is a high price to pay. After all, if we want to account for the features of ontological talk, then surely we also need to make a place for ontological beliefs (not necessarily understood as beliefs in some sort of metaphysical facts).

However, the non-representationalist strategy in metaontology I support differs in many respects from emotivism and non-cognitivism. Following modern day metaethical expressivists (in particular the work of Allan Gibbard [1990, 2003]), I will attempt to correct the extreme tendencies indicated above. We can do this by making a distinction between the idea that ontological judgments are not primarily representation of states of affairs (viz. non-representationalism) and the idea that ontological judgments do not express any kind of beliefs (viz. non-cognitivism). The result of this line of thought is that ontological judgments do also express beliefs. Therefore, as we will see mainly in the first papers of this dissertation, by denying that ontological claims cannot express beliefs, the metanontological expressivist opens up a space for rejecting non-cognitivism. One can thus be a cognitivist in metaontology—someone who thinks that ontological judgments express (also) beliefs—but also be a non-representationalist in metaontology, claiming that the function of ontological judgments and discourse is not (at least not primarily) representational. This means that the approach I will put forward should not be characterized as a version of non-cognitivism. Ontological claims, I will emphasize, are cognitive and full-blown truth-evaluable, so that we can answer "yes" or "no" to ontological questions. And then, because ontological claims can be seen as truth-apt statements, we are entitled to reason with them—in a way that makes sense. To some extent, ontological discourse is not in the business of "describing the world". This, though, does not place this topic outside the realm of cognitive or rational discourse. I want to say that ontological discourse is not properly assimilated to describing, but that is compatible with the observation that ontological discourse is also a rational discourse.

A little more in detail, the idea developed mainly in the first two essays of this dissertation is roughly the following. When an ontologist makes a claim of the form "Xs exist", she is mentioning the term "X" rather than using it. Hence, we can translate in a metalanguage what she is trying to say in the object-language as follows: "The term 'X' exists". But to say that a

term exists is to say that a given language allows that term to be used. Or better, the rules that make up a language license that term to be used. As a result, in claiming "Xs exist", the ontologist is implicitly saying that the term "X" should be used, according to a certain linguistic rule or set of rules. In other words, she is implicitly saying that the term "X" should be used according to a certain linguistic framework".[22] The latter can be, of course, true or false, depending on the linguistic rules which the ontologist is implicitly appealing to. For this reason "Xs exist" has a truth-value, but such a truth-value is not objective. That is, it has a truth-value, but such a truth-value depends on the linguistic rules which the ontologist is implicitly appealing to. It must be noticed that, however, in uttering "Xs exist" the ontologist is not just conveying such a cognitive content, but she is also expressing a conative content: she is expressing the acceptance of the linguistic rule or set of rules in question. And she is doing that as long as she is not making the relevant rules explicit. This would explain the normative character of the ontological (external) sentence "Xs exist". In a sense, the ontologist is saying in the object-language what in a metalanguage would sound like "The term 'X' should be used". Again, following Gibbard (1990; 2003) and Field (2009; 2018) in their treatment of normative sentences, in uttering "Xs exist", she is conveying the cognitive content "The term 'X' should be used according to certain linguistic rules" (viz., in a certain linguistic framework) and she is also expressing the acceptance of such implicit language rules, that is, she is endorsing them, and this constitutes the conative component of the normative judgment in question.[23]

What is the motivation for this position? As already mentioned, heavyweight realist approaches work under the assumption that ontological discourse functions primarily to describe particular kinds of states of affairs (viz. metaphysical facts) and as such the important

[22] Following Canap (1950), a "framework" can be roughly understood as the conjunction of a set of terms and the rules that govern the use of those terms.

[23] Without making any reference to mental states, in the second essay of this dissertation we will argue that the expressive component of normative judgments can also be account for in terms of "commitments to the adoption of certain linguistic frameworks".

philosophical work to be done is an investigation of the nature of these states of affairs. This is a tempting starting point, but as Thomasson (2016) rightly points out, those who take it must wrestle with difficult epistemic problems in figuring out how we are supposed to access to know the relevant metaphysical facts. After all, according to heavyweight realists, no amount of empirical knowledge about the way things are is sufficient to justify any claim about the way things *really* are. Likewise, according to them, no amount of linguistic/conceptual knowledge about the way we talk and think is sufficient to justify any claim about the way things *really* are. But, if we cannot rely on empirical and linguistic/conceptual survey, then we must acquire knowledge of metaphysical facts in an utterly different (and mysterious) way from our ordinary ways of acquiring knowledge.

Non-representationalists endeavor to avoid the above difficulties by denying that the primary aim of the discourse in question is representation of a special sort of states of affairs. That is to say, the metaontological non-representationalist avoids the placement problem for ontology: we do not need to posit any metaphysical facts to make ontological sentences true because, roughly speaking, the primary goal of ontological discourse is not to assert any matter of fact—though we can make sense of their truth or falsehood. At the same time, it is not the case that ontological claims attempt to represent some special sort of objective facts, but there are no such facts, so that ontological claims fail—as orthodox anti-realists suggest. It is simply that ontological claims, taken externally, do not attempt to represent some special sort of objective facts.

Rather, I will argue, their use may imply a distinctive kind of metalinguistic expressive function. In particular, they express the acceptance of certain linguistic frameworks—only within which the relevant terms are intelligible and hence describing is possible. What this account suggests is then that we can conceive of ontological (external) claims as expressing, at least in part, our endorsement of some specific set of norms or policies for belief formation.

Although non-representationlist in character, the metaontologicl view offered here is therefore not at all minimalist (or deflationaty), and as such also rejects lightweight realists' interpretation.

3. Synopsis

This dissertation is a compendium of short essays and is divided into three parts. In the first part, made up of the first two articles, I will apply such a (metalinguistic) expressivist approach to ontological assertions, understood as assertions external to any linguistic framework (in Carnap's terminology [1950]). In the second part, consisting of papers three and four, I will suggest that also some particularly thorny existence assertions (within linguistic frameworks) can be sensitive to an expressivist reading. The third part, which is composed of the fifth, sixth and seventh essays, will take a somewhat different form. I will focus on the problem of how to deal with the rivalry between different ontologies. I will consider the alleged rivalry between science and common sense (between the "manifest" and the "scientific" image of the world, in Sellars's terms [1963]). I will then argue that also claims of a rivalry between the two images are best understood as performing not a descriptive function, but rather a (metalinguistic) expressive function. I will conclude, in the seventh and final article, by trying to show how the overall metaontological strategy developed here can be applied to some contemporary discussions in analytic metaphysics. In particular, I will take Cumpa's attempts to find out the fundamental structure of the world as a case-study.

In the first essay of this dissertation ("**The Practical Dimension of Ontological Discourse***"*, in evaluation at *Dialectica*), I will outline an explanation of the meaning of ontological assertions (external assertion, in Carnap's terms). This necessitates a digression on the pragmatic import of ontological talk. First of all, I will look at the use of ontological discourse and I will argue that this indicates a practical role for ontological language: the achievement of

coordinated linguistic behavior**.** Non-representationalism shares advantages over its representationalist counterpart, but they also share a similar burden: making sense of ontological discourse without presupposing a robust range of metaphysical facts. A great part of the work I will do in the first essay of this dissertation can be understood as a task of accommodation of ontological discourse, from a non-representationalist perspective. The task of accommodation is to show that, from a non-representationalist perspective, there is nothing illegitimate in ontological practice. For instance, the respects in which ontologists talk about the existence of metaphysical facts are legitimate. And the crucial task is then to show how we can explain the truth of ontological claims.

Features of ontological discourse should, if possible, be accommodated by a plausible story about the function of such discourse. My central claim in the first paper of this dissertation is, therefore, that to justify a non-representationalist account of ontological discourse we must look to the function of that discourse. It is worth pointing out the fundamentally practical approach I will take. Ontological discourse aims at coordinating social behavior. Of course, it does not function to guide social behavior in the way that moral discourse does, but it does guide a particular aspect of social behavior: specifically, linguistic behavior. That is to say, it aims to the orchestration of communication.

In the same way that the moral expressivist points to the function of coordinating social behavior, and the epistemic expressivist points to the function of regulating a cognitive economy, in the first article of this dissertation, I will argue that the purpose of ontological discourse is, to some extent, to guide into coordinated linguistic practice. A precondition for meaningful communication is that people share the same linguistic framework, sharing the same terms and using them in the same way (rather than using different terms homophonically). It is, in fact, built into the act of engaging in language that we try to use language consistently. This is a concern about our linguistic behavior that weighs heavily on our ability to cooperate.

Ontological conversations are exactly those in which there is pressure to share the same linguistic framework (that is, the same words with the same meaning). Hence, ontological discourse guides into consensus about linguistic behavior.

The motivational import is a natural consequence of the expressivist understanding of ontological discourse. In this sense, ontological claims are similar to imperatives, in that they carry a kind of force; like commands, they somehow influence behavior. As well as other kinds of normative claims, ontological claims can thereby be analyzed as a type of prescriptions.[24] There are, however, important differences between the two types of speech acts. Ontological claims can be used in the indicative form, which also enables complex reasoning about what linguistic framework to choose and adopt. For example, we can embed commands in the consequent but not the antecedent of a conditional.[25] Instead, making ontological claims in the indicative gives us the ability to reason from ontological claims to their consequences, and to reason among ontological claims. It also allows making use of negation in an important way: it enables to express permissions. For example, if "Xs exist" licenses the use of the noun term "X", then it is contradicted by "Xs do not exist", which may forbid to use "X" (something like "'X' should not be used"), or may license to not use "X", that is, it may give permission to not use "X" (something like "It's not the case that one ought to use 'X'", which is equivalent to "It's permissible not to use 'X'"). Instead, the imperative form can only be used to express commands, but not permissions.

Anyway, if the illocutionary force of a speech act is approached by asking what the agent is trying to do in speaking, then the thesis advanced in this dissertation seems to suggest a multiple speech acts analysis of ontological talk. Ordinary existence sentences (internal, in Carnap's

[24] For a detailed exploration of the relationship between imperatives and normative language, see Charlow (2014).
[25] For example, "If the deadline is approaching, then send the paper" is grammatical, but "If send the paper, then the deadline is approaching" is nonsensical.

terminology) would act as genuinely factual assertions. This means they just aim to transmit belief or knowledge, adding information to something like a store of information already held in the conversational common ground. In Stalnaker's terms, elimination of possibilities from a context set (1978). Instead, deep ontological sentences (external, in Carnap's terminology), as basically normative, would serve to update conversational states in respect, not (or not only) of how things are, but also in respect of what is to be done. Their role may be to change a different aspect of the conversational score, or anyway, to change more than just the world-describing component of the conversational state. In uttering an ontological (external) sentence "Xs exist", a speaker is performing two speech-acts: she is asserting one proposition p (viz., "The term 'X' should be used, according to some linguistic norms") and she is expressing her endorsement of the standard that would verify p (viz., those implicit linguistic norms). "Xs exist" would thus also be used to perform a speech act of commending, and "Xs do not exist" would also be used to perform a speech act of condemning. As a result, their use would not only be to indicate facts, but rather to create an influence. As such, ontological judgments have also a quasi-imperative force. That is a way of getting at the expressivist idea that normative talk is different from ordinary descriptive assertions. Again the basic thought would be that normative sentences invoke a characteristic sort of change to a component of the conversational state, one not merely adding more information to the state about what the world is like. And again, the thought would be that the relevant kind of conversational state change is often exploited to perform (non-descriptive) illocutionary acts we could call something like "endorsing norms". In this way an ontological (external) sentence would be used to perform both a factual assertion and a non-assertoric illocutionary act, an act that that is not prosaically factual.[26]

[26] Instead of talking about non-assertoric illocutionary forces (in Austin's terminology [1962]), we can follow Yalcin (forthcoming) and suppose that a conversational state includes, in addition to a set of open possibilities (a context set), a set of ways of partitioning logical space. Then, we can think of its force as determining a partition of logical space. For developments of expressivist ideas about normative language using tools from dynamic semantics, see also Charlow (2015).

Once we have acknowledged this role associated with ontological discourse, no further metaphysical accounting is necessary. We can, in fact, explain features of that discourse without having to explain the underlying nature of metaphysical facts. Thus, explaining the discourse in question by identifying the purpose it serves, this view avoids difficult placement questions about metaphysical truths. In short, ontological discourse does not presuppose any domain of elusive metaphysical facts that are waiting to be described. Instead, it carries with it a kind of behavior-influencing force: in particular, it influences linguistic behavior—overcoming imperatives in semantic subtlety. And since according to this account the use of ontological language fulfills such a behavior-guiding function, rather than a representational function, it is a non-representationalist (or lightweight) account.[27] This completes the first stage of the explanation of the meaning of ontological claims according to their expressive function given the practical dimension of ontological discourse. Anyway, this is just a rough sketch of features that I believe are essential to understanding what is distinctive about ontological discourse.

This form of non-representationalism accounts for the discourse at hand in a way that does not rely on some peculiar metaphysical range of facts waiting to be described. It instead explains the discourse in terms of how ontologists use the claims at hand—and their use in each case is not primarily representational. But, as we will see in the second essay of this dissertation, it does not necessarily tie this use down to mental states either. In the first paper of this dissertation, I primarily work instead from the assumption that the meaning of ontological claims is a function of the mental states (viz. motivating attitudes) they express. This is an assumption widely shares among expressivists: the order of explanation for the expressivist usually starts with the mental states that are expressed by normative claims and then the content themselves have is spelled

[27] Remember: this view can be defined as lightweight because it does not hunt for an account of metaphysical truth-makers, but it cannot if the expression “lightweight” is understood as synonymous with "minimalist" (or “deflationary”).

out.[28] According to the expressivist tradition in metaethics, for example, the meaning of sentences like "Abortion is wrong" is best understood in terms of the expression of some mental state, for example disapproval of abortion. Moral claims express these evaluative states, which in turn give the claims their meaning. Yet, most contemporary criticism of expressivist semantics (e.g., Schroeder 2008) is directed at the alleged expressivist premise that the semantic properties of normative sentences must be understood in terms of the mental states they express (viz. "mentalism", in Schroeder's terms). For this assumption leaves the expressivist with the heavy explanatory burden of explaining exactly how mental states are supposed to inform the meaning of normative claims.

This, however, does not need to be the case: one may be an expressivist without being a mentalist expressivist. As we will see, there are good reasons to be the former, but not the latter. In the second essay of the dissertation ("**Expressivism without Mentalism in Metaontology**", [2018], *International Journal of Philosophical Studies,* 25 [5]: 781-800), written together with Pedro Antonio García Jorge, we consider an expressivist account in metaontology that aims to offer an answer to the problem of "mentalism" altogether, or at the very least render it more manageable. Indeed, the alternative version of expressivism we develop does not depend on a mental-state-expressed account of content—as in the traditional versions of expressivism. In particular, we try to avoid accuses of mentalism by explaining the meaning of ontological assertions in terms of practical commitments to the adoption of certain linguistic resources, rather than in terms of some kind of mental state inside the head of the speakers. Instead of appealing to some non-cognitive mental states like approval and disapproval ontological sentences are supposed to express, we suggest they derive their meaning from practical commitments speakers undertake in uttering them. And such commitments can be cashed out in

[28] I suspect this feature of expressivism can be understood as a result of its emotivist lineage.

terms of behavioral consequences in normative social practice.[29] In uttering them, a speaker publicly commits herself to undertake a certain action and to behave in a certain way (and to blame those who do not) and the audience is entitled to hold her accountable to this commitment (and therefore to sanction her if she does not act accordingly). This offers us a new way to understand how the uses of ontological claims inform their meaning, which does not need to assume anything about the relationship between claims and mental states (Charlow 2014, 4).

Again, following Carnap (1950, 208), we take a linguistic framework to be the conjunction of a set of linguistic expressions (like substantives and predicates) and the semantic rules (at least core rules) governing the use of those expressions—hence a vocabulary plus rules for making sentences from it. Of course, since linguistic frameworks enable linguistic practice and at the same time they make sense just within a linguistic practice, they are shared linguistic frameworks. Given this notion of linguistic framework, Carnap distinguishes two sorts of ontological assertions: internal and external assertions. Internal assertions are existence assertions within a linguistic framework, that is, they use the relevant terms according to the rules established by the linguistic framework in question. It follows their truth-values are determined directly by empirical investigation (for example, by scientific method) or by conceptual analysis (for example, mathematical reasoning). So, for example, in the ordinary use of numbers it is straightforwardly true that there are number, as abstract objects (and of course it is true that 9 is greater than 5, given the ordinary meaning of "9" and "5"). Apart from those, Carnap considers existence assertions, usually made by ontologists and metaphysicians, in which the relevant terms are not governed by any rule of use, that is, outside any linguistic framework. As such, he takes them to be meaningless (qua assertions) and devoid of any cognitive content.

[29] Keep in mind that our account does not flesh out the notion of commitments in psychological terms (i.e. of commitments as kinds of mental states), but rather in terms of pragmatic influences (see Charlow 2014, fn. 20).

We disagree with Carnap on this last point, but we fully share the above distinction. The main idea put forward in the first bloc of essays of this dissertation is that an ontological (external) assertion expresses the acceptance and the endorsement of a certain linguistic framework. Or better, in uttering an ontological (external) sentence of the form "Xs exist" a speaker is undertaking commitments to the adoption of the linguistic framework in which the term "X" occurs. In other words, she is undertaking commitments to the adoption of the linguistic framework which licenses the use of the term "X". It follows that, for example, when the nominalist says "There are not numbers" (or "9 is greater than 5 is literally false because '9' and'5' do not refer to anything") is uttering an external sentence—otherwise, she would simply be saying something false. But in such a case, according to the view we argue for, what she is doing is better understood as undertaking commitments to the adoption of a linguistic framework in which number terms do not occur as nouns. That is to say, she is undertaking commitments to the adoption of a linguistic framework that dispenses of number terms as nouns and talk about numbers be paraphrased in a language that does not use number terms as nouns.

Moreover, it is worth noting that, even if metaphysicians do not intend, under that description, to communicate views about which linguistic framework should be adopted (and hence whether the relevant terms should be used at all), their utterances may nonetheless give evidence of their views about which linguistic framework should be adopted (and whether the terms at hand should be used at all). Indeed, we do not need to take ontologists' avowals as giving good evidence about what they do. In general, I guess, we should give most weight not to not what people say about what they intend to do, but to what they actually do. And if we look to the behavior of "serious" ontologists rather than their avowals, it seems plausible to think of them as undertaking *practical* commitments rather than reporting quasi-scientific discoveries.[30]

[30] See Thomasson (2017, 18-19) on this point.

In this way, we retain the non-representationalist aspect of expressivism—the rejection of the idea that ontological language functions to represent metaphysical facts—but we deny that the fundamental non-representational function of ontological language is best understood in terms of the mental states ontological claims might serve to express. That is to say, like traditional forms of expressivism, the sort of expressivism in metaontology we defend here rejects a representationalist account of meaning, but unlike traditional expressivism, it explains the meaning of ontological assertions in terms of practical commitments the ontologist undertakes in making them, rather than in terms of attitudes they might express. We hope this view can pick up where traditional expressivism left off.

This approach also seeks to shed light on the role disagreement plays in ontology and ontological discourse. Ontological discourse, the expressivist holds, does not function to represent a mind-independent metaphysical domain, so we cannot bank on the nature of such a domain to explain why one disputant must be in error in cases of disagreement. But if ontological assertions do not aim to correspond to metaphysical facts, then what supplies the pressure towards resolution in ontological disputes? We argue that the place to look is not the domain of metaphysical facts to which ontological claims aim to refer. Instead, not that far from Carnap's picture, we hold that disputants are most charitably seen as tacitly advocating whether or not to make use of the relevant noun terms. Thus what comes to the rescue here is not some fact of the matter for deciding between disputants, but rather practical commitments to the adoption of a shared linguistic framework.

Eliminativists about numbers, for example, are most charitably seen as tacitly rejecting the noun terms for numbers; so that our talk about numbers be paraphrased in a language that does not use number terms as nouns. On this view, the nominalist does not need to be branded as semantically incompetent, but rather can be seen as (usually) mistaken in the interpretation she provides about what it is she is doing. She thinks of herself as asking a factual question, while

what she is doing is best understood as undertaking commitments to the adoption of the linguistic framework in which number terms do not occur as nouns. Therefore, unlike lightweight realists and easy ontologists, we are not committed to treat those who engage in hard ontological debates as semantically incompetent, but we are committed to treating them as making a mistake somewhere at the meta-level, presumably in the way they interpret what they are doing. After all, parties in an ontological dispute usually think of themselves as engaged in robust debates about fundamental matters of existence.

Yet, this does not force us to cast ontological disputes as merely verbal. Although not engaged in a factual dispute, we may still see the eliminativist (e.g., the nominalist, the nihilist, and the like) and the realist (e.g., the Platonist, the Universalist, and the like) as genuinely disagreeing: as engaged in a normative disagreement about which language ought to be adopted in a given situation. And, as far as we can see, this leaves room to cast the dispute as persistent, rather than as a merely verbal dispute about, for instance, which sentence expresses a truth in ordinary English.[31]

In short, whereas disagreements involving (internal) existence assertions are factually or terminologically resolvable, disagreements involving (external) ontological assertions (viz. "ontological disagreement") are not. In effect, the character of the latter is closer to the sort of disagreement one might find with terms such as "right" and "wrong", That is, they are more like debates about what someone *ought* to do in a given situation, hence normative debates. In this way, we can make sense of and justify the practice of treating ontological disagreements seriously.

The approach we argue for here has also advantages over its mentalist counterpart because it does not need to identify the source of ontological disagreement in terms of clash between non-

[31] It should also be noted that this account neither attributes different meanings for the quantifier (as in a pluralist view like Hirsch's [2002]), nor hold that disputants are using the disputed sortal terms in different senses, and each speaking a truth.

cotenable mental states (MacFarlane 2014, 121), that is, between evaluative attitudes that cannot be maintained simultaneously. Instead, this approach is one in which the tension between the claims underlying ontological disagreements is best understood in terms of practical inconsistency. For, in claiming them, disputants undertake commitments to incompatible behaviors, that is, behaviors not mutually realizable (viz. adopting or not certain linguistic resources). Disagreements of that sort are cashed out in terms of a practical clash, and as such they exert pressure towards consensus on which linguistic framework to adopt. Seen in this light, they serve the function of promoting social coordination in the ways outlined above. And this would explain why it makes sense to pursue ontological disputes as ones that need resolution: since ontological debates concern whether we are to use a term, we cannot simply agree that we are to behave in two mutually exclusive ways.

In the third essay of this dissertation ("**Scientific Models and Metalinguistic Negotiation**", [forthcoming], *Theoria: an International Journal for Theory, History and Foundations of Science*), I will investigate the relationship between the kind of account of ontological judgments I propose and the traditional metaphysical question about the ontological status of scientific models: "Are scientific models a reality or a fiction?". I will explore the possibility to understand the ontological dispute between realists and anti-realists about the existence of scientific models in terms of Plunkett and Sundell's (2013) notion of "metalinguistic negotiation."[32] That is, I will maintain they are best seen as metalinguistically advocating for and negotiating over ways in which we should talk (and think) about scientific models**.** In particular, the anti-realist (viz., fictionalists) is making the proposal to construe talk about scientific models within the scope of a pretense operator (like "imagine that…", "assume that…", etc.), while the realist, on the contrary, is suggesting to take talk about scientific models at face value, so literally true without the need to have such an operator on board. It follows that

[32] Thomasson (2017) develop Plunkett and Sundell's account in a metaphysical direction that is particularly congenial to the view I will advance in this dissertation.

the debate at issue is better understood as a pragmatic debate about how the relevant terms should be used, rather than as a factual debate that can legitimately purport to yield discoveries about a certain range of entities in the world or piece of reality. Of course, each of the parties takes themselves to be accurately representing the relevant concepts and they are both experts in the field. Nevertheless, in the case at hand, the existing collective usage is not decisive for making sense of them and, in turn, it is indeterminate how the relevant concepts ought to be understood. As a consequence, given that the practice itself is silent about it and does not settle the question, one is tempted to assume disputants aim instead to impose their respective understandings.

Anyway, how the relevant concepts are to be understood is not arbitrary or irrelevant. In the present case, the pragmatic dispute may still be worth pursuing, inasmuch as there are compelling reasons to precisify a term and the norms for its use. Disputants thus aim to coordinate common usage for our terms. The point here, though, is that they well have just practical reasons for entertaining one another's understanding. If they are advocating that the relevant terms should be understood in a certain way, then they are doing so not primarily because the content of the negotiation is true, but because it will be useful to endorse it, in the light of its superior utility for certain implicit purposes. Whether they realize it or not, they are therefore offering practical reasons to endorse their respective understanding of the concepts in question. Indeed, interlocutors' own immediate self-descriptions are not decisive for interpreting these exchanges. As Haslanger's (2012) account of the so-called "ameliorative" project shows, we are often unaware that we are even engaged in a normative project when we articulate or defend a certain understanding of a concept. The same holds for philosophers themselves, who sometime might not be aware of or have a clear image of what sort of project they are really engaged in.

A specific subset of such metalinguistic negotiations then corresponds to cases of deep conceptual disagreement (Shields 2018).[33] Deep conceptual disagreements are disagreements over how to understand concepts that play what Michael Friedman calls a "constitutive" role (2011). Friedman's view is that certain concepts play a constitutive role in the framework in which they occur. Saying that a concept plays a constitutive role does not just mean it is more epistemically entrenched [in Goodman's terms (1983)], but it also means that it plays a fundamental role in that specific framework. Roughly, a concept that plays a constitutive role helps to define how other concepts of that framework are to be understood. And, in this constitutive capacity, their understanding will be implicated in any other concepts of that framework. In short, constitutive concepts are highly general concepts that in part determine how to understand other concepts we use and that allows making meaningful first-order truth claims about particular cases. A conceptual disagreement is therefore deep because it concerns a concept that plays a constitutive and so fundamental role within a framework.[34] As a result, if a concept plays such a constitutive role, then choices and decisions about how to use it (or whether to use it at all) will have a wide-ranging impact on speakers' understanding of other concepts and on the kind of linguistic moves they can make in that framework.

By contrast, I suspect that the notion of "scientific model" does not plausibly play a constitutive role. In fact, it seems to have a rather circumscribed impact on the way in which the vast majority of concepts in scientific theories are understood. Models are relatively independent from scientific theories, rather than being constitutive of them. At the same time, however, I do not rule out the possibility that the way in which this notion is understood may to some extent affect the way in which the scientific practice itself is conceived.

[33] To be clear, this does not imply that all deep disagreements (Fogelin 1985) should be thought of as conceptual disagreements. That is, I am not committing myself to the strong claim that deep disagreements only ever involve conceptual disagreements. And, of course, not all metalinguistic negotiations are deep disagreements.

[34] But remember, as already mentioned, both deep disagreements so understood and metalinguistic negotiations are different from merely verbal disagreements.

To conclude, I will recommend to construe ontological disagreements as metalinguistic negotiations (of a peculiar kind), that is, as normative disagreements over concepts (in particular, whether to adopt them at all) and if the disagreements are over concepts that play a constitutive role in their respective frameworks, they turn out to be deep conceptual disagreements. Demarcating a constitutive role for concepts thus provides us with a helpful way of more precisely specifying what distinguishes ontological disagreements as metalinguistic negotiation from those understood as deep conceptual disagreements. However, I guess, it is best to view such a distinction as coming in degrees.

In the fourth essay of this dissertation ("**Categorial Disambiguation**", [forthcoming], in J. Cumpa, eds., *Categorial Ontologies: From Realism to Eliminativism*, Routledge), I will focus on a special class of concepts that, I will maintain, in every framework in which they occur, they play the peculiar expressive function highlight above. Such concepts are the so-called ontological-categorial concepts (e.g., "substance", "kind", "individual", "particular", "thing", "object", etc.). The primary role ontological-categorial vocabulary plays, I will argue, is essentially to make explicit what is already implicit in other vocabularies. In particular, they make explicit structural features of any ground-level descriptive vocabulary. However, this metalinguistic expressive role that ontologically categorizing vocabulary plays relative to descriptive vocabulary is of a distinctive kind**:** it operates primarily at the level of pragmatics. A talk about ontological categories expresses what one is doing in saying something (in the sense of making a statement). That is, it makes explicit what one is doing in asserting something. Specifically, it expresses what one must be able to do in order to deploy a descriptive vocabulary. For example, what one is doing in saying that "Socrates is an individual", or "Socrates is a primary substance", is classifying "Socrates" as a singular term.

It would be wrong, though, to think of ontological-categorial talk as conceptually prior to the use of ground-level vocabularies. The use of ontological-categorial vocabulary can indeed be

elaborated from the use of ordinary predicates and declarative sentences. Accordingly, it is possible to highlight two crucial features of such a vocabulary: being explicative of and being elaborated from the use of descriptive vocabularies. At the same time, I will point out that the identification of such a pragmatic metalinguistic expressive function does not preclude us to understand ontological classifications as also standing in some referential relations (although not exactly like paradigmatically referring terms) to objects of a distinctive kind: ontological categories. Nor it does preclude us to conclude that ontological categories exist.[35]

Therefore, the general view behind this paper is to suggest that it would be a mistake to understand ontological-categorial vocabulary as playing a narrowly representational role of stating facts or describe features of the world. In the same way, however, it would be a mistake denying that ontological classificatory statements are legitimate, or that they can be true or false. Both mistakes (the dogmatic metaphysical and the skeptical), even though opposed to one another, arise from the common root of the "descriptive fallacy": namely the failure to see that not all concepts perform the same role in a language.[36] In particular, some perfectly legitimate concepts do not play a narrowly descriptive role, but rather a different function. In fact, according to the view defended here, ontological-categorial vocabulary plays the expressive role, not of describing something in the world, but of explicating the framework within which alone describing is possible.

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[35] In light of the above, the latter conclusion "Ontological categories exist" should be taken as an existence assertion (viz. internal to a linguistic framework), rather than as a deep ontological assertion (viz. external to any linguistic framework).

[36] Austin (1962) framed the descriptive fallacy as follows: "It was for too long the assumption of philosophers that the business of a 'statement' can only be to 'describe' some state of affairs, or to 'state some fact', which it must do either truly or falsely. It has come to be seen that many specially perplexing words embedded in apparently descriptive statements do not serve to indicate some specially odd additional feature in the reality reported, but to indicate (not to report) the circumstances in which the statement is made or reservations to which it is subject or the way in which it is to be taken and the like. To overlook these possibilities in the way once common is called the 'descriptive' fallacy." But Sellars also put forward a similar suggestion: "[O]nce the tautology 'The world is described by descriptive concepts' is freed from the idea that the business of all non-logical concepts is to describe, the way is clear to an ungrudging recognition that many expressions which empiricists have relegated to second-class citizenship in discourse are not inferior, just different." (1957, §79)

In the third part of this dissertation, my aim will be to better understand, from the perspective sketched above, what metaphysicians are doing when they try to deal with the alleged rivalry between different ontologies, in particular between common sense ontology and scientific ontology. In cases in which scientific investigation *seems* to have disproven common sense claims, metaphysicians have often offered eliminativist paraphrases. Eliminativists attempt to avoid commitment to disputed entities by translating all the ordinary language claims apparently requiring quantification back into statements that avoid such quantification. Consider, for instance, the paraphrases offered by van Inwagen (1990). A sentence like "There is a chair here" he would paraphrase as "There are particles arranged chair-wise here" thereby quantifying only over particles, not chairs, thus supposedly avoiding commitment to chairs. Nevertheless, the two sentences involve sortals terms ("chair" and "a chair-wise arrangement [of particles]") which, although different, are found to have the same application conditions—where, following Thomasson (2015, 90), "application conditions" can be said to be among the semantic rules of use for the sortal terms we master as we acquire language that determine in which situations they are successfully applied. This is so because the sortal term for the given kind of entity "chair" may be derived simply by pleonastic transformations (Schiffer 2003) from the basic sentences "There are particles arranged chair-wise here", which does not quantify over anything of that kind. Then, in the event the application conditions for that sortal are actually fulfilled, we can conclude that the term refers and the entity in question exists.[37] Accordingly, if the latter claim "There are particles arranged chair-wise here" turns out to be true, then so it will be the former claim "There is a chair here". For the fulfillment of the application conditions of one

[37] Note that this account stems from the work of Carnap. Indeed, according to Carnap (1950), given the rules of use for the terms involved, existence (internal) questions framed using these terms are straightforward to answer: via standard empirical or conceptual methods.

term (or set of terms) may be sufficient to the fulfillment of the application conditions of the other.[38]

This is perfectly consistent with our ordinary talk about existence (i.e., outside the ontology room): from the fact that there are (according to the eliminativist's theory) simples arranged chair-wise, we may infer that there is a chair. For according to ordinary usage, nothing more is required.[39] Considered as part of normal English speech, the truth of the former is "analytically sufficient", in Thomasson words (2007, 165), to ensure the truth of the latter (and stating both would be redundant). In this case, accepting the existence of a chair is analytically entailed by accepting the truth of the sentences describing the former state, therefore, accepting the truth of "There are simples arranged chair-wise" but denying the truth of "There are chairs" would be pointless. By treating the paraphrases as true and the direct claims about chairs as untrue, in fact, the eliminativist would sever trivial connections allowed in ordinary speech between sentences. As a consequence, treating the statements as lacking the same truth-value could only be done "by artificially inflating the application conditions for 'chair' beyond those enshrined in normal use of the term" (Thomasson 2007, 165).

In the fifth essay of this dissertation ("**Transparent Contents and Trivial Inferences**"**,** in evaluation at *Studia Semiotyczne*), I will hold that, if the above is correct, then we can conclude that the inferential relation between the two sentences under consideration must be, to some extent, epistemically transparent. This means that it should be epistemically available to the speaker simply on the basis of linguistic and conceptual competence. Moreover, insofar as one sentence seems to commit us to the existence of things of a sort not mentioned in the other

[38] The claim is not one of necessity: the concept of "chair" is plausibly thought to be applicable in a way that is not committal about whether chairs are ultimately made up of atoms, or a continuum of stuff, or something else. But the existence of some such material basis appropriately arranged in the appropriate context is clearly sufficient for the application of the term "chair" to be met.

[39] Once again, with regard to internal ontological assertions (i.e., existence assertions made using or *within* a linguistic framework, hence made outside the ontology room), lightweight realism and lightweight anti-realism share the same intuitions and conclusions.

sentence, this kind of inferential relation, albeit trivial, can reveal ontological commitments and therefore be existence-entailing. That is, it turns out to be somehow "ontologically ampliative" (Chalmers, 2009, 95). Thus, in such a circumstance, competent speakers are entailed to reach and acquire ontological (internal) conclusions about the (simple) existence of the entities in question *a priori*, without the need for knowing any further empirical truths. In turn, this leads us to reject the broader externalist view that nothing "ampliative" is epistemically available simply on the basis of linguistic and conceptual competence.

Even though sortals employed by the manifest image and scientific image may share the same application conditions, in the sixth essay of this dissertation ("**Cross-Sortal Identity Claims**", in evaluation at *Axiomathes*), I will show that they quite often have different co-application conditions—which, following Thomasson (2007, 40), determine when a sortal term can be applied again, in different circumstances (such as in different times), to one and the same *individual*. It follows that the relation between the objects referred to in the two images can hardly ever be identity. That is to say, almost no identity between scientific objects (such as chair-wise arrangements of particles) and ordinary objects (such as chairs) turns out to be true. For the latter kinds of objects have criteria of identity that are radically different from those of mereological sums of subatomic particles.

At the same time, however, I will hold that also attempts to find a rivalry between the ontologies of common sense and of science are misleading. In fact, arguments for a rivalry usually rely on the idea that both images may provide category-neutral yet complete inventories of what *things* exist (and then we cannot accept both at the same time). The term "thing" here, though, is used as a metaphysical notion, in particular as one of the ontological-categorial terms mentioned above. Ontologically classifying terms, I will maintain, are pseudosortals (or dummy sortals), rather than genuine sortals. And if "thing" is not used as a sortal term, it does not come associated with the application condition needed for establishing reference to something about

which science and common sense might then agree or disagree. Nor it comes associated with the co-application conditions needed for counting. As a result, such a neutral use of "thing" cannot be used in claims of either image to offer a complete account of what things there are that could be held to rival that of the other. In short, neither the scientific image nor the manifest image may thus legitimately purport to be complete in a way that would rule out the other. And, of course, neither the scientific image nor the manifest image may then legitimately purport to offer the only true description of the world.

Furthermore, I will suggest, claims of a rivalry between the two images are to be understood differently. In line with the main idea developed throughout this dissertation, I will argue that they are better understood as performing a function that is not merely descriptive, but rather (metalinguistic) expressive. In particular, what a metaphysician is doing in claiming them is expressing, and undertaking, *practical* commitments to the adoption (or rejection) of one linguistic framework (as a whole) over the other.

Finally, in the last essay of this dissertation ("**Categories and the Language of Metaphysics**", [2019], *Organon F*, 26 [3]: 1-21), I will try to show how most of the ideas defended throughout the previous papers can be used to shed light on the work in which ontologists and metaphysicians are usually engaged. In particular, my purpose will be to better understand what ontologists and metaphysicians are doing when they try to answer questions about the ultimate categories of the world. My concerns are mainly contemporary discussions in Analytic Metaphysics, so I will take Cumpa's (2014) recent attempts to find out the fundamental structure of the world as a case-study. His view is of particular interest for the metaontological account proposed in this dissertation. In fact, he conceives the classical ontological question about the existence of the fundamental categories of the world "What are the fundamental categories of the world?" as a question about the category able to unify the two Sellarsian images of the world (viz. the manifest and scientific images), deemed to be two different

languages. He then holds that the only category which satisfactorily accounts for the relationship between the ordinary and scientific levels of thinghood is the category of "facts" (or "state of affairs"), which accordingly is the fundamental category of what he calls "the metaphysical language". I will try to offer an analysis of Cumpa's proposal and I will basically argue that his conclusions would be meaningful just if understood as playing the (metalinguistic) expressive function roughly outlined above.

4. General Conclusions

In conclusion, if the arguments in this dissertation succeed, I will have carved out space for a different approach to the old challenges metaontology face. Ontological practice aims to go beyond the commitments of local frameworks. In this dissertation, I will try to show how such a practice is best understood as playing a (metalinguistic) expressive function. In this way, ontological discourse ultimately turns out to be a useful device that serves to coordinate linguistic behavior. By understanding the discourse in question according to its pragmatic function, as opposed to its truthmakers, the non-representationalist gains an important advantage over the representationalist. Indeed, since the primary goal of ontological claims is not the representation of states of affairs, non-representationalists do not need to provide an analysis of the nature of such facts. Briefly, according to this metaontological view, ontological discourse is not understood in terms of some metaphysical states of affairs that make ontological claims true. But ontological claims are not understood in terms of the evaluative attitudes they express either. If we instead understand ontological claims by looking at the practical commitments the ontologist undertakes in making them, we will find a way to make sense of ontological reasoning that secures the advantages of non-representationalism without the baggage of emotivism and traditional expressivism.

All in all, the metaontological view put forward here will be constrained in the following ways:

i. It will be anti-realist, so as to conclude that ontological (external) questions lack objective answers.[40]

ii. It will be lightweight (viz., non-representationalist), in the sense that it cannot invoke as explanatory a range of metaphysical facts that are being represented by ontological claims.

iii. It will not give the meaning of ontological claims via the mental states that these claims are supposed to express.

Moreover, lightweight anti-realism (viz., expressivism in metaontology) also gains advantages over other non-representationalist approaches, such as lightweight realism and quasi-realism. The latter seem merely to set aside metaphysical questions. They are left, though, in the awkward position of explaining how it is that ontological claims could be informative, as they seem to be. Contrary to approaches of that sort, the present one offers a more conciliatory account of ontological discourse, which makes sense of ontological talk and ontological truths. It then offers an insight that makes sense of ontological practice, especially in relation to the phenomena of ontological reasoning.

Likewise, it is not dismissive of ontological debates and does not regard disputes about what *really* exists as pointless and out of place, but rather to some extent it aims to preserve them. Intuitively, "there is a difference between disputes on objective matters of fact and disputes on non-objective matters of opinion" (Kölbel 2004, 53). That is to say, in certain kinds of disputes on non-objective matters of opinion there is not a fact of the matter that could settle the dispute. Accordingly, in such circumstances it seems that none of the disputants is making a mistake and none of their respective judgments are false. At the same time, however, it is hard to give up the impression that the speakers still disagree.[41] That is exactly what happens in the ontological disagreement—at least according to the present account. Therefore, when two disputants (in the

[40] But, once again, this does not exclude that the answers to existence (internal) assertions can instead be objective.
[41] Kölbel (2003) calls disagreements of this sort "faultless disagreements".

ontology room) utter "Xs exist" and "Xs do not exist" respectively, we are faced with a case in which:

a. It lacks a perspective-independent fact of the matter about who is right.

b. Speakers are still disagreeing.

One of the main advantages of endorsing an expressivist approach in metaontology is precisely that of trying to reconcile these two intuitions.

Over the past several decades, there has been a great resurgence among analytic philosophers of disputes about what exists, perhaps as a consequence of Quine's attempts to eliminate neo-positivism, which in turn attempted to eliminate metaphysics. With this dissertation I aim to shed light on what ontologists are doing when they are engaged in debated of that sort. I will try to explain why they are so persistent, but avoiding the difficulties that arise in "positing" deep metaphysical facts hard to discover. At the same time, I will not give a view on which ontological disagreements are rejected as wrong-headed or misguided. I will rather try to show that such disagreements are ultimately still worth pursuing.

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The Practical Dimension of Ontological Discourse

And what if Heraclitus and Parmenides
are both right
and two worlds exist side by side,
one serene, the other insane […]

(Zagajewski A., "Lava", *Canvas*)

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to offer an account of ontological inquiry according to which the function of at least some ontological discourse (discourse about the kinds of entities that *really* exist) is not to describe pieces of reality or state deep ontological facts, but rather to do something else. I will argue that ontological sentences often carry a normative component and, as such, they express action-guiding states of mind. Specifically, they express attitudes towards to the adoption/refusal of certain linguistic resources. In that sense, an essential feature of ontological discourse is that it is practical, so that ontological conversations generally have as a purpose to influence and regulate one another's linguistic behavior. Furthermore, I will argue that a hybrid expressivist approach to the meaning of traditional ontological claims can be a viable option to avoid the risk of non-cognitivism.

Keywords: Meta-ontology · Deflationism · Metalinguistic Expressivism · Hybrid Expressivism

1. Introduction

Amie Thomasson's *easy* approach to ontology (2015) is one on which we get a straightforward first-order ontological realism. In order to justify the use of the truth predicate in ontological claims, Thomasson (2014) combines her approach with minimalism (viz. deflationism) about truth. Minimalism about truth shows us how to attach the truth predicate to sentence without paying any metaphysical price. Thus, adopting a deflationary theory of truth (which does not

take on any heavyweight metaphysical burden of explanation) enables to classify ontological statements as true or false, without their having to be made true by metaphysical features of the world. To say that an ontological claim is true is just to reaffirm it, and so it is if we add the weighty words such as 'really' or 'fact'. The idea is that I can move, for example, from "Ordinary objects exist" to "Ordinary objects *really* exist" (or "It's a *fact* that ordinary objects exist"), without taking on any metaphysical burden of explanation. For 'really' (or 'fact') is not supposed to avert to some deep and substantive criteria that might fail to be met, even when the conditions for reference given by the standard rules of use for the terms are satisfied.

In this respect it is much like Blackburn's quasi-realism about the moral and modal (though the prefix 'quasi' here can be misleading). Following Blackburn (1993), we can call such a maneuver "moving along Ramsey's ladder". But, because of the minimalism, the latter does not add anything to the former judgement: "You can as easily make the last judgement as the first — Ramsey's ladder is lying on the ground, horizontal" (78-79). Thomasson makes a similar trip along Ramey's ladder in the spirit of Blackburn's quasi-realism, to justify our right to existence claims; following Schiffer (2003) she calls the metaphysically inconsequential steps along the ladder "pleonastic transformations" (Thomasson 2007, 149). What Thomasson aims to offer is thus a kind of minimalist analysis of ontological talk and she holds that such a 'lightweight' account can explain and make legitimate sense of the realist-sounding discourse without relying on 'heavyweight' realist metaphysics.

I think, however, that neither minimalism about truth nor pleonastic transformations will allow us to move, for instance, from "Ordinary objects exist" to "Ordinary objects *really* exist" (or "It's a *fact* that ordinary objects exist"), in the way that that former is understood as an ordinary existence assertion and the former a deep ontological one (jumping from the outside into the ontology room). The very fact that we can (truly) speak of there being a fact about the existence of the purported entities does not entail that such reductive analyses make any sense as applied

to deep ontological assertion as made by ontologists (that is, in the ontology room); it merely reflects the ordinary way of use of existence assertions (that is, outside the ontology room). Accordingly, we can imagine an opponent who brushes her analysis to one side, and attempts to return to ontological questions: Are there any such things as metaphysical facts about the existence of the purported entities?

In what follow, I will offer an account of ontological discourse according to which these questions do not turn out to be misguided. At the same time, though, I will argue that ontological judgments are best understood in terms of the distinctive evaluative attitudes they express (such as dispositions to follow a rule). In short, I will propose an expressivist approach to the (heavyweight) quest for objectivity in ontological discourse.

I begin by examining the well-known Carnap's distinction between internal and external questions about the existence of entities in light of Thomasson's easy approach to ontology. I will focus on external question and claims, deemed by Carnap to be meaningless qua assertions and semantically empty. Even though I will reject the deflationist interpretation, in Sect. 3, I will try somehow to rehabilitate external claims. First of all, I will represent them as implicitly metalinguistic. Then, I will sketch a possible evaluative use of ontological claims and discourse. According to this view, by uttering an ontological (external) sentence a speaker is positively evaluating the adoption of a given linguistic framework. It follows that ontological discourse does not aim to represent or describe how the world is, but rather it aims to influence and regulate one another's linguistic behavior. In Sect. 4, I will highlight such a practical purpose of ontological discourse. In Sect. 5, I will argue that, to the extent that ontological discourse is to be conceived in terms of considerations about which language to choose, such considerations may be nothing but practical. As a result, the implicit norms speakers endorse in making ontological claims turn out to be non-epistemic values or virtues. In Sect 6, I will take a possible cognitivist way-out. I will suggest that adopting a hybrid variety of expressivism (along the

lines of hybrid alternatives to classical expressivism in meta-ethics) would allow both to endorse an expressivist approach to ontological (external) claims and to account for their meaning without necessarily falling into a form of non-cognitivism. Anyway, the account presented here does not collapse (external) talk of existence into talk of the practical advisability of adopting certain linguistic forms. In Sect. 7, I will conclude by trying to explain how the gap between considerations about what *really* exists and what linguistic framework should be adopted (given the practical goals at hand) can still be preserved.

2. Internal and External Questions

Carnap (1956) famously argues that there are two kinds of questions concerning the existence or reality of entities:

- *Internal questions*, asked within (using) a linguistic framework.
- *External questions*, raised outside or before the introduction of a given language form.

The notion of 'framework' here is quite intuitive: the conjunction of the rules of use of some expressions and the circumstances in which such expressions work. That is, the system of linguistic expressions (key terms like substantives and predicates) and semantic rules (at least core rules of use)[1] governing those expressions: the principles and conditions governing their applications (their grammar), for the formation of statements, as well as for proving, accepting or rejecting those statements**.** And, at the same time, the circumstances in which such

[1] For example, it may be a core rule of use for 'dog' that it may be properly applied to creatures with the same genetic structure as those creatures have, or it may be that the application conditions for 'piece of copper' are fulfilled by a large number of Cu atoms tightly bonded together (so that the sortal 'piece of copper' is satisfied by the presence of such tightly bonded Cu atoms).

expressions work. Or in other words, the role they play in practice, their functional role, the way they actually work in practice[2].

Given the rules of use for the terms involved (here, the quantifier and material terms), existence questions framed using these terms are straightforward to answer: via standard empirical or conceptual methods**.** In the case of internal existence questions about non-abstract entities, the answer will be determined «by empirical investigations» (Carnap 1956, 207). For example, questions about the existence of the specimen of Iberian lynx can be answered using the empirical methods of the biological sciences. It is important to notice that, along these lines, also what we consider a fact, evidence (evidence as public and shareable through language) or a *truthmaker* depends on the rules endorsed by the framework at hand (in our example, the framework of biological sciences). Therefore, since they are only possible within a framework, only internal ontological claims can be proven or refuted. In the same spirit, questions about the existence of abstract entities like, for instance, prime numbers greater than ten may be resolved by mathematical reasoning. In fact, Euclid's Theorem proves that there are infinitely many prime numbers.

From such positive answers to the specific existence questions, we may also make inferences to answer more general existence questions. That is to say, we can get trivial (analytic) entailments from positive answers to the specific questions, to positive answers to the general questions. For if there are Iberian lynxes, that implies that there are organisms. And that numbers exist is entailed by ordinary mathematical claims. For instance, Euclid's Theorem that there are infinitely many prime numbers implies immediately and obviously that there are infinitely many numbers, and so that there are numbers. Answering them is simply a matter of seeing whether the relevant rules lead to the entailment.

[2] Perhaps, we may also understand the notion of framework in terms of the network of inferential relations among sentences, hence rules of inference governing a given (descriptive) vocabulary.

The idea was recently taken up and developed by 'easy ontologists', mainly by Amie Thomasson (2015), who typically accept that there are disputed entities since we can infer the existence of these entities by way of trivial inferences (licensed by the rules for the terms in question) from uncontroversial premises. In Thomasson's words: «[e]asy ontologists agree on is that answers to certain disputed ontological questions can be reached easily by starting from an uncontroversial truth and reasoning by what seem like trivial steps to reach ontological conclusions» (2015, 21). In the same way as the deflationary theory of truth[3], which rejects demands such as the requirement that truths have truthmakers, and deflationism about reference, which denies there is any substantive answer to the question about what the reference relation consists in, one may come to legitimately infer the existence of the entities in question regardless of any empirical fact or evidence (or truthmaker) or any other substantive criterion for existence being fulfilled.

Anyway, adopting a deflationist standpoint enables us to hold that our standard general internal existence claims are perfectly true, in the normal sense, not just true in some reduced sense[4]. We should deny that the entities we are committed to in such a way are ontologically deflated, or have some second-class status, and we should not attribute a difference in ontological standing to them. As Thomasson herself highlights: «[w]e should not suggest that the entities to which we become committed are in general 'thin and inconsequential', 'ontologically shallow', or that their existence is somehow to be understood in a deflationary manner. Instead, we should simply say that such entities exist—full stop—and adopt a simple realist view of them» (2015, 146).

Nor does Carnap, on this interpretation, leave us with a kind of anti-realism on which we can only answer questions with a disowning preface of the form "what exists, according to this or that framework", where that is like saying "what exists according to the story in a work of

[3] For an account of the deflationary theory of truth, see mainly Horwich (2010, 299–322).

[4] At best, in order to prevent confusion, we could label this view as 'simple' or 'default' realism, as contrasted with 'explanatory' realism.

fiction" (like when, for instance, we say that Totoro exists according to Miyazaki's animated fantasy movie "My Neighbor Totoro")[5]. In fact, once we adopt a set of rule-governed terms to use in framing the question of whether things of a certain kind exist, the answer will in no way be arbitrary and there is no reason to think that it is true merely in some framework relative sense, or anything less than simply true[6]. In the main, we can directly answer questions about whether this or that sort of thing exists, but to ask and answer them we must be using language: using a framework that establishes the rules of use for the terms used in asking and answering the question.

However, «nobody who meant the question "Are there numbers" in the internal sense would either assert or even seriously consider a negative answer. This makes it plausible to assume that those ontologists who treat the question of the existence of numbers as a serious philosophical problem and offer lengthy arguments on either side, do not have in mind the internal question» (Carnap 1956, 209). On Carnap's original view, even though they are expressed in object-language terms, what ontologists are doing can be more charitably understood as asking external questions. Indeed, we can see the metaphysician's deeper question "Are there *really* numbers?"[7] as a formal and general question independent of any domain. In this way, external questions concern the existence or reality of the system of entities as a whole. Nevertheless, quoting Carnap himself, «to be real means to be an element of the system; hence this concept cannot be meaningfully applied to the system itself » (1956, 207). It seems to be a kind of logical or

[5] The view was commonly presented in this way by Yablo (1998, 244), who suggests that we should treat internal truths as statements that pertinent rules of make-believe tell us to imagine-true. For a reply to Yablo's fictionalist objection, see Thomasson (2015, Chapter 1).

[6] It is important to notice that claiming that in articulating the structure of the judgeable as such, linguistic frameworks thereby articulate the structure of the objective world is an optional additional thesis, not entailed by Carnap's account. His view does not entail the idealist thesis that what there is (or that certain disputed items: properties, numbers, etc.) depends on which linguistic framework we accept.

[7] The classical (and contemporary) question raised by ontologists whether the world is a world of substances, facts or structures can be understood in this way. That is, what an ontologist is doing when he asks whether a certain metaphysical category, such as 'substance', 'fact', or 'structure', exists (or better, really exists) is to ask an *external question* in the sense set out above.

categorical error to ask if the system as a whole is real since it would be equivalent to ask if the system as a whole is an element of the system.

This leads Carnap to hold that external existence questions are devoid of any cognitive content. Or better, taken literally, as theoretical or factual questions, they are pseudo-questions, badly formulated or poorly formed questions. Somehow, they are defective and semantically empty and, as such, they turn out to be just unanswerable questions. The only existence questions which tolerate a factual reading are the internal ones. The metaphysician's *deeper* questions cannot be understood as theoretical or factual questions that use the terms in accord with their extant rules, for if they are, then they are easily answered in the affirmative, and the answers seem so easy to come by that it does not seem that this can be what the serious metaphysicians are really engaged in debating. The point is exactly that for a question to be asked meaningfully the terms in it must be governed by rules of use, so that we must be using a linguistic framework to ask an (internal) existence question.

Of course, Carnap also seems to be a non-cognitivist about ontological claims. In the same way as for external questions, «an alleged statement of the reality of the system of entities is a pseudo-statement without cognitive content» (1956, 214). Since it is impossible to interpret ontological discourse in a domain, it is impossible, in a certain sense, to find references for the terms in question and truth-maker for its statements. The result is that ontological claims, taken externally, turn out to be cognitively idle: this means not in the business of being true or false at all (without truth values). Or better, Carnap conceives them as not grammatically well-formed claims, hence not claims at all, which though create the illusion of understanding where there is none.[8]

[8] Moreover, since evidence is only possible within a framework, external ontological claims can neither be proven nor refuted either.

By declaring all external existential questions devoid of cognitive content, Carnap dismisses, for instance, both the statements of the reality or irreality of abstract entities (both Platonism and nominalism) as «pseudo-statements if they claim to be theoretical statement» (Carnap 1963, 871). The same holds for the statement asserting or denying the reality of the external world (both realism and idealism or solipsism), if understood as a debate about «the external question of the reality of the thing world» (Carnap 1956, 22). All in all, to the question "Is there a fact of the matter as to who is right, whose ontological views reflect the way the world is really structured?", Carnap's answer is just: "No, there isn't".

3. Evaluative use of ontological statements

Nevertheless, a sentence uttered to ask an external question might aim to perform a different question act respect to the sentence used to ask the internal ones. External questions are supposed to have a different content and, to that extent, it is possible to characterize a meaningful notion which the ontologist might go on to pose questions about. After all, one must be a radical to deny that they are meaningful and it would certainly be too uncharitable to condemn a going discourse of such a kind as meaningless. Even though, to some extent, ontological (external) statements are not genuine assertions, they must serve some other purpose. In particular, they have a different function than that of referring. Their work does not consist in representing a certain range of entities in the world, but rather to perform a function that is fundamentally non-descriptive. In the same way, non-cognitivists could argue that ontological expressions used in such open questions did not function to represent anything and, as such, they are not equivalent to any descriptive or referring expressions. So understood, ontological discourse does not state facts or describe the world; it does something else.

Once again, the emphasis for Carnap comes from looking at two different readings of existence claims: one which is acceptable but uninteresting and the other of which seems empty. The

empty reading is the external one, which asks about the status of the framework itself. That is, external questions should be understood as questions on the framework itself and not in the framework. This seems to be compatible with the understanding of external questions as not using the terms but rather mentioning them. Following Huw Price, we can state that «the only legitimate external questions simply mention the terms in question» (2009, 324). Then, if we are charitable enough, we can treat external questions not as using the disputed terms (governed by their associated rules of use), but rather as mentioning them. Of course, the same applies to external statements: they do not use a linguistic framework, but rather they show something about the framework itself: what we can make sense of with (using) the framework in question. This also explains why external claims can be given a pragmatic construal according to which they both articulate intrinsic characteristics and make explicit structural relations of the framework itself (only within which terms are intelligible, and only within which descriptive vocabulary works and describing is possible). They convey key insights about what makes language possible or, in other words, they express something important about what underpins it. In a manner, ontological discourse seems to play the expressive role, not of describing something (in the world in the narrow sense), but of explicating the framework just within which describing is possible. It accomplishes that by showing essential features of the framework in which descriptive vocabulary works: something like rules governing the discourse (as well as our behavior bound to it). Paraphrasing Carnap himself, such sentences belong to the field of syntax (Carnap 1935, 75–76), in the sense that they express insights into the workings of logical syntax.

In short, existence assertions, taken externally, may be deemed to communicate something relevant about what a language (a framework) supports: approaches to the functioning of logical syntax. In this respect, it may be correct to say that ontological claims are covertly made in a

metalanguage and that they are to be given a metalinguistic reading[9]. Therefore, this characteristic expressive role of ontological statements should be understood as straightforwardly metalinguistic. More particularly, what philosophers are doing when they utter external questions, or they say that "Xs exist", is a metalinguistic doing of a distinctive kind, marked out by the use of the illustrating principle. So, it is fair to conclude that ontological discourse, taken externally, stands in a special relation to descriptive vocabulary: a relation that invited its characterization as 'metalinguistic' (with respect to that descriptive vocabulary) in the first place, the usage of which involves a distinctive kind of metalinguistic expressive role.

Bringing Wittgenstein into it, we can in this respect resort to the notion of 'grammatical proposition'. In the *Philosophical Investigation* (1958) and especially in *On Certaint* (1969) he talks about «something whose form makes it looks like an empirical proposition, but which is really a grammatical one» (1958, § 251). Grammatical propositions lay out or help to lay out a rule for using words. That is, something like instructions on the use of words: «"A is a physical object" is a piece of instruction which we give only to someone who doesn't yet understand either what "A" means, or what "physical object" means. Thus it is instruction about the use of words, and "physical object" here is a logical concept» (1969, § 36).

To that extent, they establish or assist in establishing the 'transcendental' conditions of application of the terms at hand. More concretely, what is being done when you assert grammatical propositions is a metalinguistic act: to show us what we can meaningfully say. They illustrate principles and postulates, which shape our considerations and our investigations: «I mean: we use judgments as a principle(s) of judgment» (§ 124). They act like grammatical samples, examples that serve as paradigms or general standards, which establish or help to establish rules for the use of our words (just labels, tags, etiquettes). As it were, they are logical

[9] More precisely, while ontological statements are not strictly metalinguistic, they are in a broader, non-canonical sense.

and methodological pseudo-propositions that try to say what can only be shown: «But is it adequate to answer to the scepticism of the idealist, or the assurances of the realist, to say that "There are physical objects" is nonsense? For them after all it is not nonsense. It would, however, be an answer to say: this assertion, or its opposite is a misfiring attempt to express what can't be expressed like that» (1969, § 37).

An assertion of such a kind is merely an observation about grammar «[a]nd a philosopher could only use the statement to show that this form of speech is actually used» (1969, § 433). In line with what is already stated about existence claims taken externally, a grammatical proposition does not use a framework, but rather it shows us something about the framework itself[10].

The thought that ontological statements, taken externally, do not describe states of affairs (because they are really metalinguistic) won't do at all if it is meant that instead of describing states of affairs in the world, they describe linguistic habits. It is more plausible if it is meant that ontological statements can be used to express a judgment about a given linguistic framework and an utterance of it be thereby accompanied by a certain attitude in relation to the adoption of the related framework. Their distinctive function can be that of expressing no-cognitive, conative state of mind (a specific desire-like attitude of approval, acceptance, rejection, etc.), rather than that of stating facts. In this manner, ontological discourse turns are to be not a representation or a description of how the world is, but rather an expression of our attitudes towards the adoption of a certain system of linguistic rules (the way we represent the world to be). Specifically, a sentence of the type "Xs exist" may express such a judgment that if a speaker holds that judgment, then she has the positive attitude (for example, the desire) to adopt the linguistic framework in which the term "X" occurs. Therefore, people who utter

[10] And, as hinge proposition, they cannot be questioned without questioning the totality of the underlying framework in which they resort.

sentences such as "Xs exist" are positively evaluating[11] the adoption of the framework containing "X" and generally want such a framework to be adopted. After all, they would not have made the utterance unless they want to adopt it.

4. Practicality of ontological discourse

According to the background assumption, ontological discourse involves a non-cognitive state of some kind. Non-cognitive states, like desires, are mental states that have the function of moving to action. Thus, they exemplify a so-called 'action-guiding attitudes'. According to such a view, being motivated amounts to having an action-guiding attitude: a state that moves to action. A person's use of an ontological sentence (taken externally) conveys that she subscribes to a given framework where 'subscribe' refers to an action-guiding attitude. As a consequence, it is possible to distinguish as an essential feature of ontological discourse, taken externally, its distinctively practical character: ontological statements express desire-like attitudes that serve to motivate the expected action (the adoption of a given linguistic framework). In a sense, it influences or directs the decisions and actions of others; in particular, it contributes to the mutual choice of a specific linguistic framework. In fact, a general way of affecting other people's behavior is to let them know what our attitudes towards a certain conduct or action are. We motivate showing of being motivated! We use a sentence of the type "Xs exist" to convey a positive attitude towards the adoption of a particular language framework since we then might influence people to adopt it as well. Asserting it is to express a plan (to adopt certain linguistic resources) and to propose it for joint adoption. Where there is pressure for all speakers to adopt a common linguistic framework, speakers use ontological claims, which are literally correct

[11] Must be noticed that here I am obviously endorsing a contrast between the descriptive and the evaluative use of language, in line with local expressivists and in contrast with global expressivists like, for instance, Huw Price (2011).

only in a specific framework of reference, in order to pressure others to adopt that or a similar one. Accordingly, one important reason why ontological discourse, taken externally, is practical is presumably that it serves the major function of enabling us to regulate our conduct. It thereby fulfills the essential function of regulating one another's behavior in a certain sense. The explanation might be, in turn, that it enables us to coordinate our actions so as to benefit mutually. In particular, such a kind of discourse would serve in human coordination in the linguistic community: it let people coordinate in the social-linguistic practice.

Ontological discourse, precisely in virtue of the distinctive expressive role it plays with respect to the use of descriptive vocabulary, has a first-hand use in advocating the framework within which such vocabulary can have the significance of describing**.** Therefore, even though ontological claims are cognitively meaningless and they fail at bipolarity (without true values), they may still have a different sort of meaning: a normative one. As for grammatical propositions, they thus turn out to serve the normative function to count as proposals[12]. In general, normative claims are caught up in the regulation of our practices, whereas matter-of-factual claims are used to keep track of things in our environment. Therefore, the deontic dimension of ontological (external) claims comes from and how it behaves in terms of projection behavior. This, I think, allows us to view them, as well as other kinds of normative claims, as playing some essentially non-descriptive social-practical role.

Granted that ontological discourse, so understood, serves to regulate conduct in this way, it is reasonable to assume that ontological conversations generally have this goal as well. The general aim of them might be such as directing the actions of others or influencing or being influenced by others. In particular, it generally has as a purpose to contribute to people choosing or not choosing a certain linguistic framework. As a result, an ontological debate points at

[12] Thus, they are not the expression of a prediction, belief or description, but rather the expression of an intention and, of course, intention and belief are taken to have different directions (different roles, functions).

coordinating speakers to follow the same postulate or a set of postulates, in order to converge with their usage. However, the assumption that ontological discourse has this purpose works as a tacit notion in ontological conversations: a purpose on which we usually do not reflect, but which governs our understanding of ontological utterances and which permeates contexts in which we converse about ontological issues.

Summing up, an ontological assertion (taken externally) can be thought as a proposal to adopt a joint plan and your agreement as acceptance of this plan (while your disagreement as a refusal of it). However, as we will see in a while, the proposal might be reasonable or not depending on our practical goals.

5. Practical values and virtues

In line with the non-factualist status of the present view, no framework can be deemed more correct or valid than any other. Or better, since speaking of correctness or validity here does not apply at all, then it is applied in the same way. Likewise, among the frameworks, there is none that is uniquely best (viz., the correct one). A non-factualist need not accept, and probably should not accept, that a framework is the best one. Probably, only a factualist has to assume that among the frameworks one is uniquely best since she has a notion of a framework being straightforwardly correct. In brief, the factualist needs to maintain that a framework is objectively privileged and the non-factualist needs to deny it! [13]

Nonetheless, some who go this far may resist at this stage, on grounds that non-factualist seems to make totally arbitrary which linguistic framework to choose and adopt, and thus which assertions of existence to make. But this is a needless worry, for the formulation certainly does

[13] For a defense of a non-factualist view of this sort, see mainly Field (2009). However, the idea is already in Gibbard (2003), as Field rightly points out also in a recent article: «Whereas one world is metaphysically privileged (it represents reality), there is no obvious reason to think of one norm as metaphysically privileged. Indeed, it is metaphysically privileged only if the worlds contain 'normative facts' that make the norms 'correct', and presumably the Gibbard idea was that there is no need for that» (2018, 14).

not suggest that frameworks are all equally good: definitely, a framework might be better than another according to some goals. The rules we adopt need not be arbitrary, given our purposes, since some rules may serve the purposes better than others. Some languages may be better than others for various purposes and there may be practical issues, or reasons, involved in determining which language is better for a given purpose (or set of purposes).

Thereby, ontological discourse, taken externally, has to be conceived in terms of practical considerations about which language should be chosen: the one which is more useful or convenient to adopt, for example, by appealing to certain practical virtues or non-epistemic values (such as, among others, greater efficiency, fruitfulness, simplicity, etc.)[14]. So that the acceptance of a linguistic framework can «be judged as being more or less expedient, fruitful, conducive to the aim for which the language is intended to be used» (Carnap 1956, 214). Specifically, the speaker may use an ontological assertion to positively or negatively evaluate the adoption of a linguistic framework which, in turn, may have certain characteristics, consequences, practical advantages or disadvantages. However, once we are adopting the framework we have good (practical) reasons to adopt, there is an objective answer to questions about when they can be correctly adopted and what follows from such an adoption. We can productively investigate the practical consequences of using this or that tool without trying to find the one correct metaphysical position to adopt and «the work in the field will sooner or later lead to the elimination of those forms which have no useful function» (Carnap 1956, p. 22).

It is important to notice that, insofar as such practical (non-epistemic) virtues or values act like norms or standards of evaluations, these comparative judgments, of which frameworks are better than which, turn out to be normative. That is to say that, even when based in part on non-normative facts, they can only be made from those norms. Therefore, judgments of betterness

[14] Certainly, sometimes reasons might also be ethical or moral in character.

must be understood as involving a hidden relativity to norms, in particular, practical virtues or values.

The standpoint sketched above also explains why external questions can be given a practical construal. As we have seen, according to Carnap, if we take external existence questions literally (as attempted theoretical or factual questions), they are ill-formed pseudo-question. The best we can do is then to consider them as implicitly asking practical questions about whether or not to accept and use a given linguistic framework and the forms of expression licensed by that very framework. They should be sensibly understood as purely practical questions about the advisability of adopting certain discursive forms. That is, whether we should make use of some terms, governed by their customary rules of use, along with their customary rules of use at all. Although, according to Carnap, external questions lack cognitive content, they are significant questions, but they are not meant to be questions about the facts, but rather questions about what we should do. When asking an external question we utter a perfectly meaningful interrogative sentence in the performance of a question act that asks a question about what to do.

Here, again, there is no special philosophical or ontological insight into reality involved: at best, ontologist's questions are really questions about which framework we ought to use according to some practical goals. Thus, for instance, what "Are there numbers?" (taken externally) is asking will be: "Is it useful, or fruitful, to use a framework in which numerical terms can be replaced by variables and quantified over?". In the same way, the question "Is the Platonist or the nominalist framework the correct one?" has no factual answer, since there are only practical differences between them[15]. The choice of a language is nothing but a practical choice about what tool to use, rather than as a theoretical decision that is either correct or incorrect: «[i]t does not need any theoretical justification because it does not imply any assertion

[15] Of course, the same hold for questions of the same kind, such as: "Is the idealist or the realist framework the correct one?"

of reality» (Carnap 1956, 214). Therefore, the relevant distinction turns out to be the one between the theoretical issues about what true statements (including existence claims) may be made using a given linguistic framework and the purely practical issues of which linguistic frameworks to choose and adopt.

6. A Cognitivist way out

As already mentioned, Carnap can be plausibly read as denying that ontological claims, taken externally, have semantic value at all and this commits him to deny the truth-aptness of them. Atomic ontological claims, such as “Numbers exists”, have no factual meaning and express no proposition (and so they have no truth-values). This seems to undermine the objectivity of ontological discourse because there will be no objective answer to first-order ontological questions (even though, once we are adopting the framework we have good practical reasons to adopt, there will be objective answers to existence questions, this time taken internally). Nevertheless, ontological external statements, when used as evaluations, does not necessarily need to be conceived as devoid of any propositional content (and thereby no truth-apt). Evaluating we can express both a cognitive mental state, of the style of beliefs (which can thereby be declared true or false) and a conative mental state, conceptually bound to action (action-guiding), of the kind of desires - like, for instance, the acceptance of a system of norms.

As already stated, claiming "Xs exist" the speaker, in a sense, is positively evaluating the adoption of a given linguistics framework, say F, in which the noun term “X” occurs. Here the descriptive content is: “It is advisable to adopt F, according to an implicit norm, or system of norms, N” (where the value of N depends on practical virtues or non-epistemic values determined by the context of evaluation), then the belief (true or false) that F should be adopted, given the standard N. At the same time, however, the speaker endorses N, which is taken to support the adoption of F. What characterizes the expressive component of the evaluation is

exactly the acceptance of N, but the ontological utterance conveys also the speaker's belief that such an action is allowed by N. Such a belief has definitely truth conditions, which are also the truth conditions of the sentence uttered. Therefore, in ontological conversations we let each other know that we believe - and so to be true or false - that a particular kind of action (the adoption of a given linguistic framework) is better or worse than another according to certain practical values or virtues, and that, at the same time, we accept such practical values or virtues as norms of our evaluations. In short, the principal expressive role of external ontological claims, so understood, is non-descriptive. However, this is compatible with they also, in a certain sense, describe—albeit that can only be understood against the background of their expressive role.

This view is, in a sense, a notational variant of contemporary *hybrid* alternatives to classical expressivism in meta-ethics, which take evaluative sentences to express a mental state that is the resultant of both a cognitive state, of the style of beliefs, and a conative state, of the style of desires[16]. All these options do not deny that the evaluative utterances express propositions and that therefore can be declared true or false. More generally, including a belief-like element in her explanations, the hybrid expressivist shares a substantive element with the descriptivist when it comes to accounting for the distinctive features of the target discourse. Nevertheless, what characterizes such a kind of expressivism is the idea that by making an evaluation we are not only expressing a proposition, but also expressing information that belongs to the field of expressive meaning, which has a different impact on what we want to communicate.

One way of developing the idea is the so-called 'ecumenical expressivism', a hybrid expressivist theory according to which evaluations are sentences that predicate properties (and so partly cognitive) and at the same time conventional devices for the expression of attitudes (and so partly non-cognitive). Therefore, normative sentences both express a proposition (that

[16] See, among others, Schroeder (2009), Strandberg (2012, 91), Fletcher (2014, 848).

an object or an action has a particular property) and a generalized pro-/con-attitude toward that particular property (towards that object or action in so far as it possesses such a property)[17]. The precise content of the belief expressed is fixed by the object of the attitude. Specifically, one possible implementation of this view to meta-ontology is to understand an external existential claim of the form "Xs exist" as expressing the proposition that the noun term "X" is legitimately used in a certain framework (the use of the noun term "X" is allowed in a certain framework). Moreover, in claiming that, I am also advocating the adoption of the given framework because it has such and such property (an implicit practical value/virtue), which I strongly favor. What is important is that an ontological judgment of that sort has, at least in part, a desire-like direction of fit with the world.

The father of such hybrid alternatives of expressivism, or at least who developed the program in the most systematic way, can be considered Allan Gibbard. Gibbard (1986, 1990) suggests that normative/evaluative sentences express propositions in an extended sense: not just sets of possible worlds, but sets of norm-world pairs <n,w>. Then, the same normative proposition can be true at the actual world relative to some norms but not others, so that different speakers who agree on all the relevant facts can still evaluate in different ways by employing different norms in making their evaluations. Normative judgments thus express combinations of factual beliefs with systems of norms (or better, with the acceptance of those systems of norms). Each of these combinations can be captured by a world, representing a way the world might be, together with a second component consisting of a norm, representing a non-cognitive state of norm-acceptance. In this manner, he develops a strategy for combining the relevant non-cognitive attitude (of acceptance towards rules or norms) with belief to generate more complex

[17] For a characterization of the ecumenical expressivism, see mainly Ridge (2006).

sentences[18]. In particular, he proposes an analysis of judgments regarding rationality. To call an action 'rational' is, to a first approximation, to express one's acceptance of a system of norms which permits it. To call an action 'irrational' is to express one's acceptance of a system of norms which forbids it. In his words: «Thinking X rational is a combination of a normative state and a state of factual belief. It is accepting a system N of norms such that one believes the subject to be in circumstances for which N permits X» (1986, 479). The basic idea can be illustrated with an example. When I say, for instance, that María's decision is rational, I'm expressing:

i. A cognitive (doxastic) mental state: the factual belief that María's decision is allowed by a system of rules N.

ii. A normative state (conative, non-cognitive): the acceptance of the system of norms N.

What constitutes the expressive component of our evaluation is exactly the acceptance of N.

7. No Collapse

Once again, it is important to emphasize that in uttering a normative judgment you do not say that you are in a certain state of mind, or say that you accept a certain system of norms; you simply express your acceptance (or the state of mind itself). The hybrid varieties of expressivism preserve this distinction (maintaining that the meaning of evaluations cannot be fully represented in a proposition). Indeed, one of the basic distinctions of expressivism, which allows us to explain the eminently practical nature of our evaluations, is exactly the difference between expressing a non-cognitive (conative) state of mind and saying that one is in that state of mind. For example, when I express my support for standards that allow me to say that pineapple on pizza is tasty, I do not do the same as when I say that I endorse those standards. By

[18] Perhaps it is worth noticing that, like others hybrid expressivist accounts, Gibbard's standpoint has also the advantage to give a solution to the problem of mixed states posed by Geach (1960).

saying that I subscribe to some standards about what is tasty, I can be wrong. I can, for instance, retract myself later if I think that those standards are not the ones that govern my judgments about what is tasty. Quite the contrary, the states of mind I express, such as the endorsement of the aforementioned standards, are neither subject to self-deception, nor they can be subject to further retraction.

In the same way, the account put forward here still preserve the gap between considerations about what there is (externally) and what linguistic framework should be adopted (given the practical goals at hand). There is no collapse at all of (external) talk of existence into talk of the practical advisability of adopting certain linguistic forms. We can preserve the contrast between them, by exploiting the contrast between expressing the acceptance of a norm (evaluating the adoption of a given framework) and asserting the practical advisability of adopting a given framework (asserting one's belief about how the terms in question should be used given a practical norm). The latter is not intended as a translation or a meaning-preserving paraphrase of the former since they are neither conceptually nor nomologically equivalent. As we have seen, they have different functions and hence we are not in a position to equate them.

Furthermore, must be pointed out that we can conclude that a person using an ontological discourse of this kind may be evaluating, expressing a certain attitude towards the action in question (the adoption of a certain linguistic framework), even if we do not have access to any special information that indicates she has the attitude in question (such as specific contextual information about the particular case at hand). What explains that her utterance conveys the attitude does not appear to be the conventional meaning of a particular term she uses, but rather a certain particular type of use of ontological sentences. This, in turn, indicates that the fact that they convey attitudes should not be explained by semantic rules, but rather by pragmatic factors. We must thereby focus our attention on the pragmatic dimension of that expressive role; that is, on what we are doing when we make use of ontological claims of that sort, what they enable one

to do, the speech acts we are performing, and so on. In making first-hand use of (the relevant kind of) ontological discourse one is doing something distinctive that could be specified explicitly in pragmatic terms, namely endorsing a certain discursive framework[19], hence particular linguistic resources.

On top of that, external ontological claims, as covertly evaluative (hence covertly normative), are norm-sensitive (keep in mind that, in this case, norms of evaluation are the above considered practical values or virtues). Yet, with an evaluative claim, one does not intend to be making a claim that is to be evaluated for correctness by looking at a specific norm: a claim about what is justified according to a specific norm would be straightforwardly factual, with no evaluative force. In fact, by making the relativity to the hidden norms explicit, the sensitivity to norms is lost (and sensitivity to norms is a large part of what normative disagreement consists in). As a consequence, typical ways of making the relativity explicit destroy the evaluative nature of the utterance. Moreover, a speaker may not have a determinate system of norms in mind when she makes an evaluation[20], or rather people often do not consistently employ precise norms, so that it would be a «super-human logical skills» (Field 2009, 269) to be able to know enough of the details of our own norms and those of the other participants in the debate and to trace out all the logical implications in order to fully disentangle what standards we advocate and what properties of standards we prefer. Therefore, "Xs exist" (or "Xs *really* exist") ultimately can be deemed as our way for expressing that the rules of a given framework are good enough without saying exactly what those rules are, and why they are good (by virtue of which property).

[19] For an expressivist approach to external ontological claims, see also Kraut (2016). It must be noticed that Kraut's account differs from mine in one important respect: his view is explicitly non-cognitivist, while mine, as I tried to show, aspires to be cognitivist.

[20] For this reason, Gibbard (1990) suggests we would do better to think of judgments to the effect that an action would be irrational as expressing rejection of any set of norms which does not forbid it.

8. Conclusion

The picture sketched above tries to account for the distinction between ontological (external) statements and ordinary (internal) statements of existence, in terms of a difference in the function they serve. The use of ontological statements, taken externally, may imply a distinctive type of metalinguistic expressive function. Not the function of describing something in the world, but of expressing attitudes to the adoption of a certain linguistic framework (only within which describing is possible). That is to say, in contrast to taking ontological claims as expressing purely factual beliefs, we should take them as expressing, at least in part, our acceptance of specific sets of norms or policies for belief formation. This is not just the thesis that ontological claims are non-representational. It's the thesis that ontological claims are non-representational because they express, in part, a type of mental state that plays a desire-like rather than belief-like role. Ontological discourse is thus understood as a device that makes it possible to manifest attitudes for or against the adoption of certain linguistic resources. In particular, by uttering an ontological sentence of the form "Xs exist" (or "Xs *really* exist"), at least in some circumstances, the ontologist will be positively evaluating the adoption of the relevant language forms (specifically, the framework in which the noun term "X" occurs). And in doing so she will express a complex state of mind composed of the factual belief that it is advisable to adopt the framework in question according to an implicit norm, or system N of norms, and at the same time the acceptance of that very norm (or system of norms), where the value of N depends on practical virtues or non-epistemic values determined by features of the context of evaluation.

However, maintaining that the stance outlined above is dismissive toward ontological discourse (taken externally) would be misleading**.** It would be more accurate to say that it aims to reconceive the discussion on philosophical ontology rather than dismissing it. This outlook, if viable, does not constitute an elimination of traditional ontological discourse: it just attempts to

better understand what is going on in it. The purpose is neither to replace nor to purge it from our practice, but rather to portray it as legitimate and to recognize it as a useful device that serves to express the endorsement (or the withholding) of certain linguistic resources, hence to positively (or negatively) evaluate the adoption of a discursive framework or another.

In the same manner, the resulting meta-ontological position (about the legitimacy of ontological debates) is not to deflate ontological disputes: there is nothing wrong with the 'hard' ontological debates about whether entities of some kind *really* exist, but it is just the way they are usually conceived that is misguided. 'Earnest' and 'serious' debates about existence are not to be dismissed as out of place but, in a certain sense, they must be reconceived. Indeed, we can account for the intuition of cross-framework opposition by claiming that the speakers are expressing pragmatically opposed states of norm acceptance, rather than logically contradictory descriptive beliefs. The alleged conflict turns out to be a practical rather than a logical one. In this way, we also gain the resources to explain the endless character of some ontological debates and why the differences seem intractable, while neither resolving them nor dismissing their importance. Ontological disputes are thus neither merely verbal (disputants are not to be taken as talking past each other) nor straightforwardly factual, but rather 'non-straightforwardly factual'[21] (Field 2009). This means they are best understood as a special kind of 'faultless disagreement'[22], namely as instances of evaluative disagreements. In conclusion, the issue here was not to answer the ontological question (o questions) but to frame it anew in light of the emerging meta-ontological view about what ontologists are doing when they countenance the existence of entities of some sort.

[21] Field (2009, 251-252 & 275) introduces this notion for disagreements concerning evaluations. According to him, disagreements of that sort involve claims which are true or false only relative to implicit normative standards (as he calls them: 'norm-sensitive claims'). Sensitivity to norms is a large part of what such a kind of disagreement consists in. But, disputants are not reporting their preferences about standards either, because by making the relativity to the hidden norms explicit, the sensitivity to norms is lost and their claims turn out to be factual claims with no evaluative force.

[22] For a characterization of 'faultless disagreement', see mainly Kölbel (2004).

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Expressivism without Mentalism in Metaontology

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Abstract

Carnap (1956) famously argued that there are two kinds of questions and claims concerning the existence or reality of entities: internal and external ones. We focus on Carnapian external ontological claims of the form: 'Xs really exist', where 'X' stands for some traditional metaphysical category, such as 'substance', 'fact' or 'structure' (at least in traditional debates among ontologists). While Carnap considered them as meaningless, we consider them as faultlessly meaningful. However, in line with an expressivist guise, we do not claim that they have the meaning they have in virtue of representing a certain range of entities in the world or describing pieces of reality. Quite the contrary, we maintain that they are meaningful because they perform a function that is fundamentally expressive, that is, a non-descriptive function. In particular, they may imply a distinctive type of metalinguistic expressive function. Moreover, we avoid accuses of mentalism insofar as we explain the meaning of external ontological claims in terms of the practical commitments to the adoption of certain linguistic forms they express, rather than as expressing some kind of mental state (inside the head).

KEYWORDS Ontological debates; linguistic frameworks; expressivism; non-mentalism; practical commitments

1. Introduction

It is common for contemporary ontologists to claim that they are not concerned with what exists simpliciter, but rather with what exists *fundamentally*, or what *really* exists. What they are interested in is an account of what exists really, deeply, fundamentally or ontologically, which carves reality at the joints. Let us call this real existence.[1] Along these lines, many classic and contemporary ontological disputes (though not all) can be

[1]The expression is Ross Cameron's (Cameron 2010; Dorr and Hawthorne 2013).

recast as debating whether, for instance, the world is a world of substances, facts, or structures. Thus, an ontologist might claim that substances (or facts, or structures) are the only entities which exist, or better, *really* exist, and go on to explicate the world of our experience and language through relationships of grounding, truthmaking, mereological composition and so on.[2] Unlike the physicist, however, there is no sense in which the ontologist's metaphysical investigations can be viewed as converging towards consensus with her peers.[3] Quite the contrary, ontology as a discipline is characterized by widespread disagreement, which shows no sign of abating with the progress of time. Nor will empirical evidence help to resolve ontological debates in so far as they have to be considered quite different from workaday existence disputes, such as: 'Mummy, can we invite the Teletubbies to dinner?', 'Don't be silly, they don't exist'.

With this in mind, our aim in this paper is twofold: to provide an expressivist reading of discourse (and debates) about the kinds of entities that *really* exist and, at the same time, to offer an account of ontological inquiry, so understood, that avoids both non-cognitivism and mentalism. Our point of departure is what Thomas Hofweber (2016) called 'Carnap's Big Idea', namely Carnap's wellknown distinction between internal and external questions about the existence or reality of entities.[4] What we focus on are external questions (and claims), understood as the traditional ontologist's question: 'Do Xs *really* exist?' (where we take 'X' to stand for some metaphysical category, such as 'substance', 'fact' or 'structure'), which Carnap regards as meaningless (defective and semantically empty). In this respect, we argue, he seems to defend a sort of ontological

[2] Or think of the mereological nihilist's assertion that the only things that really exist are mereological simples; this is a view that has always been quite popular in the present debate (Unger 1979; Wheeler 1979; Merricks 2001).

[3] For considerations along these lines, see Thomasson (2014, 15–22).

[4] In what follows, we will often use 'ontological questions' to refer to the external questions and simply 'existence questions' to refer to the internal ones.

noncognitivism. Although we do share Carnap's overall standpoint, we withdraw from such a conclusion and we will thus try to rehabilitate, in a sense, external ontological claims. In order to achieve that, we will provide an expressivist reading of them. In particular, we will defend an account in line with contemporary hybrid-expressivist views, such as to enable a possible cognitivist way out. Furthermore, in the last sections, we argue that an approach of that sort has not to be necessarily understood as a mentalist approach to the meaning of external ontological claims. Indeed, what we endorse is an expressivist meta-semantics. Accordingly, we will conclude, ontological discourse turns out to be a (useful) device that serves to express and undertake commitments to the adoption of certain linguistic frameworks, and ontological debates are thus better understood as clashes of such commitments. However, the commitment expressed by someone who uses a statement of that sort should not be understood, in the first place, as an ontological commitment to the way reality is, but rather a practical commitment to the adoption of some linguistic forms and resources, hence a commitment to think and reason in a particular way.

2. 'Carnap's Big Idea'

According to Carnap (1956), there are two types of questions about the existence or reality of entities:

- Internal questions, asked within (using) a linguistic framework, which can be answered straightforwardly using analytical or empirical methods and investigations.
- External question, raised outside or before the introduction of a given framework, concerning the existence or reality of the system of entities as a whole and totality.

The notion of 'linguistic framework' here is quite intuitive. Roughly, a linguistic framework is a way of speaking. In particular, the conjunction of the rules governing the use of a group of expressions and the circumstances in which such expression works.[5] That is, the system of rules (or at least core of rules)[6] for deploying linguistic locutions (key terms like substantives and predicates), as well as the conditions of their application for the formation of statements (and for proving, accepting or rejecting those statements) and the role they play in practice (their functional role).

2.1 Internal questions

For a question to be asked meaningfully the terms in it must be governed by rules of use. Internal questions, questions asked and answered from (*within*) a framework, use a framework that establishes the rules for deploying the terms used in asking and answering those questions. That is to say, they are questions that make use of the relevant terms (material object terms, property terms, number terms, etc.) governed by certain rules of use. In raising an existence question, we must use a term. If we are to ask 'Are there any X?' (such as 'Are there material objects/numbers/properties/ propositions?'), then the crucial term 'X' ('material object', 'number', 'property') must be introduced with some rules of use. Rules of use would determine under what conditions 'X' is to be applied or refused. To ask them we must be using language – using a framework that establishes the rules of use for the terms used in asking and answering the question.

[5] By 'rules' we do not mean just explicitly formulated rules that the practitioners consult; we mean to include rules that the agent follows blindly.

[6] For example, it may be a core rule of use for <lion> that it may be properly applied to creatures with the same genetic structure as those creatures have.

As a consequence, if we ask an existence question, using terms according to the rules of use by which they come to be introduced to the language, then those rules enable us to resolve the questions straightforwardly. They can be answered using standard empirical or conceptual methods. The answers to internal existence questions, Carnap (1956, 206) holds, 'may be found either by purely logical methods or by empirical methods, depending upon whether the framework is a logical or a factual one'. In the case of internal existence questions about non-abstract entities, the answer will be determined by empirical investigations. For example, questions about the existence of Andalusian dogs may be answered using the empirical methods of the biological sciences. Instead, in the case of internal existence questions about abstract entities, for instance, questions about the existence of prime numbers may be resolved by mathematical reasoning. Indeed, Euclid's Theorem proves that there are infinitely many prime numbers. In both cases, internal questions may be answered by employing the rules of use for the terms in question, whether rules for our number terms introduced in the language of arithmetic or rules for using biological terms. In each case, internal existence questions may be answered straightforwardly, either using analytic means (as in the prime number case) or empirical means (as in the Andalusian dog case). The same holds for metaphysically loaded terms such as 'substance', 'fact' or 'structure', although for a slightly different reason (at least according to our liberal interpretation of Carnap). Indeed, the belief that there are substances (as well as facts or structures) plays a particular role in the system of beliefs that constitutes the framework in which they resort. They constitute the very foundation (*bedrock*) of that belief system and as such they belong to the *scaffolding*, to the frame of reference itself rather than being justified or grounded in it. As a consequence, they cannot be questioned without questioning the totality of beliefs of the underlying framework. In a sense, their truth follows trivially

(or in a deflationary way, if you prefer) in that framework. That is, they are trivially true (or better, unfalsifiable) in that framework, but not in virtue of some empirical confirmation or mathematical proof, but exactly in virtue of the privileged position they occupy within it.[7]

Therefore, the general point is that once rules for terms are in place we can use the relevant terms in accord with those rules and straightforwardly evaluate the truth of existential sentences containing those terms.

2.2 External questions

Nevertheless, what ontologists are doing can be more charitably understood as asking external questions, of the form: 'Do Xs *really* exist?', where 'X' usually stands for some metaphysical category, such as 'substance', 'fact' or 'structure' (at least in traditional debates among ontologists). They are questions raised before or *outside* the introduction of a given framework and, as such, they turn out to be formal and general questions independent of any domain. So understood external questions concern the existence or reality of the system of entities as a whole. But, as Carnap (1956, 207) himself claims: 'To be real means to be an element of the system; hence this concept cannot be meaningfully applied to the system itself.' Accordingly, it seems to be a kind of logical or categorical error to ask if the system as a whole is real since it would be equivalent to ask if the system as a whole is an element of the system.

This leads Carnap to hold that external existence questions are devoid of any cognitive content. That is, somehow defective and semantically empty. Or better, taken literally, as theoretical or factual questions, they turn out to be ill formed pseudo-questions and,

[7] Clearly, what we have in mind here is the well-known Wittgenstenian notion of 'hinge proposition' (Wittgenstein 1969).

as such, just unanswerable questions. The only existence questions which tolerate a factual reading are the internal ones. Correspondingly, this Carnap is also a non-cognitivist about external ontological claims. In the same way, '[a]n alleged statement of the reality of the system of entities is a pseudo-statement without cognitive content' (Carnap 1956, 207). Since it is impossible to *interpret* ontological discourse of that sort in a domain, it is impossible, in a certain sense, to find references for the terms in question and truth-makers for the related statements. External ontological claims thus turn out to be cognitively idle: this means not in the business of being true or false at all (without truth values), or better, not claims at all. Carnap conceives them as not grammatically well-formed claims at all and as creating the illusion of understanding where there is none.

3. Rehabilitation Strategy

Contrary to what Carnap maintained, we consider that it would certainly be too uncharitable to condemn a discourse of such a kind as meaningless. Indeed, a sentence uttered to ask an external question might simply aim to perform a different question act to the sentence used to ask internal questions. Likewise, we suppose that ontological claims, taken externally, must serve some other purpose than internal ones. In particular, they serve a different function than that of describing. That is, their work does not consist in representing a certain range of entities in the world, but rather to perform a function that is fundamentally non-descriptive. They do not state facts or describe the world; they do something else. Accordingly, external questions, we suppose, have a different sort of content than internal ones and, to that extent, it is possible to characterize a meaningful notion which ontologists might go on to pose questions about. It is a corresponding mistake to deny that such statements are legitimate, or even that

they can be true (though to say that they are true is not to say that their function is to describe).

First of all, following Huw Price, we suggest that external questions are better understood, not as using the disputed terms (governed by their associated rules of use), but rather as mentioning them. In his words, '[t] he only legitimate external questions simply mention the terms in question' (Price 2009, 324). That is to say, external questions should be understood as questions on the framework itself and not in the framework, they ask about the status of the framework itself. Of course, the same goes for ontological statements: they do not use a linguistic framework, but rather they show something about the framework itself: what we can make sense of with (using) the framework in question, what we can meaningfully say in that framework. In this way, they make explicit and articulate characteristics and structural features of the framework itself (only within which the terms in question are intelligible, descriptive vocabulary works and the act of describing is possible). In this respect, they would be merely observations about grammar and a speaker by claiming the statement only shows that the mentioned form of speech (the mentioned term) is actually used within a certain framework.

So understood, an ontological sentence can thus be used to express a judgment about a certain linguistic framework, hence about a certain system of grammatical rules. An utterance of it will thereby be accompanied by a certain pro-/con-attitude in relation to the related framework. In this way, its distinctive function will be that of expressing a non-cognitive, conative state of mind (a specific desire-like attitude of approval, acceptance, rejection, etc.) rather than that of stating a fact. Ontological discourse turns out to be, therefore, not a representation or a description of how the world is, but rather an expression of our attitudes towards a certain system of linguistic norms. Specifically,

a sentence of the type ‘Xs exist’ (or ‘Xs *really* exist’) may express such a judgment that if a speaker holds that judgment, then she has a positive attitude (for example the acceptance) towards the discursive framework in which the noun term ‘X’ occurs. As a result, it may express the acceptance of a system of grammatical rules, which constitute that very framework. In short, by uttering an external ontological sentence ‘Xs exist’ (or ‘Xs *really* exist’) the speaker is endorsing particular linguistic resources (rules of inference governing a given descriptive vocabulary), hence she is positively evaluating the acceptance of a given linguistic framework (that very discursive framework in which the noun term ‘X’ occurs, in which the expression ‘X’ is meaningful).

In view of the above, combining together the metalinguistic and the expressive readings we have just proposed, we can reach a first conclusion. An external ontological claim, ‘Xs exist’ (or better ‘Xs *really* exist’), consists of both a representational and expressive content. Here the representational component is: ‘’X’ occurs in F’, where ‘X’ stands for a noun term (such as, for example, ‘substance’, ‘fact’, ‘structure’ and the like) and F stands for any implicit linguistic framework that allows making use of ‘X’. That is to say, ‘the noun term “X” should be used and applied, given the linguistic framework F’, or, which is the same, ‘we should adopt the term “X”, according to the relevant system of rules F’. Hence, by claiming the ontological expression ‘Xs *really* exist’, a speaker expresses the belief (true or false) that a certain implicit system of linguistic rules F licenses making use of the noun term ‘X’ in a meaningful way (and so that, given those rules, making use of those rules, it follows that the term ‘X’ refers). At the same

time, however, the speaker endorses F. What characterizes the expressive component of the evaluation is exactly the acceptance of F.[8]

This view is, in a sense, an application in meta-ontology of *hybrid* alternatives to classical expressivism, as currently carried out in metaethics, according to which a normative sentence (for example, a moral judgment) serves to express both a cognitive (doxastic) representational state, of the style of beliefs, and a non-cognitive (conative) mental state, of the style of desire-like the acceptance of a system of norms (Ridge 2006; Schroeder 2009; Strandberg 2012, 91; Fletcher 2014, 848). Without explicit mention of mental states, these hybrid versions can be treated as expressivist alternatives that argue that evaluations serve to communicate both representational and expressive information (Gutzmann 2016). As a result, these options do not deny that normative/evaluative utterances express propositions and can, therefore, be declared true or false. Rather, these positions are characterized by the idea that by making an evaluation we are not only expressing a proposition, but also expressing information that belongs to the field of expressive meaning, which has a different impact on what we want to communicate.

Many of these contemporary hybrid versions of expressivism (Chrisman 2007, 237; Field 2009, 252; Yalcin 2011, 329) stem from the work of Allan Gibbard. According to Gibbard (1990), normative/evaluative sentences (about what should be the case) express propositions in an extended sense: not just sets of possible worlds, but sets of norm-world pairs <n,w>. In particular, Gibbard (1986, 1990) proposes an analysis of judgments regarding rationality according to which they express complex mental states

[8] Note that the principal expressive role of external ontological claims, so understood, is non-descriptive. However, this is compatible with the fact that they also, in a certain sense, describe – albeit, as we will see better in Section 5, that can only be understood against the background of their expressive role, which is their principal use.

that are the result of both factual beliefs and non-cognitive attitudes of acceptance towards rules or norms. In his words:

> Thinking X rational is a combination of a normative state and a state of factual belief. It is accepting a system N of norms such that one believes the subject to be in circumstances for which N permits X. (Gibbard 1986, 479)

For instance, when we say that Marta's decision is rational, we are expressing:

- A cognitive (doxastic) mental state: the factual belief that Marta's decision is allowed by an implicit norm (or system of norms) N.
- A normative (noncognitive, conative) mental state: the acceptance of the implicit norm (or system of norms) N.

The acceptance of N is exactly what constitutes the expressive component of our evaluation: to call something rational, Gibbard (1990, 153) claims, '[i]s to express one's acceptance of a system of norms that permits it'.

4. Ontological Debates

Against that background, we can account for the intuition of cross-framework opposition by claiming that the speakers are expressing pragmatically opposed states of norm acceptance,[9] rather than logically contradictory descriptive beliefs.[10] What is most interesting about disagreements of this kind, however, is that they are not going to be resolved in the way factual disagreements about belief are resolved: namely, throwing more and more arguments and evidence. They are, so to speak, immune to appeals to

[9] Here we intend 'pragmatics' broadly, to pick out systematic theories of the use of language, rather than more narrowly as addressing issues having to do with convenience of communication (as in Grice [1989]), effects of context on interpretation and so on.

[10] We take it that evaluative attitudes are incompatible if they are non-cotenable in MacFarlane's (2014, 121) sense.

wordly facts. So understood, ontological disputes are neither merely verbal (disputants are not to be taken as talking past each other),[11] nor straightforwardly factual, but rather 'non-straightforwardly factual' (Field 2009). That is, they turn out to be instances of a peculiar kind of 'faultless disagreement' (Kölbel 2004), which is possible to characterize as a sort of disagreement concerning evaluations. And this might account for the infinite and endless character of some ontological debates. In this way, we gain the resources to explain why the differences seem intractable, while neither resolving them nor dismissing their importance.

But, can we be so radically divergent in our ontological external claims? In general, we think disagreement is a dynamic, fluid phenomenon, in which the scope and the nature of a disagreement can change over the course of a discussion. This also applies to the present case. In fact, the disputants engaged in an ontological debate of such a kind can be easily imagined as starting to discuss what *really* exists (hence, according to with our proposal, whether or not to make use of a certain noun term) and ending up discussing frameworks directly, and so what started as an ontological debate turns into a debate about which linguistic framework to adopt. In this way, in the event that parties made their normative statements about which semantic rules to adopt explicit (assuming that it is possible) the disagreement would probably turn into an instance of the so-called 'deep disagreement'. A deep disagreement, broadly understood, is a disagreement over normative principles, in which contenders explicitly discuss what should be the relevant

[11] At most, according to the picture currently being defended, they could also be understood, in a certain liberal sense, as what Plunkett and Sundell (2013) have called 'metalinguistic negotiations' (although here parties in the debate are not metalinguistically negotiating how ought the relevant piece of language to be used, but rather whether the relevant piece of language is to be used at all). See also Thomasson 2016.

rule or norm to endorse in a given context (Torices, n.d.).[12] In our particular case, the norms in question are linguistic norms (frameworks), so that the disagreement will concern which semantic rules are better suited to be employed.

But, 'if deep disagreements can arise what rational procedures can be used for their resolution? The drift of this discussion leads to the answer NONE' (Fogelin 1985, 6).[13] Here, 'rational' presumably appeals to a reason for thinking that some normative principle is true. In fact, deep disagreements are rationally irresolvable precisely because there are no objectively true normative principles. The same holds for deep disagreement over linguistic frameworks, over which semantic rules to employ. Since there are no objectively true linguistic frameworks, they are rationally irresolvable. Or better, it is perhaps possible to consider, in a certain sense, objectively true the semantic rules in force in practice, but remember that we are analyzing cases, the external ontological claims (which are raised outside any linguistic practice), in which the actual linguistic practice is assumed to play no role; that is, cases in which the way the actual linguistic practice works cannot be adduced as a reason.

Moreover, since there is no such thing as *the true linguistic framework*, none of them has to be conceived as more correct than any other. Or better, since speaking of correctness here does not apply at all, then it is applied in the same way to any linguistic framework. This means that the criterion by which one language is preferable can no longer invoke any sort of *correctness*. But this does not mean that the frameworks are all equally good. Definitely, some languages may be better than others. However,

[12] Traditionally, however, deep disagreement was more narrowly defined: in particular, Lynch (2010, 263) characterizes deep disagreement as a disagreement over epistemic principles, where an epistemic principle is 'a normative principle to the effect that some source or way of forming beliefs has some valuable epistemic status.'

[13] It must be noticed that what Fogelin calls 'deep disagreements' are conflicts between Wittgenstenian hinge propositions or, in Putnam's words, framework propositions (1985, 5-6). For a characterization of deep disagreement as a disagreement that involves hinge propositions, see also Pritchard (2018).

judgements that compare frameworks are themselves, in turn, normative. That is, they can only be made from norms. Or better, judgements of betterness themselves must be understood as involving a hidden relativity to a norm. And again, we do not need to accept, and probably should not accept, that a norm is the best one, that is, the Norm.[14]

Anyway, a reason for thinking that some norms are true is an epistemic reason. Since we have conceded that no linguistic framework is the objectively true one, the dispute cannot be resolved by appealing to epistemic reasons. After all, the root issue at the heart of a deep disagreement is the question of which norms we ought to employ (just as the underlying issue in the present case is the question of which grammatical rules we ought to employ). This problem is distinct from the question of which norms we acknowledge to be true. Accordingly, an obvious alternative is appealing to practical reasons. Although the choice between two linguistic norms (or norms in general) is not a matter of objective truth, there can be considerable practical advantages to the choice of one norm over the other. The choice will, in turn, be justified relative to practical norms, so that the adoption of a framework with respect to another has such and such advantages. Debates over frameworks consist in pointing out such comparative advantages. In this way, the criteria by which one language is preferable to another can no longer invoke any sort of *correctness*. The criteria for choosing a language can only be practical. In a nutshell, what we suggest is to reframe the problem of whether employing one set of linguistic norms (framework) over another as a practical matter.

Practical issues may be involved in determining, for instance, which language is better for a given purpose (or set of purposes) and which response should be chosen will depend on one's stance about the overall aim of the ontological inquiry under

[14] For a defense of such a non-factualist view, see Gibbard (2003) and Field (2009; 2018, 14).

discussion.[15] Definitely some languages may be better than others for various purposes, therefore the rules we adopt need not be arbitrary, given our purposes, since some rules may serve those purposes better than others.[16]

This does not mean, however, that theoretical issues cannot also be involved in determining which language is better for a given purpose (or set of purposes). The decision to accept a language is usually influenced by theoretical knowledge, just like any other deliberate decision concerning the acceptance of linguistic or other rules. That is, even though the question of which linguistic frameworks we should adopt is a practical question, it may also be influenced by theoretical considerations (e.g. parsimony, simplicity, fruitfulness, efficiency, etc.). As Carnap (1956, 208) himself acknowledges, in the acceptance of a linguistic framework, '[t]he efficiency, fruitfulness, and simplicity of the use of the thing language may be among the decisive factors. And the questions concerning these qualities are indeed of a theoretical nature'. But these are considerations that make it advisable to accept the relevant tacitly proposed linguistic rules, '[n]ot virtues that give us evidence that the metaphysical view is true' (208).

Anyway, which factors are relevant for the decision will be determined by the practical goals and aims for which the language is intended to be used. But here is a further complication in this regard. Given a practical goal, the competing parties involved in a (deep) disagreement about which linguistic rules to adopt may express the acceptance of different theoretical virtues as the standards they endorse in making their respective evaluations. And, in such a case, there may not be some broader theoretical grounds that

[15] For the purposes of this paper, the question about what could actually be the overall aims of an ontological inquiry can be left open.

[16] Of course, noting the potential interest relativity of eligibility does not license an anything-goes relativism.

can justify their choices. Yet, there may be cases in which contenders share a common theoretical background, consisting of a shared system of relevant theoretical virtues that they both endorse. In such a circumstance, however, they may subscribe to different rankings of those theoretical features, which establish privileges between principles. As follows, they favor different views relative to the particular rankings of theoretical virtues they endorse. Such considerations will specify which theoretical features should be valued the most and which theoretical virtues should have priority: for instance, parsimony, simplicity or adequacy to intuitions. That is, each participant to the debate may set priorities among theoretical features and virtues differently. Each disputant thus, evaluating some linguistic rules differently, expresses her acceptance of a different ranking of theoretical virtues, as the implicit norm she endorses. Each position therefore endorses a norm of its own because it prioritizes different theoretical features. They do not differ substantially in the broader system of theoretical features and virtues they are adopting, but they order them differently. And, of course, since none of these rankings is truth-conducive, no perspective can be deemed as the best one. Just to give an example, some scholars involved in an ontological debate of that sort may give prominence to ideological simplicity, as universalists do; others may prioritize ontological parsimony, as nihilists do; still others may privilege adherence to common sense and folk-intuitions, as commonsensicalists do.[17]

To sum up, external ontological questions about what *really* exists (whether substances, facts, structures or whatever) should be sensibly understood as questions about what we should do: 'Practical questions about whether we should make use of the linguistic forms in question' (Carnap 1956, 208). Throughout the course of the

[17] See Belleri (2017) on this subject.

discussion, however, the ontologist's question may easily turn to a question about the advisability of adopting a certain system of linguistic norms (framework) over others, so that the discussion will, in turn, focus on practical considerations about which language as a whole one should choose according to some practical goals.

5. Mentalism?

The previous sections have made clear that we are proposing an expressivist account of external questions and claims; nevertheless, the label 'Expressivism' covers a variety of both non-descriptive and non-representationalist approaches to the meaning of some linguistic terms and the sentences on which they appear as an ingredient.[18] They are non-representationalist since they don't assume that there must be a relation of representation between every word of language and the world, and they are non-descriptivist since they don't assume that the only function of a declarative sentence is to match wordly facts or describe how things are in the world.[19] The basic idea is that it is not a necessary condition for a sentence to be meaningful that every term forming part of the uttered sentence must refer to something in the world – an object or a property. Therefore, the key feature of expressivist approaches is what could be called the pragmatic turn:[20] in order to explain the meaning of nondescriptive sentences, instead of asking how the world must be for them to be true (or false) and consequently

[18] For an overview of the spectrum and applications of expressivist approaches, see Sinclair (2009) and Frápolli and Villanueva (2018, 3–4).

[19] Although representationalism and descriptivism are correlated or intermixed in the explanation of meaning, they are quite different. Representationalism is a metasemantic thesis; that is, representationalism explains in virtue of what language is meaningful, while descriptivism is a thesis about what we do with language.

[20] Gibbard (1990, 92; 2003, 6–7, 75) calls this strategy the oblique strategy, which consists not in giving truth conditions for normative sentences, but instead in telling what state of mind they express. We will explain ahead in what sense we are talking about expressing a state of mind in non-psychological or mentalist terms.

meaningful, the expressivists' starting point is to ask how or for what they are used and then explain their meaning in virtue of how they are used. Our aim then has been to apply this pragmatic turn to external questions and claims to explain, *pace* Carnap, why and how they are meaningful by explaining how or for what external questions and claims they are used.

However, expressivism has had the misfortune of usually been understood (both by its critics and its advocates) as a mentalist approach to the meaning of claims. Considering this, it is worth clarifying why we are not mentalists with respect to meaning. We will consider Schroeder's criticism of expressivism as a paradigmatic case of a mentalist conception of expressivism. Schroeder argues that since expressivism is committed to the thesis – which he labels as the *parity* thesis[21] – that 'normative sentences bear the same "expression" relation to non-cognitive attitudes that ordinary descriptive sentences bear to beliefs' (Schroeder 2008b, 88), and since '[m]entalism is the view that descriptive language gets its content from the contents of corresponding mental states – beliefs' (Schroeder 2008a, 24), it follows that expressivism is mentalism.[22]

5.1 Schroeder's challenge

If Schroeder is right about expressivism, then it would follow that we are proposing a mentalist or internalist approach to the meaning of external ontological claims. And this would be so because, if they express mental states of norm acceptance, then their meaning has to be understood in terms of such non-cognitive mental states those claims

[21] The parity thesis makes a generalization about how declarative sentences – both descriptive and non-descriptive – work. They serve to express mental states; the difference is on the mental state they express: descriptive sentences express belief whereas normative or non-descriptive sentences express non-cognitive or desire-like mental states.

[22] The classical example of a mentalist theory of meaning is Locke's theory of ideas. Grice's (1989) notion of speaker-meaning, according to which non-natural or conventional meaning is determined by speaker's intentions, is a recent example.

are supposed to express. That, though, would be bad news for our proposal because it would entail that expressivism – in general, and our proposal in particular–is committed to a psychological semantics rather than truth-conditional semantics inasmuch as it relates sentences to mental states rather than sentences to propositions, as standard truth-conditional semantics do.

Accordingly, if our proposal were mentalist, then we would have to say at the semantic level that the meaning of the relevant linguistic expressions is equivalent to certain speaker's psychological phenomena like ideas, images and intentions. But that is not our contention. Our contention is that although we consider, *pace* classic expressivists like Ayer (1946), that evaluative use of some terms are meaningful, they don't reduce to mental states as Schroeder argues.

Thus, to explain why, although we embrace expressivism we are nonmentalists, we must first clarify what *'expressing a state of mind'* means. For that, we will appeal to Gibbard, who, as we have already mentioned, has been one of the main advocates of contemporary expressivist approaches. According to him, 'to express a state of mind [...] is to purport to have it, whether or not one does' (Gibbard 2003, 77). In light of this quote, we contend that expressing a state of mind through an assertion does not imply, as a supporter of a mentalist conception of expressivism would state, that a speaker who makes the assertion is in that particular state of mind, nor that she is speaking (directly or indirectly) of that very state of mind to which she has a privileged access and which causes her utterance. Yet, that sounded like a negative explanation, which, while useful, can be supplemented with a positive one. Here is one given by Sinclair.

According to him, expressing a state of mind

> […]is to take up a public argumentative position with respect that state: to be prepared to defend that state and to advertise this preparedness [. . .] on this view, the particular territory defended is

> *determined inferentially*, by what counts as evidence in favor of one's stance and what counts as agreement or disagreement. (Sinclair 2009, 142, our italics)

Now, we can summarize these two answers and state that 'expressing a state of mind' means expressing certain inferential relations between what a speaker is committed to and what is incompatible with what she has stated; alternatively, to publicly commit to defending such commitments. It is just about the commitments that can be attributed to a speaker, not about what is happening inside her head.

5.2 Expressivism as meta-semantics

So far, we have clarified why we are non-mentalist with respect to meaning. Now, it is time to clarify in what sense we claim that expressivism is better understood as a meta-semantic project.[23] We propose this approach to expressivism because we consider that the target of an expressivist account is certain speech acts, namely the statements made by speakers and because we consider that the *meaning of normative expressions* is determined neither by what they refer to or represent nor by (internal) mental states they serve to express. Instead, we maintain that their *conventionally assigned role* (that is, their meaning) is the upshot of our communicative, hence social, practices, which are regulated by systems of norms, rules or standards[24] that are in force when a linguistic expression is used. In the case of normative sentences, their meaning consists in how

[23] The idea that expressivism is better understood as a meta-semantic project has been recently proposed and defended by several authors and in several ways: see for example Ridge (2014); Chrisman (2014, 2012); Yalcin (2014); Köhler (2018). All these proposals have in common the refusal to identify and reduce the meaning of linguistic expressions to internal mental states, although they recognize that an abstract, not a psychological, notion of mental states is involved, somehow, in the explanation of how or in virtue of what linguistic expressions gets their meaning or content.

[24] However, we are not proposing nor defending an objective (Platonist) conception of norms, standards or rules according to which those are entities of some kind that are metaphysically and temporary previous to the meaning of linguistic expressions (Glüer and Wikforss 2018).

they are used for expressing commitments to act according to certain norms and standards which are in force in practice.

Applying such conception to the case of external ontological claims, we can conceive of them as a useful device that serves to manifest (practical) commitments to follow the system of linguistic rules that licenses making use of the terms in question. They are used to express commitments to adopt the framework within which the relevant terms are intelligible.[25]

For example, by claiming a traditional external ontological statement, such as 'Substances exist' (or 'Substances *really* exist'), we undertake the commitment to make use of the noun term 'substance', hence we express the commitment to adopt the linguistic framework within which that very piece of language applies and is meaningful (or in other words, we express the commitment to follow the system of linguistic rules that licenses making use of it). On the other hand, the skeptic about the existence of substances as the fundamental furniture of the universe would be undertaking the commitment to avoid making use of the noun term 'substance', hence she would be expressing the commitment to withhold from adopting the framework that allows making use of it.

Consequently, without bringing up mental states, an ontological dispute turns out to be a clash of opposed, and mutually incompatible, commitments regarding the usage of a specific linguistic resource and the adoption of the related discursive framework.

[25] To be sure, an account of ontological claims, taken externally, in terms of expression of commitments to the adoption of specific discursive frameworks has been put forward also by Robert Kraut (2016).

6. Some Possible Objections

Before we conclude let us consider two possible objections which might be raised to our proposal.[26]

First, according to Kripke's (1982) *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* what we have called the cognitive content (descriptive component), that a certain action accords with a given rule, is hardly characterizable as fully factual. Indeed, as Wittgenstein explicitly states, there is no fact of the matter at all able to ground that something accords to a rule. And that's because 'no course of action could be determined by a rule, because any course of action can be made out to accord with the rule' (Wittgenstein 1958, 81). As a result, what we have pointed out is just another normative or evaluative claim.

Here is our response. The cognitive content (descriptive component) makes the rule explicit. To say that a particular action is allowed by a rule is to say that commitments to that action are undertaken by a community (collectivity, collective agents) in a social practice (hence that such a rule is in force). The expression of the rule makes explicit the commitments implicitly undertaken (by a community) in a social practice within which that rule is in force. Moreover, by uttering a normative sentence the speaker expresses (makes explicit) also subjective commitments (evaluative component). However, subjective commitments should not be understood as commitments to act in any way whatsoever, rather they have to be understood as commitments to act in the same way as other members of that community do, in order to take part in the practice of that very community. Hence, the speaker implicitly accepts being sanctioned or rewarded by the

[26] The consideration of these two possible objections arose from the lively discussion we had during The 13th Conference of the Italian Society for Analytic Philosophy (SIFA), where we presented the first draft of this paper.

community in which the rule licensing the relevant action is in force, depending on whether or not her action conforms or not with that rule and, at the same time, she commits herself to sanctioning or rewarding any conduct that conflicts or conforms with that rule.

As a result, the present approach takes the objectivity of the rules of language to be defined by the horizon of the community of speakers who share the same normative space. In this way, it is possible to maintain that what we have called 'the cognitive content (descriptive component)' actually states a fact. Nevertheless, here 'fact' has to be understood in a deflationary fashion, not as the objective or heavyweight notion of 'fact of the matter'. That is to say, with the term 'fact' we do not refer to anything that justifies or grounds a practice, but simply as referring to that very practice. In a sense, this notion of 'fact' is quite close to Kripke's notion of 'brute fact', which he uses at the end of his criticisms of descriptivists' accounts of meaning. In his words:

> There is no objective fact – that we all mean addition by '+', or even that a given individual does – that explains our agreement in particular cases. Rather our license to say of each other that we mean addition by '+' is part of a 'language game' that sustains itself only because of the brute fact that we generally agree. (Kripke 1982, 97)

Second, if we accept that with an external claim we are expressing commitments to a certain action (the adoption of a given framework) and at the same time we embrace an inferentialist account of meaning, then in what sense do such commitments differ from the commitments we undertake when we utter a descriptive claim?

Very roughly, we can answer this question by making a distinction between two different sorts of commitments: the theoretical commitments that we undertake in making descriptive claims (that is, commitments to other descriptive claims or to accept other descriptive claims), and the practical commitments that we undertake in making

evaluative or normative claims (that is, commitments to endorse certain norms and therefore to perform certain actions allowed by those very norms).[27] The distinction between the two types of commitments, even if quite coarse-grained, rests ultimately in their being more or less directly connected to action. Thereby, with respect to ontological claims, we use the internal ones to undertake theoretical commitments and we use the external ones to express practical commitments: with the former, we undertake commitments to other descriptive claims, while with the latter we express commitments to the adoption of certain linguistic frameworks.

7. Concluding Remarks

In this article, our main concern has been to argue against the picture on which the proper subject of ontological investigation is existence in a privileged metaphysical sense – fundamental, or real, or deep, whatever it may be. We do not think the problems with that worldview subsist in the details but in the very project itself as it has been usually understood. In that we agree with Carnap that the inquiry of depicting the fundamental furniture of the universe (if substances, facts, structures or whatever) is out of order, since it is not addressing an intelligible question (understood as a theoretical or factual question); therefore there is no question to which it is the answer. Nevertheless, in contrast to what Carnap maintained, this in no way is an anti-metaphysical conclusion. Indeed, we hold, there must be a concern that it is possible to say, or to think, that something exists in the ontologist's external sense. This being so, the question, asked by her, 'What *really* exists?' is not meaningless. Our contention, on the basis of the preceding considerations, is that this is possible. In this way, the main

[27] In pointing out this distinction, we follow Chrisman (2010, 10).

theoretical gain of the proposal is the rehabilitation of the status of the claims entertained by ontologists and the competing positions in the ontological debates, as opposed to dismissing them. After all, what we have questioned are the traditionally meta-semantic assumptions about external ontological claims, underlying both representationalism and mentalism, insofar as representationalism explains linguistic meaning through the representative relationship between language and world (that which is represented and/or described), and mentalism explains linguistic meaning through the relationship between language and the content speaker's internal mental states.

Ultimately, in the picture currently being proposed, we have tried to defend two main theses: one about the semantics and one concerning the meta-semantics underlying ontological discourse.

- The semantic thesis: ontological external claims are not meaningless, albeit what they convey is better understood as fundamentally metalinguistic. In particular, as we have been at pains to show mainly in Section 3, what they convey is that the relevant terms in question occur in certain linguistic frameworks (their use and application is allowed by certain systems of linguistic rules; or in other words, certain systems of linguistic rules license and govern their use).

- The meta-semantic thesis: they have the meaning they have in virtue of expressing the acceptance of those very linguistic frameworks, which is how or for what they are used. Specifically, as we argued in Section 5, they express the acceptance of those frameworks by undertaking the (practical) commitments to adopt them. Accordingly, since we explain by virtue of what external ontological statements mean what they mean without appealing to any of the mental states inside the speaker's heads, but rather in terms of the (practical) commitments that the speakers undertake by claiming them, our

expressivist approach actually also avoids any mentalist or internalist account of their meaning.

The use of ontological statements, taken externally, may thus imply a distinctive sort of metalinguistic expressive function. Not the function of describing something in the world (or in our head), but of expressing commitments to the adoption of a certain linguistic framework (only within which describing is possible). What we have tried here to suggest is precisely to see them as an expression, at least in part, of our commitment to some specific set of norms or policies for belief formation.

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Scientific Models and Metalinguistic Negotiation

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore the possibility that at least some ontological dispute are better understood as what David Plunkett and Timothy Sundell have called 'metalinguistic negotiations'. I will take the debate between the dominant approaches of realism and anti-realism (especially fictionalism) about the ontological status of scientific models as a case-study. I will argue that such a debate is best seen as normatively motivated, insofar as a normative and non-factual question may be involved in it: how ought the relevant piece of language to be used? Even though I will generally assess the prospects for a broadly deflationist approach, I shall outline a sense in which such a dispute can be recast as 'minimally substantive'.

Keywords: scientific models, metalinguistic negotiation, conceptual ethics, ontological disputes.

1. Introduction

The general aim of this paper is to explore the possibility of conceiving the ontological dispute between realists and anti-realists about scientific models in terms of what David Plunkett and Tim Sundell (2013) have called 'metalinguistic negotiation'[1]. A useful first step in characterizing scientific models can be to distinguish between model descriptions (the kinds of descriptions appearing in scientific papers and textbooks) and model systems described (mass points, frictionless pendulums, perfect vacuums, perfectly spherical planets, perfectly rational agents, etc.). Model systems are given by model descriptions. When scientists introduce a model they use an identifying description, so what they display in scientific papers and textbooks when they present a

[1] Or, in Stojanovic's terms, 'forward-looking disagreement'(2011).

model are more or less stylized descriptions of the relevant model systems. In this way, they model a system or structure that they plan to build, by writing a description of it. For instance, scientists can introduce a model of the solar system describing planets as ideal spheres only having shape and mass (disregarding all other properties) and with a rotation-symmetric mass distribution orbiting around a big mass, or they can introduce a model of a population of breeding rabbits describing the population in the model as isolated from its environment and as reproducing at fixed intervals of time. Another example can be the model description describing a point mass bob bouncing on a perfectly elastic spring represents the real ball and spring system; or the liquid drop model of the atomic nucleus which portrays the nucleus as a liquid drop and describes it as having several properties (surface tension and charge, among others)

There is a variety of things that are commonly referred to as scientific models. Some model systems are straightforward physical objects (for instance, Watson and Crick's metal model of DNA and Phillips' hydraulic model of the economy), but many of them, maybe the majority, are not material at all (as there are no concrete perfectly spherical planets, frictionless pendulums, or perfectly rational agents). Therefore, in the latter cases, it seems there are no (concrete) objects that match the identifying descriptions we use to introduce them. Thomson-Jones (2010) calls them 'non-concrete models'. Non-concrete models (and the related descriptions) raised a thorny issue in ontology: what account should be given of these descriptions and what sort of objects, if any, do they describe? If we deny that are any entities which model descriptions refer to[2], then we are faced with the problem of explaining how we can have true statements involving non-referring terms. On the other hand, if we accept that non-concrete models exist and we take model descriptions at face value, we must explain what sort of things they are

[2] Thomson-Jones (2010, p. 284) defines them as 'descriptions of missing systems'

(non-existent Meinongian objects, merely possible objects, Platonist or artefactual abstracta, etc.) and what is literally true of them. Among the plenitude of different solutions put forward by anti-realists, one of the most promising seems to be the fictionalist account. According to fictionalists, model descriptions should be thought of as similar to stories, and model systems should be thought of as akin to fictional characters: as Nancy Cartwright puts it «A model is a work of fiction»[3].

In this paper I focused on the dispute between realists and fictionalists about the existence of scientific (non-concrete) models. My challenge here will not be to settle the dispute, but rather to offer an attempt at explaining why it is so persistent and yet worthwhile. My conclusion will be that such a dispute can be better understood as a case of what David Plunkett and Timothy Sundell have called 'metalinguistic negotiation' (2013). First of all, I will try to sum up the different standpoints of both parties involved in the debate, or at least some of the most influential ones. Then, I will argue that Plunkett and Sundell's considerations might be carried over to this debate. I will maintain that ontologists have no substantive grounds to choose one view or the other, so they are in a sense 'free' to choose between the competing standpoints for practical purposes. In spite of this, I shall finally explain in what sense the dispute can still be regarded as 'minimally substantive'.

2. **Realists**

Realists hold that there is something that scientific models correctly describe. Given the successful use of these devices, they claim that our *prima facie* commitment to entities described in models is justified. Yet, as already mentioned, in most cases there are no

[3] Cartwright 1983, p. 153.

concrete objects that possess the properties ascribed in models. The possible strategies advance by realists are roughly twofold: either to take model systems to be Meinongian nonexistent objects (Parsons 1980), or to conclude that they are abstract objects (Zalta 1983, Wolterstorff 1980) which in some sense have properties that fit the model descriptions.

The Meinongian approach to scientific models is parallel to the neo-Meinongian view of fictional character. According to them, the truth of sentences like "A perfect sphere of uniform mass density would produce a gravitational field of uniform magnitude at all points on its surface" must be taken literally. Here, the perfect sphere is taken to be a non-existent object: the non-existent object truly described in that sentence and which turn out to have all of the properties ascribed to it. The immediate consequence of this account is that it makes possible to quantify over entities that do not exist and to distinguish existence from quantification. A distinction, however, many philosophers claim to find incomprehensible[4]. Among others, Bertrand Russell famously stated: «Meinongian objects are apt to infringe the law of contradiction»[5]. Nevertheless, modern versions of Meinongianism made an effort to provide possible solutions. Terence Parsons (1980), for instance, tries to avoid contradictions by distinguishing two kinds of properties: *nuclear* properties ('length', 'period', etc.) and *extra-nuclear* properties ('existing', 'being possible', etc.). Object's nuclear properties are supposed to constitute the object's 'nature' (a non-existent objects may naturally possess the nuclear properties which are ascribed to it in the model), while extra-nuclear properties are supposed to be external to the object's nature (like 'existence'). The latter are properties that an object has outside the scope of the model in which it appears; in other words,

[4] In particular, see van Inwagen 2004, pp. 126-138.
[5] Russell 1905, p. 205.

properties that the object has in virtue of the way the world *really* is and not properties that it has in the given model.

Another view along similar lines takes models systems to be (existing) *abstract* objects of some sort. However, this approach also faces some problems. One difficulty of such an account is that it describes model systems as having properties that abstract entities cannot have. Indeed, abstract objects cannot be thought to literally have properties (like 'length' or 'period') commonly ascribed to model systems and it seems to be just a category mistake to think them as bearing those properties:

> […]The simple pendulum described in a model is said to have a certain length and to move through space over time in a certain way, but abstracta of course cannot do that. [6]

A move that was advanced to avoid the puzzle is to claim that abstract objects possess the properties ascribed to them in the model, but possess them in a 'special' way. Edward N. Zalta (1983) develops this idea distinguishing two modes of presentations: *encoding* and *exemplifying*. On Zalta's account, an abstract entity encodes all of those properties ascribed to it, but does not exemplify them. An Ideal pendulum, for instance, cannot exemplify a certain length and period, but it can encode them. Similarly, Héctor-Neri Castañeda (1989) appeals to the distinction between *internal* and *external* mode of predication of properties, while William J. Rapaport (1978) talks of properties that are *constituents* of objects and properties that are *exemplified* by them. Nicholas Wolterstorff's (1980) advocate a different standpoint. According to him, abstract entities are not objects of a certain kind, but *object-kinds*. Or better, authors when they construct scientific models delineate a certain kind of object by describing certain sets of characteristics. Therefore, the frictionless pendulum, for example, turns out to be not an object, but a certain kind of object, or *object-kind*. Finally, in a more

[6] Thomson-Jones 2010, p. 13.

radical way, Ronald Giere takes the objects described in model-descriptions, such as the linear harmonic oscillator, as «Abstract entities having all and only the properties ascribed to them in the standard texts»[7].

In sum, choosing one of the previous route, it could be possible, in principle, to avoid contradictions. Nonetheless, in any case, the original attractions of the realist account would be undermined, namely the idea that model descriptions can be straightforwardly compared (for isomorphism) with the real-world target systems[8]. In fact, embracing, for instance, Zalta's stategy, we end up to take the relevant abstracta to bear some other different kind of relation to their properties (encoding them), from the one borne by the target systems (exemplifying them).

3. **Anti-realists**

These difficulties of realism have led some to defend an opposite view about scientific models. According to anti-realists we are wrong to take statements about model systems literally, as genuine descriptions of certain (kind of) objects. They hold that some parts of the scientific enterprise do not correspond to anything in reality[9]. Among the plenitude of different prospects inside the anti-realist realm, let me first mention the 'paraphrase view' and 'the negative free logic view'. According to the former, following Russell (1905) and Ryle (1966), statements about model systems must be paraphrased in a way that avoids the apparent reference; that is to say, they must be paraphrased as talking about what is true 'according to the model description'. However, nominalistic paraphrases are often considered too cumbersome for everyday purposes, or for the purposes of the science. On the other hand, negative free logic

[7] Giere 1988, p.78.
[8] Thomson-Jones 2010, p. 15.
[9] Some, like van Fraassen (1980), would say that if by chance the abstract terms used by scientists did denote something real, we have no way of knowing it.

views, fallowing Sainsbury (2005) and Burge (1974) treat nonexistence claims involving the objects which model descriptions refer to as literally true, since they are considered simply the negations of existence claims that are false on account of reference failure. But they face a different problem, since, even though in many contexts such nonexistence claims seem true, in others they seem to be obviously false.

Anyway, to date, one of the most promising reaction to the realist account of scientific models is to adopt a so called 'pretense view', according to which we do not need to posit any kind of objects at all, but we just pretend that there are. We do not need to think of statements about model systems literally, as accurate descriptions of a certain (kind of) object, instead we should take such statements as props in games of make-believe. In short, model systems usually are presented to us by way of descriptions and such «[…] model descriptions should be understood as props in games of make-believe»[10]. In particular, Frigg (2010a, 2010b) applies Walton's theory of fiction to scientific models. Walton (1990, chap.2) maintains that, when we read a fictional text, we are supposed to imagine things according to certain rules. In the same way, Frigg treats scientific models as imaginary creations. As «[…] fictional propositions are ones for which there is a prescription to the effect that they have to be imagined»[11], model descriptions must be taken as prescriptions to imagine that there are certain objects with the relevant properties:

> It is fictional that the model system has these properties, roughly, if the model-description, together with the appropriate rules of generation, enjoins us to imagine that there is a system that has these properties.[12]

[10] Frigg 2010a, p. 260.
[11] Walton 1990, p. 39.
[12] Frigg 2010c, p. 268.

Therefore, as well as Walton's renounces the postulation of fictional entities, a theory of scientific modeling based on this account is free of ontological commitments to any Meinongian or abstract objects, and so there is no ontology of them to give[13]. In conclusion, on Frigg's proposal, scientific models turn out to be ontologically like works of fiction: model descriptions give rise to model systems, which are «Akin to characters and places in literary fiction»[14]. For example, when a model description reports that "An ideal tuning fork vibrates at just one frequency", it is not describing a concrete object (the ideal tuning fork) that does not exist, nor it is committed to the existence of an abstract object as having properties it could not have (a vibration). Instead, according to the pretense view, the model-description of the ideal tuning fork serves as a prop in a game in which we have to imagine that there is a concrete object, which vibrates at just one frequency.

However, attempts at treating scientific models as work of fiction present at least two sorts of worries. Firstly, Frigg treats all discourses about scientific models as implicitly involving games of pretense. Not just the 'internal' discourse about the objects as described in the model (for instance, when we say**:** "*A point-mass has no dimension*"), but also 'external' ones in which we seem to refer, without pretense, to model systems themselves (critical and historical claims; for instance, when we say: "A model of DNA was proposed by Watson and Crick's in 1953")[15]. But a more difficult task is to explain

[13] Frigg 2010a, p. 264.

[14] Frigg 2010b, p. 100.

[15] In this respect, a possible alternative is the so called 'artifactualist' view: an hybrid position according to which model systems are abstract objects created by scientists, mind-dependent social and cultural objects such as laws and nations, stories and symphonies. The key point of the artifactualist approach is to allow that in external discourse we may refer to model systems and say true things about them (for further discussions about artifactualist views of fiction, see especially: Kripke 2013, Searle 1979, Salmon 1998, Stephen Schiffer 1996, Thomasson 2010).

how model systems can represent target systems in the world if, as fictionalists apparently hold, there are no model systems. Toon makes this point clear:

> If we were to understand model-systems in the same way that Walton understands fictional characters then it seems that we would conclude that there are no model systems. […]If there are no model-systems then there can be no facts about them and we cannot establish an object-to-object [representation] relation between model-systems and the world.[16]

Frigg attempted to handle this difficulty by suggesting that we analyze 'transfictional' statements (the statements which compare the model systems with the target system) as comparisons of properties, which are unproblematic[17]. For example, saying that some actual rabbit population behaves like a population in a model, we are taking the fiction to have certain properties which can be compared to the properties of a real rabbit population. But, as Godfrey-Smith promptly replied,

> It is not clear that giving an explanation of modeling in terms of un-instantiated properties is more down-to-earth than giving one in terms of non-existent objects.[18]

4. **Metalinguistic Negotiation and Conceptual Ethics**

So, what is the moral? The moral here is not that such views cannot be made coherent: as I tried to briefly show, they perhaps can be, in a way or another. Instead, the moral is that difficulties in ways we think and talk about scientific models are easily resolved neither by holding that there nor by holding that there are not description-fitting objects. At least in some metaphysical disputes, we have enough (theoretical) justifications for believing either side, so it is not clear at all that we can ever find grounds for settling them. The same goes for the ontological debate over scientific models. Consider some odd features of metaphysical disputes in general:

[16] Toon 2012, p. 58.
[17] Frigg 2010a, p. 263.
[18] Godfrey-Smith 2009, p. 114.

- They are typically not resolvable by empirical means.
- Disputants deny they could resolve them even if work in linguistics or lexicography showed definitively how the relevant terms are used in our community.
- Disputants are not simply interpreted as talking past each other.

These odd features are also the hallmarks of what David Plunkett and Tim Sundell (2013) have called 'metalinguistic negotiations' (albeit their target was not meta-ontology, but meta-ethics). Debates understood as metalinguistic negotiations are debates that concern a distinctive normative question: how best to use the relevant terms relative to the context at hand. They are «Debates that involve negotiating the appropriate use of a piece of language»[19] and that reflect disagreements about how (or whether) those very terms ought to or should be used in a given context. Following Stajanovic, perhaps this may also be characterized as a special case of faultless disagreement[20], a so called 'forward-looking disagreement':

> Now, a further suggestion that I have advanced is that the two parties' claims are not to be viewed so much as truth - apt claims, but rather, as proposals to how to extend the future uses of the concept under debate.[21]

We can sum up some hallmarks[22] of metalinguistic negotiations which make them particularly persistent and hard to resolve as follows:

[19] Plunkett and Sundell 2013, p. 15.
[20] Take as faultless disagreement, roughly those in which (i) the two parties truly disagree, (ii) they are both right (from their own perspectives), and (iii) they both believe that the other is wrong.
[21] Stajanovic 2011, p. 13.
[22] Plunkett and Sundell 2013, p. 3; Plunkett 2015, p. 847.

1. The disagreements cannot be resolved just by adding empirical information. They do not go away even if the disputants agree on all 'facts', nor any further discoveries might resolve things one way or the other

2. They do not go away even if disputants recognize that they are using the relevant terms in different way.

3. They do not go away even if the disputants agree about how the word is *actually* used.

It is important to notice that the extent of the relevant negotiations involved vary greatly. Metalinguistic negotiations are not confined to gradable adjectives or other context-sensitive expressions, but they can even concern words that are seemingly quite fixed in their meaning. They may simply involve pressing for one way of precisifying a vague term (or a term that is indeterminate in some of its areas of application), or involve advocating more substantial changes in the ways a term is to be used (or whether it is to be used at all).

Consider, for instance, the case originally introduced by Peter Ludlow in his paper *Cheap Contextualism*[23]: a radio debate about the status of racehorse Secretariat as an athlete. The debate concerned a list of the greatest athletes of the 20th century, and the question of whether that list should include the racehorse Secretariat. Simplifying, we can imagine one of the contenders to claim: «Secretariat is an athlete» and the other to reply: «Secretariat is not an athlete». Or, borrowing an example from Stojanovic (2011), suppose that Didi and Naomi are debating whether to hire Khaled. Didi says, «Khaled has a strong publication record, with over 20 publications» and Naomi replies, «Oh no, he has less than 20 publications»:

[23] Ludlow 2008; Plunkett and Sundell 2013, p. 16.

> Then their disagreement turns precisely on the question of what one ought to count as a publication. To put it differently, whether an online conference working paper should or shouldn't fall in its extension. Given this indeterminacy, a practical issue will arise for Didi and Naomi (and, more generally, for their academic community) to decide whether or not to extend the concept of 'publication' in such a way as to include among its instances a certain kind of "new" objects, namely, online conference working papers, or not.[24]

Note that unlike the cases of metalinguistic sharpening involving gradable adjectives, there is little reason to think that the relevant linguistic expressions here (‘athlete’ and ‘publication’) are semantically context-sensitive. Moreover, in these two examples, there is little reason to think that the disputes concern straightforward factual matters about the topics at hand. The speakers mutually know all of the facts about Secretariat’s speed, strength, etc., and what races, awards, metals he won, etc., and in the same way, Didi and Noemi know all about Khaled’s academic history. Instead, these disputes are best seen at the pragmatic level as being metalinguistic negotiations; that is to say, disputes about which of the senses of ‘athlete’ and ‘publication’ are best to use.

The exchange between realists and fictionalists about the existence of scientific models may be understood in a similar way. If we take the meaning of a word to be the concept it expresses in a context, such a kind of dispute reflects a disagreement about which among some set of competing concepts should be used in the context at hand. Therefore, on the assumption that the given exchange is a metalinguistic negotiation, the immediate topic of disagreement in that exchange turns out to be one in ‘conceptual ethics’. Burgess and Plunkett introduce the idea as follows:

> These normative questions about thought and talk — how should we use our words? which concepts should we use? how should we use them? — are questions in what we will call *conceptual ethics.*[25]

[24] Stojanovic 2011, p. 12.
[25] Burgess and Plunkett 2013a, p. 1091.

Fictionalism can be helpfully undestood as a position in conceptual ethics insofar as fictionalists advocate the distinctly normative view that we ought to use the relevant concept(s) within the scope of some sort of pretense. We can distinguish two sorts of questions in conceptual ethics:

i. Should we use a given concept?

ii. And if so, how should we use it exactly?

Unlike eliminativists, fictionalists answer the first question affirmatively; but unlike realists, they invoke a kind of make-believe to answer the second**.** Even if, according to them, there are not any objects which scientific models refer to, there may still be good reasons to continue thinking and talking 'as if' there were. Fictionalism is usually motivated by the desire to strike a compromise between the theoretical value of representing the world correctly and the practical value of exploiting whatever conceptual resources help us get by.[26]

However, in order to interpret model talk as implicitly in the context of such a pretense, a sort of revisionary work seems to be needed: revisions to the face-value understanding of discourses about model systems. As stated by Toon:

> When scientists appear to talk about theoretical models as objects […] we *should not* take this talk too seriously.[27]

Therefore, in order to avoid endorsing what they consider false or defective thoughts, fictionalists construe (or suggest to construe) discourses about models as falling within the scope of an (high-order, intensional) operator like: 'imagine', 'assume', or 'consider', to the effect of remarking that they are not literally true. Indeed, in Wolton's words, «[…]fictional propositions are ones for which there is a prescription to the effect

[26] *Ibid*., p. 1103.
[27] Toon 2012, pp. 131-2

that they have to be imagined»[28], prescriptions to imagine that there are certain objects with the relevant properties. Adding qualifications to what would otherwise be an assertion (or a series of assertions), which have the effect of cancelling the assertoric force, fictionalists get exactly the revisions that are needed to treat such discourses pretensefully. In this way, they try to give readings that do not threaten «To force mysterious entities on us»[29], engaging in «Voodoo metaphysics»[30].

5. **Ontological Debates**

While it seems plausible to apply metalinguistic negotiation to at least some classical debates in metaphysics[31], it might nonetheless be questioned whether also ontological debates can be understood in such a way[32]. A possible answer is to consider philosophical debates about existence as reflecting disagreements not about *how* the term should be used, but rather about *whether* the term should be used at all. In this respect, Burgess and Plunkett suggest that «[…]certain forms of eliminativism can be understood as the position that we ought to stop using a given term or concept»[33]. Thus, for instance, some eliminativists about numbers might be seen as suggesting not to think numbers in the realm of things. Similarly, at least in in some cases, fictionalists may be seen as suggesting to revise a concept by changing or removing certain associations or even conceptual/inferential roles. Indeed, fictionalists, taking the position that we ought to use a set of terms within the scope of a pretense, might be seen as suggesting to stop

[28] Walton 1990, p. 39
[29] *Ibid*., p.416
[30] *Ibid*., p. 385.
[31] See, for instance, Belleri (2017) for a way of understanding the debate between endurantists and perdurantists as a case of metalinguistic negotiation. Plunkett (2015, p. 842) also argues that «Some (perhaps many) philosophical disputes are metalinguistic negotiations» (2015, p. 853), focusing on questions of ground, supervenience, and real definition rather than the existence questions.
[32] As ontological debates, I take into account here the philosophical debates about existence that are typically thought not to be 'settled' even when the disputing parties agree about the empirical facts.
[33] Burgess and Plunkett 2013b, p. 1103.

thinking of models in the realm of things, so that some aspect of their conceptual/inferential role has to go.

But, can this account also apply to the dispute between realists and fictionalists about the existence of scientific models? In principle, such a debate cannot be resolved neither through empirical work (by appealing to facts or evidence of any kind), nor using standard analytic/conceptual methods (such as mathematical reasoning and proof) [34]. Accordingly, a first attempt can be to conceive it as a 'verbal dispute'[35]: fictionalists as taking discourses about models inside the scope of a pretense, so as falling within the scope of an (intentional, high-order) operator (like 'imagine', 'assume', 'consider") and realists, on the contrary, as taking them at face value, so literally true without the need to have such operators on board. However, since scientists use indiscriminately both linguistic forms and scientific practice appears not to support one over the other, it turns out to be quite indeterminate which of the two linguistic resources is the correct one. As a result, differing ways of talking about scientific models should not be taken as expressing genuine conflict.

The alternative is therefore to understand the fictionalist's ontological claim ("The objects described in scientific models do not exist, they are just fictional objects") and the realist's claim ("The objects described in models exist—in some form") as normative claims, i.e. as proposals to adopt one linguistic form or the other, hence as proposals of how we should talk about models (whether within the scope of a pretense operator or not). Specifically, they do so in a metalinguistic way: not describing one use rather than the other, but directly illustrating them. For example, the fictionalist uttering:

[34] For instance, questions about the existence of prime numbers between twenty and thirty may be resolved appealing to Euclid's Theorem that there are infinitely many prime numbers.

[35] For other definitions of verbal dispute, which I will not discuss here, see Jenkins (2014) and Chalmers (2011).

"Imagine a mathematical pendulum to have a certain length and to move through space over time in a certain way...", and the realist: "The mathematical pendulum of a certain length moves through space over time in a certain way...". These sentences must be taken as illustrative examples which pick out linguistic rules[36], as paradigms or paradigmatic applications of how to use words.

In this way, even though realists' and fictionalists' claims about the existence of scientific models seem to express ontological commitment to reality being a particular way, they turn out to express practical commitments to the adoption of some linguistic forms or others.[37] Indeed, the use of their ontological statements may imply a distinctive kind of metalinguistic expressive function.[38] Not the function of stating facts or describing something in the world, but rather that of expressing commitments to use the terms at hand in certain ways. The expressive function characteristic of their ontological statements is to make explicit such commitments. Along these lines, what they are doing in making ontological claims (the realist claiming "The mathematical pendulum exists" and the fictionalist claiming "The mathematical pendulum does not exist, but let imagine that exists") is endorsing linguistic rules that allows words to be used in specific ways. So understood, their statements differ fundamentally from straightforward descriptions of reality. They turn out to be prescriptive statements, rather than descriptive ones that commit speakers to a way reality is. In this sense, expressing the acceptance of a certain linguistic rule, each disputant in the debate

[36] Roughly, by 'linguistic rules' I mean both semantic and syntactic rules.

[37] Nevertheless, on this view, commitments articulated by their statements are not practical commitments in the traditional sense of being a commitment to act (moving our bodies towards some end) in accord with some prescriptions. Rather they are commitments to speaking (and consequently, thinking and reasoning) in some ways. Therefore the commitment expressed by one who uses a statement of that sort is not conceived, in the first instance, as an ontological commitment to the way reality is, but rather a commitment to think and reason in a particular way.

[38] Thanks to an anonymous referee for drawing me out on this issue.

advocates and defends her adoption and presses the other party to adopt the same linguistic rule.

But, on what grounds can we advocate changes in the way our terms or concepts ought to be used? The point I wish to outline here is precisely that such changes in the ways the relevant terms are to be used (or which concepts we ought to use) are often advanced not in the light of metaphysical discoveries, but rather on practical grounds. That is to say, the grounds for pressing one view or another are, after all, practical. According to the circumstances, by choosing one linguistic form or another may help scientists better describe the model in question and, as a result, better express their scientific theories and reason through their consequences. 'Better' in each case presumably means better in terms of greater clarity, precision, avoidance of difficulties (better on practical grounds). Moreover, appeals may be made to practical advantages in simplifying calculations and predictions in the model, or just in simplifying the description and presentation of the model itself. For instance, using the relevant terms not within the scope of a pretense aids scientists in describing models in a concise way and to avoid the cumbersomeness of scientific explanation and prediction if we attempt to use the relevant terms within the scope of a pretense. By speaking literally of a mass point (a body with nonzero mass and with zero volume) or a mathematical pendulum, rather than just speaking within the scope of a pretense, researchers might enhance, for example, their ability to describe model and formulate explanations in terms of simplicity.

On the other hand, the use of fictional/pretenseful discourse for terms like 'point mass' or 'mathematical pendulum' (that enables us to say we are merely pretending that there are point mass and mathematical pendulum) may serve to suggest and highlight

important disanalogies between those terms and theoretical terms[39] like 'strings' or 'gravitons'. That is to say, in some circumstances, scientists may find it useful, for the sake of clarity or in order to offer a fine-grained description, to differentiate the former notions (which are idealisations that cannot be physically instantiated in reality), from terms that serve to track or posit theoretical entities that run empirical risk of failure. For even if we think of terms introduced by a theory to play an explanatory role as terms that might turn out to fail to refer, the same does not need to go through for terms introduced by scientific models that are 'physically' impossible and that were never supposed to serve any kind of tracking or positing 'physical' entities that might turn out to fail because of some empirical mistake. Pretending, one may take relevant terms in a model description functioning quite differently from terms for concreta (both observable and theoretical ones), since in the former there is no empirical presupposition that might turn out to fail[40].

But at any rate, such considerations must be handled on a case-by-case basis. Depending on what is important and what is not for a given purpose (but also depending on the shared background knowledge of the participants in the communication), scientists may shift the focus of attention. By communicating information in a certain way they make clear what is important and what is supposed to be correctable. In short, to choose one way of speaking or the other could be taken as a stipulative enterprise in which the parties aim to decide how the relevant terms in a model description ought to be used, given certain practical interests or purposes.

[39] Theoretical terms are terms that refer to the unobservable entities that scientific theories posit to explain or predict empirical results and which have empirical existence presuppositions. Inaccessible to experience, their claim to conviction derives from the acceptability of the theories in which they figure. Examples of theoretical entities are normally thought to be electrons, fields, and genes, but also entities advanced by theories at the frontiers of physics whose concrete existence is still uncertain, such as strings and gravitons.

[40] 'Vulcan' or 'Phlogiston' are classical examples of empirical presuppositions that turned out to fail.

As a consequence, in the event that parties made their normative statements explicit (the fictionalist explicitly claiming "We should adopt the linguistic rule that allows us to use model descriptions inside a pretense operator" and the realist claiming: "We should not, instead we should take them at face value") the disagreement would soon turn into an instance of 'deep disagreement'[41], namely disagreement over norms (in our case, over linguistic rules). However, which rule to adopt is also a normative issue. Since, as already mentioned, neither of the two rules is unambiguously grounded in scientific practice, neither rule can be deemed as the correct one. Considerations given above, after all, already suggest that the underlying issue is not a matter of what we know or do not know, but of what we should or shouldn't do. It is not a matter of trying to justify our linguistic principles, it is a matter of trying to justify our actions—our employment of a linguistic rule over another.

The root issue at the heart of a deep disagreement is the question of which (linguistic) rules we ought to employ. This problem is distinct from the question of whether it is true that they are. Moreover, it is a not a problem that will be resolved by appealing to epistemic reasons. Deep disagreements are rationally irresolvable and the best explanation for why they are rationally irresolvable is that there are no objectively true linguistic rules.[42] One relevant sense of 'rational' here is presumably epistemic rationality. Epistemic rationality trades in epistemic reasons. An epistemic reason is a reason for thinking that some rules are true. Therefore, the debate cannot be resolved by appealing to epistemic reasons. An obvious alternative, though, is appealing to practical reasons; that is to say, it will be solved, if at all, by appealing to practical reasons. What they want is a reason for employing one rule over another and that is a practical matter.

[41] See Lynch 2010.

[42] Or better, it perhaps possible to consider objectively true the linguistic rules in force in practice but, as already stated, neither of the two rules seems unambiguously grounded in scientific practice.

Lastly, in light of the above, we can consider a metalinguistic negotiation as a combination of a normative disagreement and a deep disagreement about the adoption of a given linguistic form or another.

6. **Minimal Substantivity**

Obviously, the fact that an ontological dispute can be recast as a metalinguistic negotiation undermines its ontological substantivity. Where, it is usually argued that in order to be ontological substantive or significant, an ontological debate must fulfill at least the two following requirements:

i. To have realist or anti-realist ontological commitments.

ii. To contend that one language is objectively more ontologically fitting than the other.[43]

Nevertheless, there is room for an account that may illuminate a 'minimal' (or 'deflationist') sense in which the dispute at stake can be deemed as ontologically substantive. But, how exactly can the ontological relevance of such a debate be rescued? Although reason for certain linguistic choices turns out to be practical (such as, for example, better organizing our thought and talk about scientific models), consequences of those choices are in a sense ontologically significant. Indeed, if we take existential statements as being connected to existential quantifications, the selected language will existentially quantify at the object-level over certain entities, which in turn implies certain ontological commitments (positive in the case of realists, negative in the case of anti-realists or fictionalists). In other words, the decisions we take have, at least in principle, an ontological impact to the extent that the consequences of those choices

[43] For the requirements for an ontological dispute to be substantive see, for example, Sider (2009, p. 385) and Manley (2009, p. 4).

may consist in ontological commitments to certain objects.[44] However, given the way in which they were reached, commitments of this kind are probably better understood as shallow or 'lightweight' (and the related debate as 'minimal substantive'). Following Chalmers (2009), we can define the corresponding realism as a 'lightweight realism'. Hence, we may oppose a lightweight sense of the quantifier at work in the deflationist's arguments to a more 'heavyweight'[45] sense of it suited for 'proper' (or 'substantive') ontological debates. In a possible connection with Neo-Fregean approaches to ontology, a 'lightweight' notion of existence implies that the existence of the entities in question 'requires nothing from the world'[46].

Since, according to the deflationist standpoint, one may come to (legitimately) infer the existence of the entities in question regardless of any empirical evidence or metaphysical discovery, those entities could be thought as, in some sense, independent from the empirical world, with a deflated ontological status[47]. Nonetheless, as Thomasson (2015) suggests, a different conclusion is still possible. In *Ontology Made*

[44] Of course, there can likely be some resistance to treating the existence question at hand as a question to be answered in such a deflationary way. For this might seem to some to give us entities too cheaply. Indeed, some might ask: Why should we think that such a method can reveal ontological commitments? This feeling stems, I think, from an impulse to pursue a certain kind of 'deep' ontology, or, as Frank Jackson (1998, pp.1–5) has called it, 'serious metaphysics'. According to which, the primary role of the ontologist addressing existence questions is not to undertake a certain kind of conceptual analysis, but rather to engage in deep discoveries about what *really* exists, or what things there *really* are. Nonetheless, that relieves us of the epistemological embarrassments that come with a 'serious metaphysical' approach that takes facts about what exists and what modal features objects possess to be discoverable by some special means that is not simply exhausted by of conceptual analysis or straightforward empirical enquiry.

[45] Many different substantive criteria have been proposed and utilized as conditions for what it takes for entities to exist. For instance, the 'Eleatic' criterion: «Everything that exists makes a difference to the causal powers of something» (Armstrong 1997, 41; see also his 1978, vol. 2, p. 5), promoted by David Armstrong and later endorsed by Kim (1993, pp. 348–49) and Trenton Merricks (2001, chapter 3). Another common proposal worth mentioning is that for things to exist they must be (in some sense) mind-independent, as George Lakoff puts it: «Existence cannot depend in any way on human cognition» (1987, p. 164); or Jody Azzouni's criterion of ontological independence from «Any psychological or linguistic process whatever» (2004, p. 113). Still other criteria for existence are sometimes considered, for example, trackability, observability, or other forms of epistemic robustness (Elder 1989, p. 440).

[46] See especially: Hale and Wright 2001; Schiffer 2003; Rayo 2013.

[47] For instance, Schiffer (2003) defends this idea.

Easy, she argues that language choices do not create any further objects, but they just provide the linguistic means to say that these exist. What we get out of (positive) language choices is a straightforward simple realism about the entities in question and not a view on which they are 'lightweight' or 'deflated' in their ontological status[48]. We should deny that the entities we are committed to in such a way are ontologically deflated or have some 'second-class' status; that is to say, we should not attribute a difference in ontological standing to them. As she clearly states:

> I will (for brevity) sometimes refer to my view simply as the 'deflationary' position. But of course this term can be and has been used in a variety of ways, and on my view we should *not* say that the *entities* in question are 'deflated'—that is part of the point of the first-order 'simple realism'.[49]

And again:

> I think, however, that we should not suggest that the entities to which we become committed are in general 'thin and inconsequential', 'ontologically shallow', or that their existence is somehow to be understood in a deflationary manner. Instead, we should simply say that such entities exist—full stop—and adopt a simple realist view of them.[50]

Thereby, the only difference with more 'heavy-duty' forms of realism lies in the motivations for accepting the entities in question. In fact, she does not argue for them by suggesting that the relevant entities are 'posits' that explain phenomena. Contrary to Platonists, for instance, she does not appeal to explanatory power or the like to justify her acceptance of them.[51] On this view, ontology does not involve any kind of explanation (such as metaphysical discoveries). In other words, we do not need to embrace any kind of truth-maker theory according to which we posit certain entities in order to explain what it is that makes our sentences true: we need in no case to 'posit'

[48] See Thomasson 2015, Chapter 3.
[49] *Ibid*., pp. 128 - 129.
[50] *Ibid*., p. 146.
[51] Even if: «Introducing the new nominative vocabulary that enables us to refer to new kinds of objects might, however, pragmatically enhance our ability to formulate explanations, and might in that sense aid in explanation» (*Ibid*., p. 157).

an *x* which serves as truth-maker for '*x* exists'.[52] Such a deflationary approach to existence, in contrast with a 'heavyweight' sense of truth-making, matches the deflationary approach to truth, according to which truth should not be thought as a special kind of property possessed by a sentence.[53]

In short, the view outlined here does not deflate the notion of existence (or at least not necessarily) but rather it aims to deflate debates about existence questions. An ontological debate is deflated insofar it does not aim to select the language that «carves the world at its joints»[54] and the entities that do or do not meet some proposed substantive criterion of existence. Accordingly, this kind of deflationism has to be understood as a meta-ontological position, rather than an ontological one.[55]

The primary advantages of this sort of deflationary approach are epistemological: for we can account of the persistence and difficulty of the ontological debate about the existence of scientific models without implying substantive forms of meta-ontology. That is to say, without appealing to fugitive ontological facts that are detectable neither by direct empirical methods nor by conceptual analysis (requiring nothing 'epistemically metaphysical'[56]). Instead, the disputants in such a debate can be seen as engaged in a metalinguistic negotiation (advocating for ways we should employ the relevant terms and concepts), rather than in reporting metaphysical discoveries or reporting discoveries about the world[57]. In this way, its persistence and depth can be understood in terms of the difficulties of working out and reconciling differences in our

[52] See also Augustin Rayo's arguments against what he calls the 'metaphysicalist' position that for an atomic sentence to be true there must be a certain kind of correspondence between the logical form of a sentence and the metaphysical structure of reality (Rayo 2013, pp. 6–11).
[53] Horwich 2010, pp. 299–322.
[54] See Sider 2011, *passim*.
[55] Thanks to an anonymous referee for asking me to clarify this distinction.
[56] Sider 2011, p.187,
[57] Contrary to what is maintained, among others, by heavyweight metaphysicians in the neo-Quinean tradition, who think of themselves as doing work of a piece with science, weighing up the merits of competing theories about the world just as a scientist does.

normative views about linguistic or conceptual tools. Since nothing but normative/conceptual work is needed, thinking of the work of ontologists in this light brings the advantages of dispelling ontological mysteries and clarifying the epistemology of metaphysics. In any case, this normative/conceptual work may be conducted in the object language—not by discussing how to talk about scientific models, but by discussing what scientific models are. Indeed, the point is exactly that debates about whether or not there *really* are the entities in question are perspicuously framed as debates about what linguistic form will best serve our purposes, and debates about what purposes we should adopt or how we should prioritize among them.

7. **Carnap's Legacy**

The idea put forward here does not really differ from Carnap's approach, according to which an ontological question is a matter of «Practical decision concerning the structure of language, not a theoretical question as their formulation seems to suggest»[58], where acceptance of a certain linguistic form is judged according to its expediency and fruitfulness given certain intended aims. Or better, as is well-known, the later Carnap held that there are two different ways of asking and answering questions concerning the existence or reality of entities: internal and external questions.

'Internal questions' are questions that arise *within* a framework and whose nature depends on the framework at hand (where a linguistic framework is, roughly, a system of linguistic expressions and the set of rules governing those expressions)[59]. They can

[58] Carnap 1950, p. 23.

[59] Note that, insofar a framework is understood as a system of noun terms and predicates (and the set of rules governing their use) it is also quite consistent with Carnap's account to endorse the idea that different frameworks do not differ in using quantifier with a different meaning and that the meaning of the quantifier does not vary across different frameworks (see, for instance, Thomasson 2015, Chapter 1.5).

be answered straightforwardly, using conceptual and/or empirical methods.[60] According to Carnap, legitimate uses of the terms are necessarily internal to a framework, for it is conformity to the rules of the framework in question that constitutes use. Ontological disputes, taken internally to a framework, can also be regarded as instances of what Plunkett and Sundell call 'canonical disputes': «Any dispute that centers on the truth or correctness of the content literally expressed by the speakers»[61].

On the contrary, 'external questions' are categorial questions asked before (or *outside*) the adoption of a given language; that is to say, 'external' to any linguistic frameworks, «Concerning the existence or reality of the system of entities as a whole»[62]. If they are taken as factual or theoretical questions, Carnap suggests, they have to be understood as pseudo-questions; but they can also be construed as «Practical questions about whether we should make use of the linguistic forms in question**».** [63]

On Carnap's original view, even though they are expressed in object-language terms, what ontologists are doing can be more charitably understood as asking external questions. And they are only legitimately understood as practical in character, i.e. as questions of the form: should we adopt this framework? Would it be useful? Carnap plainly sums up the point as follow:

> Those who raise the question of the reality of the thing world itself have perhaps in mind not a theoretical question as their formulation seems to suggest, but rather a practical question, a matter of a practical decision concerning the structure of our language. We have to make the choice whether or not to accept and use the forms of expression in the framework in question.[64]

[60] For instance, questions about the existence of prime numbers between twenty and thirty may be resolved by mathematical reasoning. From these we may also make easy inferences to answer more general questions. For if there are primes between twenty and thirty, then there are numbers (Thomasson 2015, p.11)
[61] Plunkett and Sundell 2013, p. 6.
[62] Carnap 1956, p. 206.
[63] *Ibid*., p. 213.
[64] *Ibid*., p. 207

These questions should perhaps to be answered within the enterprise of what he called ‘conceptual engineering’ or ‘linguistic engineering’ (as opposed to the pure descriptive work in syntax or semantics, generally engaged by linguists). In Carnap's mature conception, different language structures can be chosen as a means to formulate theoretical assertions in a way analogous to how an engineer chooses an instrument:

> I admit that the choice of a language suitable for the purposes of physics and mathematics involves problems quite different from those involved in the choice of a suitable motor fora freight airplane; but, in a sense, both are engineering problems, and I fail to see why metaphysics should enter into the first any more than into the second. [65]

Conceptual or linguistic frameworks are tools, so we do neither have to prove their correctness, nor we do have to agree on which ones to use. But, we can test their suitability for various practical purposes. The acceptance of a linguistic framework may in fact «Be judged as being more or less expedient, fruitful, conducive to the aim for which the language is intended to be used» without the need of «Any theoretical justification, because it does not imply any assertion of reality ».[66]

Likewise, in the dispute between realists and fictionalists about the existence of scientific models, each party may use an ontological assertion of that sort to positively or negatively evaluate the adoption of a linguistic form which, in turn, may have certain characteristics, consequences, practical advantages or disadvantages. Their claims have thereby to be understood in terms of practical considerations about which linguistic resource we should choose: for example, the one which is more useful or convenient to adopt by appealing to practical virtues or non-epistemic values (such as, among others, greater efficiency, fruitfulness, simplicity, etc.). In short, the purposes for which a linguistic form is intended to be used will determine which factors are relevant for the

[65] *Ibid*., p. 43.
[66] *Ibid*., p. 214.

decision: the efficiency, fruitfulness and simplicity of the use of the thing language may be among the decisive factors. Of course, the implicit practical purposes which realists appeal to in order to take discourse about scientific models at face value and the implicit practical purposes which fictionalists appeal to in order to talk about scientific models within the scope of a pretense operator can be various and different (among, for instance, efficiency, fruitfulness, simplicity, etc.) and such criteria are to be assessed on the basis of a case-by-case analysis.

8. **Conclusion**

In this paper I explored the possibility to understand the ontological dispute between realists and anti-realists (in particular, fictionalists) about scientific models in terms of metalinguistic negotiation. I argued that their respective ontological claims have a different function than that of referring; in other words, their work does not consist in representing a certain range of entities in the world or describing pieces of reality, but rather to perform a function that is fundamentally non-descriptive**.** Indeed, although the disputants seem to be engaged in a factual disagreement, they are best seen as pragmatically advocating ways in which we should think and talk about scientific models. As such, their ontological claims turn out be covertly normative (they carry a normative component) and the dispute, at bottom, normatively motivated. Accordingly, an essential feature of such an ontological dispute is that it is practical; that is to say, it has as a purpose to influence and regulate their behavior. In particular, it may serve them to coordinate with each other in the linguistic practice about scientific models. In this way, it is possible to account for its persistency, which grounds in the difficulty of addressing deep normative questions, without implying that it is pointless and without undermine its depth and importance.

Moreover, I argued that, depending on the circumstances, parties in the debate aim to decide which linguistic form to adopt given certain practical purposes. However, the dispute can be viewed as 'minimally substantive', in the sense that, even though linguistic choices turn out to be largely a practical matter, they can in principle affect our ontological commitments.

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Categorial Disambiguation

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Abstract

According to the so-called 'sortalist' view, existential claims are not truth-evaluable without (at least tacit) categorial disambiguation. That is to say, quantification must involve presupposing some category or categories of entity we are quantifying over. On this view, though, traditional ontological-categorial terms, such as 'substance', 'kind', 'thing', 'object', and the like (in their most general use as entirely *neutral* terms) face problems. Since they cannot be used unambiguously to pick out some identifiable individual, existential claims involving or about ontological categories turn out to be neither complete nor truth-evaluable. Nevertheless, I do not think the reason why they do not count as genuine sortal terms is that they express defective concepts with highly indeterminate extension, but rather it is because they actually function in a very different way than usual sortlas do. In this paper, I will offer an account of the distinctive metalinguistic expressive role played by ontological-categorial vocabulary. Such an account, however, operates primarily at the level of pragmatics: as part of a theory of the use of these expressions. Accordingly, it does not necessarily commit us to nominalistic (semantic or ontological) conclusions. A form of *simple* realism about ontological categories is thus at least compatible with an expressivist analysis of the use of ontological-categorial vocabulary.

Keywords: Sortals, Pseudosortals, Ontological-categorial vocabulary, Simple realism

1. Introduction

It has often been argued that the truth-value of existence and nonexistence claims depends on the category of entity speakers intend to refer to and they cannot be evaluated except with respect to some presupposed category. Where it is ambiguous what category of entity the presupposed referent belongs to, existence claims turn out to be indeterminate. As a result, in those cases, the most natural response will be to refine

or precisify the categorial concepts in question in a way that avoids the problem. Nevertheless, real philosophical confusions arise with respect to traditional ontological categories, such as 'substance', ‘property’, ‘kind’, ‘class’, ‘individual’, ‘thing’, ‘particular’, ‘object’, etc. The general view behind this paper is that the source of such confusions is to be found in the traditional descriptivist assumption about the function of ontological-categorial discourse. I will maintain that it would be a mistake to understand ontological-categorial vocabulary as playing a narrowly descriptive role of stating facts or representing how the world is. In the same way, however, it would be a mistake denying that ontological classificatory statements are legitimate, or even that they can be true or false. Both mistakes (the dogmatic metaphysical and the skeptical), although opposed to one another, arise from the common root of the descriptivist fallacy.

In Section 3 of this paper, I will argue that the primary function of ontological-categorial concepts is to articulate structural features of the discursive framework within which alone description is possible. In a certain sense, they make explicit what is already implicit in the use of descriptive vocabulary. This metalinguistic expressive role that ontologically categorizing vocabulary plays relative to descriptive vocabulary is, though, of a distinctive kind: it operates primarily at the level of pragmatics. A talk about ontological categories expresses what one is doing in saying something (in the sense of making a statement). That is, it makes explicit what one is doing in asserting something. In particular, it expresses what one must be able to do in order to deploy a descriptive vocabulary. For example, what one is doing in saying that ‘”Dog is a kind” is classifying ‘dog’ as a common noun.

Nevertheless, in Section 4, I will argue that the identification of such a pragmatic metalinguistic expressive role does not necessarily entitle us to draw nominalistic

conclusions. Indeed, playing that distinctive expressive function does not preclude us of understanding ontological classifications as also standing in some referential relations (although not exactly like paradigmatically referring terms) to objects of a distinctive kind: ontological categories. This, in turn, allows us to raise an objection to Carnap's and Sellars's versions of ontological nominalism. In the last Section, my aim will be to consider a form of realism about ontological categories at least in principle compatible with an expressivist approach to the use of a vocabulary of that sort.

2. Sortals and Pseudosortals

According to the so-called *sortal solution* (Schaffer 2010, p. 143)[1], in any situation, a speaker who would ground the reference of a term must disambiguate the reference of that term at least by a very basic concept of what general category of thing the term in question is to refer to. Singular reference can only be disambiguated to the extent that names, demonstratives, and other singular terms are associated with a category (or categories) of entity to be referred to. This means that we cannot refer to, discover, or single out objects at all except by way of a certain categorial conception. Of course, categorial conceptions are expressed in categorial terms (such as 'organism', 'artifact', etc.), which are just highly general sortal terms. Sortal expressions are 'count nouns', because things to which sortals apply can be counted (a sense has been given to questions of the form "How many?"); as opposed to things that fall under 'mass nouns', which can be measured (a sense has been given to questions of the form "How much?"). In order to make possible to count them (to say or ask how many Ks there are in some collection), sortal terms and concepts are (generally) associated with semantic principles that supply criteria of individuation and identity for anything that is to fall under them

[1]Although they differ in details, versions of the approach have been defended by Dummett (1973), Lowe (1989), Devitt and Sterelny (1999), Wiggins 2001, Hale (2010) and Thomasson (2007).

(Lowe 1989, pp. 56-57). In this way, kind-terms (as sortal expressions) turn out to be part of the apparatus of naming. For singular terms require criteria of individuation and identity[2] that are supplied by covering sortals.[3]

In the same vein, Thomasson (2007) argued that our sortal terms have at least very basic application conditions (conditions under which the term may be properly applied) and co-application conditions (conditions under which the term may be properly re-applied to one and the same individual), which are reflected in their usage. And, insofar as individuals may only be referred to employing a sortal term, "reference to individuals is determinate only to the extent that the term is associated with determinate frame-level application conditions and coapplication conditions, via association—at a minimum—with a certain category of entity to be referred to" (Thomasson 2007, p. 42). Thereby, application and coapplication conditions must be met if the term is to be successfully grounded, and so if it is to refer at all. If they are not met, the speaker has made the sort of mistake that leads a reference chain to end in a block. For instance, in the absence of the application and coapplication conditions for the relevant categorial term 'dolphin' being fulfilled, the proper name 'Flipper' fails to refer at all.[4] This captures the idea that a block is encountered where speakers make a mistake in intending to refer to an entity of a certain category: that is, where the basic application and coapplication conditions for terms of that category are not fulfilled.

Similarly, quantified claims require implicitly presupposing a certain category or categories of entity in the domain over which we are to quantify. Existence questions

[2] Individuals *a* and *b* can only be identical if they are of sorts with the same criteria of identity, and they meet those criteria.

[3] There is no implication here that the criteria are explicit, that there must be statable principles. Talk of 'criteria of identity' and 'individuation' is talk about aspects of the linguistic practice of using count nouns.

[4] Note that application conditions for different sortal terms may take many different forms. For certain observational terms (e.g., 'yellow patch'), the application of the term may be justified by the presence of certain visible conditions; for natural kind terms, it may require the presence of entities of the same natural-scientific kind as those present in an original sample.

involving a well-formed sortal term ‘K’ may be answered straightforwardly by determining whether or not the frame-level application and coapplication conditions for ‘K’ are fulfilled. In particular, according to Thomasson, determining the truth-value of an existence (or non-existence) claim involving a well-formed sortal ‘K’ may be done in two steps: first, undertaking conceptual analysis to figure out the associated application and coapplication conditions for ‘K’; secondly, undertaking empirical inquiry to see whether those conditions are fulfilled (for the singular term in question). Thus, her view on reference determination impacts on the specification of the domain of quantification. In her words:

> Existence questions formulated quantificationally are complete and truth evaluable provided a domain is properly specified, where that involves specifying (or at least tacitly presupposing) what sort or sorts of entity we are talking about. (Thomason 2009, pp. 464-465)

And she gives grounds for thinking that all quantifications must at least tacitly presuppose a category or categories of entity over which we are quantifying:

> If they are to be meaningful, such quantified statements must likewise presuppose implicit or explicit reference to a certain category or categories of entity in a domain over which we are quantifying. (*Ibid*. p. 115)

At the most basic-frame level, Thomasson’s concluding view is that existence conditions for the objects we refer to are established in disambiguating reference:

> Existence claims are only well formed and truth-evaluable if the term flanking the existence statement is associated with a certain category of entity each is to refer to, which disambiguates the reference of the term. (*Ibid*., p. 57)

In sum, on this view, claims involving singular terms are not truth-evaluable without (at least tacit) categorial disambiguation. If they are not, then neither are the quantified existence claims (nor are the existence claims in natural languages). Therefore,

quantification must involve presupposing some category or categories of entity we are quantifying over. One first gives a sortal, and then uses 'exist' to say whether something is a real member of that sortal. For example, if the sortal is 'person,' then on this view one uses 'exist' to mean that something is a real person, rather than a fictional one. But the sortal could be 'fictional character,' and then one would be contrasting fictional persons with not fictional ones.[5]

Nevertheless, for most of the standard terms for everyday objects, there may be cases in which it is indeterminate whether or not there is something to which a given sortal term applies. There may be cases, for instance, in which the rules apparently leave it indeterminate whether or not a love story came into existence or a crime was committed. In these cases, the account sketched above leads us to accept simply that it is indeterminate whether or not they exist (rather than to deny their existence). As a result, if it turns out that they are indeterminate, the most natural response will be to refine or precisify the sortal concepts in question in a way that avoids ambiguity or vagueness. Consider, for example, a story like Tatyana Tolstaya's *The Slynx*, in which it is left open whether or not (in the world of the story) there really is a Slynx. It follows that it is an indeterminate matter whether there is such a fictional creature as the Slynx (Everett 2005, p. 630). In fact, it is merely indeterminate whether, according to the story, the Slynx is a flesh-and-blood creature or not. Indeterminacies of that sort arise because the concept of such a fictional character is vague and imprecise. However, granted this indeterminacy, attempts to precisify or just minimally revise the concept can remove the indeterminacy (in the story).

[5] According to the standard use of the sortal term 'fictional character', it is sufficient for the term to apply that there be a literary work employing a name in a pretenseful way, where the author does not intend to refer back to any real person.

Quite the contrary, real philosophical confusions result instead from the existence in natural languages of pseudosortals (or 'dummy sortals'), such as paradigmatically common nouns for ontological categories. Famously, Aristotle characterizes ontological categories as *summa genera* and 'substance' as the *summum genus.* Apart from 'substance', standard examples of ontological categories are 'kind', 'class', 'property', 'individual', 'thing', 'particular', 'object', etc. (and their genus 'universal'), but also others such as 'trope' (understood as something like 'unrepeatable instance of a property'). These expressions occupy the grammatical places held by genuine sortals, but they do not have associated criteria of individuation and identity, which are semantically essential for them in order to be regarded as real sortals. Accordingly, they do not semantically support counting. For this reason, there is no definite answer to Putnam's provocative question "How many *objects* are there in this room?"[6]

However, the issue here is not at all one of vagueness. We should consider neither whether they express defective concepts (that is, concepts with highly indeterminate extensions), nor whether they have vague criteria of identity and individuation, but rather we should consider the role they play in our ontological discourse and thought. For they actually function in a very different way than usual sortlas do.

3. The Ontological-Categorial Vocabulary

It is wrong to think that we are describing anything when we talk about ontological categories, or referring to anything when we use terms like 'object' or 'substance' (at least not as paradigmatically referring terms). Instead, following Carnap (1937),

[6] "Suppose I take someone into a room with a chair, a table on which there are a lamp and a notebook and a ballpoint pen, and nothing else, and I ask, 'How many objects are there in this room?' My companion answers, let us suppose, 'Five.' 'What are they?' I ask. 'A chair, a table, a lamp, a notebook, and a ballpoint pen.' 'How about you and me? Aren't we in the room?' My companion might chuckle. 'I didn't think that you meant I was to count people as objects. Alright, then, seven.' 'How about the pages of the notebook?'" (Putnam 1988, p. 110).

ontological-categorial vocabulary (and the related concepts it expresses) is to be better understood as covertly metalinguistic.

Carnap, besides the ground-level empirical descriptive vocabulary, allows metalinguistic vocabulary. Or better, in *The Logical Syntax of Language* (1937), Carnap allows a principal class of non-descriptive vocabulary: the syntactic vocabulary and what he there calls the 'quasi-syntactical' vocabulary (pp. 63-70), which is covertly metalinguistic.[7] In what he classifies as overtly and covertly metalinguistic[8], we may see a way of reconceiving the idea of ontological categories. That is to say, Carnap's classification of some expressions as quasi-syntactical leads us to also treat ontological-categorial vocabulary (and the related concepts they express) as covertly metalinguistic. Ontologically classifying terms, such as 'object', 'property' and 'proposition', are quasi-syntactical expressions corresponding to overtly syntactical expressions in a proper metalanguage, such as 'singular term', 'predicate', and 'declarative sentence'. Roughly, the Carnapian idea is that ontological-categorial vocabulary appears to tell us something about the world: what kinds (ontological categories) of things are in it. It seems to tell us that there are particulars, as well as properties and kinds related to those particulars by the distinctive relation of exemplification. But actually, he claims, the information conveyed by such ontological vocabulary concerns the syntactic form of language or thought, and it is not about the world talked or thought.

The view Carnap put forward in *The Logical Syntax of Language* (1937) is also Sellars's point of departure.[9] Sellars, in a sense, refines Carnap's idea that ontological-categorial vocabulary is fundamentally metalinguistic. Indeed, Sellars interprets such a

[7] To be precise, as Carnap describes them in *The Logical Syntax of Language* (1937), 'quasi-syntactic' are material mode versions of statements perspicuously framed in the formal mode. Sellars's corresponding term is 'covertly metalinguistic.'

[8] Note that Wittgenstein discussion of 'hinge propositions' in *On Certainty* (1969) also traces this distinction between the ordinary descriptive use on one side and a whole range of 'covertly metalinguistic' uses of vocabularies on the other.

[9] See mainly Sellars 1958; 1962; 1963; 1970.

way of speaking as a material mode speech about the functional role of expression-types (or linguistic-types). So, for instance, "Dog-kind is a class" (Sellars 1958, pp. 148-149; 1963, p. 167) is a way of claiming in the material mode (in the object language) what could be claimed in the formal mode (in a certain kind of metalanguage) as "'Dog' is a common noun". The same holds for kind-nominalizations, such as 'doghood' or 'lionhood' (1963, p. 186). However, the divergent behavior of "Doghood is a kind," and "'Dog' is a common noun", shows that ontologically categorizing vocabulary, such as 'kind', and kind-terms, such as 'doghood', are not metalinguistic in the narrow sense (Tarski's) of being common nouns that refer to expressions of a particular object-language, such as English. These expressions are not metalinguistic in a straightforward sense of being common nouns that apply to expression-types (or linguistic-types). They do not mention any linguistic expressions at all. This does not mean, though, they could not be understood to be metalinguistic in a broader sense, namely as covertly metalinguistic. Doghood-talk is understood to be a metalinguistic, but not explicitly metalinguistic, way of talking about expression-types (or linguistic-types) that stand to the common noun 'dog' in a relation of functional equivalence.

The same holds for some classical examples in the literature: "Socrates is a particular" or "Socrates is a primary substance, that is an individual" (Sellars 1958, p. 158-159; 1970, p. 326) should be analyzed as "'Socrates' is a singular term"; saying "Yellow is an entity" (1970, p. 329), one is ascribing to this, roughly, the sense of "'Yellow' is a meaningful term"; "Triangularity is a property" (1974, p. 288) is the material mode for "'Triangular' is a one place predicate". Thus, the Sellarsian analysis is, like Carnap's account, a metalinguistic about what is expressed by ontological-categorial vocabulary. If we assume that ontological categories are the material mode of speech for syntactical

categories they turn out to be 'covertly metalinguistic' (in Sellars's terms) or 'quasi-syntactical' (in Carnap's technical terminology).

Nevertheless, contrary to what Carnap maintains, they are not to be understood by deflationary metalinguistic paraphrases. Sellars's development of Carnap's metalinguistic approach gives us reason to understand the vocabulary of ontological categories, in particular terms (in Sellars's terminology: 'expression types' or 'linguistic types') such as 'substance' and 'kind', as playing a characteristic expressive function (one not played, for instance, by paradigmatically referring terms). According to Sellars (1963), ontological-categorial terms codify aspects of the semantic roles in force in our discursive practices. Roughly, talk of ontological categories makes explicit certain linguistic norms. That is to say, the rules which ontological-categorial vocabulary expresses are rules for deploying linguistic locutions. Therefore, ontological-categorial concepts articulate rules for reasoning with descriptive concepts.

Anyway, the underlying insight is that some vocabularies, which are not explicitly metalinguistic, are used not (or not only) to describe what surrounds us. As not strictly descriptive, they perform the distinctive expressive role of making explicit essential features of the linguistic frameworks (in Carnapian sense)[10] within which genuine descriptions are possible. That is, they are used to specify the structure of the languages in which descriptions are to be expressed. Rather than in the first instance describing how the world is, they express features of the frameworks that make such descriptions possible. And exactly in this sense, as articulating necessary features of discursive

[10] According to Carnap (1956) a linguistic framework is, roughly, a system of linguistic expressions and the set of rules governing those expressions. A technical counterpart of a Carnapian ontological framework is a furnishing function. A furnishing function is a mapping from worlds to domains. A world and a furnishing function jointly determine a furnished world. Given a world, the furnishing function specifies a class of entities that are taken to exist in that world. For any ordinary utterance, the context of utterance determines a furnishing function. Intuitively, this function corresponds to the ontological framework endorsed by the speaker in making the utterance (on this subject, see Chalmers 2009, p.108)

practice that make descriptions possible, they can be understood as broadly metalinguistic locutions.

As a result, the expressive role of ontological-categorial concepts is thus to make explicit what is already implicit in the use of ground-level concepts: the conditions under which alone it is possible to apply them, which is to say, to use them to make judgments. Insofar as ontological-categorial concepts express structural features of descriptive judgments, what they make explicit turn out to be already implicit in the capacity to make any judgments at all. In short, the ontological classificatory concepts are in a certain sense already implicit in the descriptive concepts, for what they express is already implicit in any concepts used to make descriptive judgments.[11]

This means they are graspable *a priori*.[12] But this does not mean that one must or can grasp them before grasping descriptive concepts. It is rather that nothing more is required to grasp them than is required to grasp descriptive concepts. Their grasp is already implicit in the grasp of descriptive concepts. At the same time, though, the contents of ordinary descriptive concepts are not intelligible antecedently to and independently of the rules made explicit by ontological-categorial concepts.

Brandom (2015) develops this idea by arguing that ontological classificatory vocabulary, besides being elaborated from discursive practices, explicates them. That is to say, ontological classificatory vocabulary can be elaborated from and at the same time is explicative of features necessarily exhibited by any autonomous discursive practice. Where autonomous discursive practices are every language game

[11] Perhaps, the division of expressive roles for ontological-categorial vocabulary (in opposition to empirical descriptive vocabularies) traces back to Kant's idea of 'pure concepts of the understanding' or categories, which play quite a different expressive role from that of ordinary empirical descriptive concepts.

[12] Note that '*A priori'*, here, has not to be conceived as i*mmediate awareness* of a mental state in the Cartesian sense.

one could play though one played no other, hence any descriptive vocabulary.[13] In this way, the expressive role distinctive of ontological-categorial vocabulary has to be understood as elaborated from and explicative of the use of any descriptive vocabulary. Accordingly, the concepts expressed by ontological-categorial vocabularies are both elaborated from and explicative of the use of ground-level descriptive vocabularies**.** So that different ontological-categorial concepts can be elaborated from and explicative of different essential features of the use of a descriptive vocabulary. This is mainly the central feature of the relation between ontological-categorial concepts and descriptive vocabulary.[14]

In general, ontological classificatory vocabulary shows these two crucial features: being graspable *a priori* and being explicative of structural features of any descriptive vocabulary. In particular, according to Brandom, what an ontological-categorial vocabulary V' specifies are practices-or-abilities that are sufficient to deploy a descriptive vocabulary V. In his words:

> Vocabulary V′ specifies practices-or-abilities P that are sufficient to deploy the vocabulary V with the meanings that it expresses when so used. […] the vocabulary V′ allows one to say what one must do in order to say what can be said in the vocabulary V. In that sense V′ makes explicit (sayable, claimable) the practices-or-abilities implicit in using V (Brandom 2015, p. 50).

Vocabulary V′ thus plays the expressive role of being elaborated from and explicative of practices-or-abilities necessary for the deployment of the descriptive vocabulary V.

In a nutshell, while ontological-categorial vocabulary is not itself a descriptive vocabulary, its use is implicit in the use of descriptive vocabularies. In fact, in being

[13] I guess what Brandom calls 'autonomous discursive practice' can be understood in terms of what Carnap calls 'linguistic framework'.

[14] Note that if we take it that grasping a concept is mastering the use of a word, then one does not need to actually grasp concepts that are elaborated from and explicative of a descriptive vocabulary in order to deploy that descriptive vocabulary.

able to deploy a descriptive vocabulary, one already possesses all the abilities sufficient to deploy the terms that play the expressive role characteristic of terms picked out as ‘ontological-categorial’. This means that their use can be elaborated from the use of ground-level descriptive vocabularies. Thus, one who knows, for example, how to use common nouns such as ‘dog’ already knows everything one needs to know in order to know how to use ontological categorizing terms, such as ‘kind’. In being able to deploy the first vocabulary, one already knows everything one needs to know, in principle, in order to be able to deploy the second vocabulary. At the same time, however, it makes explicit features that are already implicit in the use of descriptive vocabularies. For, as explicative of practices necessary for deploying vocabularies that perform the task of description, ontological-categorial vocabulary expresses what practitioners must be able to do in order to describe the world. In this sense, its use is also explicative of the use of ground-level descriptive vocabularies. And again, since it plays this distinctive framework-explicating role, what it expresses must be implicitly understood by anyone who can deploy any ground-level descriptive vocabulary.

Briefly, ontological-categorial vocabulary is a material mode metalinguistic speech expressing priorities embedded in the descriptive language. In other words, it can be taken to play the metalinguistic expressive role of making explicit features that are already implicit in the use of descriptive vocabularies. Thereby, this expressive role that ontologically categorizing vocabulary plays relative to the use of descriptive vocabulary is of a distinctive kind: it operates primarily at the level of pragmatics. A talk about ontological categories is covertly a talk about what one is doing in saying something in the sense of making a statement. Making explicit, expressing what one is doing in

asserting it. This is a thesis in pragmatics, rather than semantics.[15] In the first instance, ontological-categorial vocabulary plays a pragmatic expressive role relative to vocabularies whose principal use is for description. It expresses what one must be able to do in order to deploy a descriptive vocabulary. It does this by providing, in Brandom's terminology, a 'pragmatic metavocabulary' for describing.[16] That is, exactly a vocabulary that is both elaborated from and explicative of essential features of the use of descriptive vocabulary. The principal idea is that what a speaker is doing when she says things like "Dog is a kind" is functionally classifying the English expression 'dog' (and the expressions that play the same conceptual role in other languages, such as the Spanish 'perro') as a common noun. But, the speaker is doing so using a (covertly) metalinguistic vocabulary of a distinctive kind, which is an insight properly expressible in a pragmatic metalanguage. In this way, ontological classificatory vocabulary turns out to be a special kind of 'metavocabulary': a pragmatic one.

4. Simple Realism

As already stated, the alleged problem with Carnap's metalinguistic account of ontological classificatory discourse somehow is that it seems to entail that kind-talk is to be reduced to or paraphrased into talk about linguistic forms. The proposed solution has been to understand ontological-categorial vocabulary (and the concepts they express) as

[15] Here 'pragmatics' is used broadly, to pick out systematic theories of the use of language, rather than more narrowly as addressing issues having to do with the convenience of communication (as in Grice), the effects of context on interpretation, and so on.

[16] "Traditional Tarskian metalanguages are semantic metalanguages. They contain the expressive resources to talk about aspects of discursive content. Accordingly, they let us discuss truth conditions, reference relations, inferential relations, and the like. Carnap also deploys syntactic meta-languages that let us talk about syntax, grammar, and lexical items (though Carnap himself uses "syntax" in an idiosyncratically wide sense in The Logical Syntax of Language). Pragmatic metalanguages have the expressive resources to talk about the use of language and the proprieties that govern it, for instance the activities of asserting, inferring, referring, predicating, and so on" (Brandom 2015, pp. 265-266).

playing a special kind of pragmatic metalinguistic expressive role. This expressivist treatment does not collapse the contrast between talking about ontological categories and talking about expression-types (or linguistic-types). Indeed, from the fact that what one is doing in saying that "Dog is a kind" is classifying 'dog' as a common noun, it does not follow that that is what one is saying. It certainly does not follow that that is all one is saying. We are not necessarily committed to inferences from what one is doing in saying that to what one is saying by doing that**,** and thus to transitions from pragmatist expressivism to metalinguistic semantic. Quite the contrary, a pragmatic metalinguistic functioning of ontological classificatory expressions can be compatible with they can also describe. Or better, the pragmatic expressive role of ontological-categorial vocabulary is non-descriptive. This, though, is at least in principle compatible with such vocabulary also describes—albeit just against the background of its expressive role.[17]

In the same way, we are not necessarily committed to inferences from pragmatist expressivism to ontological nominalism. Nominalism, in ontology, is the thesis that the world 'in the narrow sense'[18] consists exclusively of nameables: things that could be referred to by genuine singular terms. Thus, ontological nominalism restricts the real to what is nameable by genuine singular terms. Sellars explicitly endorses this view:

> It is also argued that exemplification is a 'quasi-semantical' relation, and that it (and universals) are 'in the world' only in that broad sense in which the 'world' includes linguistic norms and roles viewed (thus in translating) from the standpoint of a fellow participant. (Sellars 1962, p. 103)

[17] In a certain sense, we can say that the content of ontological-categorial sentences supervenes on their metalinguistic expressive function. No additional notion of content is required and any deeper theoretical explanation is neither received nor needed. Such sentences will have the propositional content they have in virtue of expressing what one must be able to do in order to deploy a descriptive vocabulary. Their meaning supervenes on their use-properties, in virtue of which sentences have their meanings, but it is not reduced to their use-properties (on this subject, see Köhler 2017).

[18] I take it that being 'in the world in the narrow sense' means being in the non-discursive world: the world as it was before there discursive beings, or a counterfactual world in which there never were discursive beings.

Nevertheless, the pragmatic metalinguistic expressive role of ontological-categorial talk does not necessarily lead to this kind of ontological nominalism. That ontological classificatory statements have such a distinctive expressive function in no way precludes their being truth-apt statements about the world in the narrow sense. I do not think we should draw nominalist (or eliminativist) ontological conclusions from that sort of expressivist analysis of the use of ontological-categorial vocabulary; rather, I consider a kind of ontological realism compatible with an expressivism of that sort. Ontological classifications are distinguished by having such a pragmatic metalinguistic expressive function. But this is not yet to say that they do not also refer to a distinctive kind of (abstract) object: ontological categories (as universals). One might distinguish ontological-categorial terms by seeing their use as involving pragmatic metalinguistic classification without thereby concluding that they do not also stand in referential relations to a distinctive kind of (abstract) entities. They just have this extra expressive function that ordinary sortal terms and singular terms do not have. A pragmatic metalinguistic expressivism of that sort should be understood as aimed at showing just that one does not need to countenance ontological categories (as universals) to understand the use of the expressions that refer to them. This allows us to accept a (kind of) realism about ontological categories without thereby countenancing any superlative entities on which the legitimacy of ordinary practice depends.

There is no reason to deny that in this case (in the ontological-categorial talk) there is a relation of reference. What must be denied is just a representationalist theory of meaning. For anti-representationalists, all that matters is that meaning not be explained in terms of the semantic notions they intend to deflate.[19] Likewise, we can even say that there is a relation of 'correspondence'. In fact, deflationary theories of truth domesticate

[19] For reference-talk in a deflationary, use-theoretic spirit see, among others, Brandom 1994, chs. 5-7 and Horwich 1998, ch. 5.

correspondence intuitions: they do not require us to deny them.[20] In short, the fact that judgments of that sort are best understood in terms of a distinctive expressive function does not preclude their having descriptive contents or their being straightforwardly truth-apt. This is obviously so if reference and truth themselves are taken in a deflationary spirit. And, just as pragmatic metalinguistic expressivism does not automatically preclude reference relations in semantics, it does not preclude realism in ontology. The possibility of realism in this area is at least compatible with expressivism in pragmatics. This conclusion thus opens up space for the elaboration of a kind of realism about ontological categories that would be compatible with an expressivist account of the use of such a vocabulary.

Realism of that sort typically accepts that there are kinds, things, objects, particulars, individuals, properties and the like. However, the existence of ontological categories is not endorsed because some *entities* are posited as truth-makers for our ontological classificatory claims. Such a deflationary account about ontological-categorial talk does not deny that there are ontological categories. But it does deny that there is a deep and substantive nature of them to be uncovered by a philosophical theory, so that it makes sense to seek some reductive view of what ontological categories 'really' are. There simply is no further meaningful question to be asked about whether there *really* are kinds, objects, individuals, etc.), or more generally about whether there *really* are entities to serve as truthmakers for such ontological conclusions. Within a linguistic

[20] While there are many versions of deflationism about truth, the basic idea is that the meaning of 'true' is captured in the trivial equivalence schema (using angle brackets to mark propositions and their constituents): "<p> is true iff p" (Horwich 1998, p. 103) and by the view that any further investigation hoping to discover the nature of truth would be out of place. Consequently, according to such deflationary positions, there is no more to be said about the nature of truth, no deeper and more substantial theory to be uncovered, so attempts to look for one (in a correspondence, coherence, verificationist, or other theory of truth) are one and all misguided. Note, however, that a deflationary understanding of truth may be traced back at least to Frege, who wrote: "It is worthy of notice that the sentence 'I smell the scent of violets' has the same content as the sentence 'it is true that I smell the scent of violets'. So it seems, then, that nothing is added to my thought by my ascribing to it the property of truth" (Frege 1918).

framework (in Carnap's sense) we can answer questions concerning the existence or reality of ontological categories straightforwardly. But we do so without raising metaphysical questions about deep and substantive criteria for referring or truth-making.

This view has been recently taken on board by 'easy ontologists', such as Thomasson (2014; 2015), who typically accept that there are disputed entities since we can infer the existence of these entities by way of trivial inferences from uncontroversial premises, without requiring substantive investigation. In Thomasson's words:

> […]easy ontologists agree on is that answers to certain disputed ontological questions can be reached easily by starting from an uncontroversial truth and reasoning by what seem like trivial steps to reach ontological conclusions. (Thomasson 2015, p. 21)

Existence assertions can be conceptually analyzed in such a way that they can be analytically entailed by sentences without corresponding existence assertions. For example, an ordinary existence sentence like "There are properties" is sometimes trivially correct in that its correctness is knowable through trivial reasoning: from an uncontroversial sentence like "The table is brown" we may infer "The table has the property of brownness", and thus that there is a property, and so on.[21] On this view, the truth-value of such ontological claims can be determined just by conceptual reflection on first-order non-ontological knowledge of the world. That is to say, in light of certain empirical truths about the world (for example, truths about the qualitative distribution of matter) or first-order reasoning (for example, mathematical reasoning), but not in light of any distinctively ontological truths or distinctively ontological reasoning.

[21] "So understood, we can easily see why questions asked within—or better, using—a linguistic framework are straightforward to answer. For example, the very rules for introducing property language (combined with 'customary deductive rules') license us to infer from an ordinary truth like 'the house is red' that 'the house has the property of being red' and so to provide an easy affirmative answer to the general question (asked internally) 'Are there properties?'" (Thomasson 2015, pp. 102-103; cf. Schiffer 2003, pp. 61–71).

In order to prevent confusion, Thomasson labels this view as 'simple' realism, in contrast with the rival 'explanatory' realism:

> On the simple realist view, there are the disputed entities all right, but these are not 'posits' that are parts of 'theories', the inclusion of which is justified by their explanatory power. (*Ibid.*, p. 157)

Here, the relevant notion of explanation is a metaphysical relationship between entities 'out there in the world', on a par with grounding or ontological dependence. Therefore, in the same way as the deflationary theory of truth, which denies that truth should be thought as a special kind of property possessed by a sentence and rejects demands such as the requirement that truths have truthmakers (Horwich 2010, pp. 299-322), and deflationism about reference that denies there is any substantive answer to the question about what the reference relation consists in, one may come to legitimately infer the existence of the entities in question regardless of any metaphysical discovery or any other substantive criterion for existence being fulfilled. Anyway, adopting a deflationism standpoint enables us to hold that our claims (internal to a linguistic framework) about the existence of ontological categories are perfectly true in the usual sense, not just true in some reduced or pretending sense.[22] Instead, Thomasson maintains, such existence assertions are true in the only sense in which we can make sense of them. The explanatory realist is mistaken not in asserting that there are kinds, particulars, objects, properties, etc., and that true existence claims may be made about them. But rather she is mistaken in the representationalist theory of truth that she attaches to the view: that for those existence claims to be really true, there would have

[22] This point has been made most famously by David Lewis (2005), who argues that Simon Blackburn's quasi-realist view of the moral (though it is able to imitate all that the realist wants to say) is best understood as a form of fictionalism. For, Lewis argues, quasi-realism should be understood as implicitly prefacing all of the assertions that sound like realism (that there are moral facts, that these are objective, etc.) with a 'disowning preface' like the fictionalist's preface 'according to the fiction…' (Lewis 2005, p. 319).

to be entities that we could discover through metaphysical investigation and that would explain what makes the relevant claims true.

In the same vein, we should deny that the entities we are committed to in this way have some 'second-class' status. We should not attribute a difference in ontological standing to them. As Thomasson (2015, p.146) highlights:

> […] we should not suggest that the entities to which we become committed are in general 'thin and inconsequential', 'ontologically shallow', or that their existence is somehow to be understood in a deflationary manner. Instead, we should simply say that such entities exist—full stop—and adopt a simple realist view of them.

What we get in this way is a straightforward simple (or default) realism about the entities in question and not a view on which they are 'lightweight' or 'deflated' in their ontological status:

> I will (for brevity) sometimes refer to my view simply as the 'deflationary' position. But of course this term can be and has been used in a variety of ways, and on my view we should *not* say that the *entities* in question are 'deflated'—that is part of the point of the first-order 'simple realism'. (*Ibid*., pp. 128 – 129)

They exist to the same degree and in the same manner as everything else does. Hence, the difference with more 'heavy-duty' forms of realism lies just in the motivations for accepting the entities in question. In fact, simple realists do not argue for them by suggesting that the relevant entities are 'posits' that explain phenomena. Contrary to Platonists, for instance, they do not appeal to causal-explanatory work or the like to justify her acceptance of them.[23] On this view, ontology does not involve any kind of explanation (such as metaphysical discoveries). In other words, we do not need to embrace any kind of truth-maker theory, according to which we posit certain entities in

[23] Yet, that does not exclude that "introducing the new nominative vocabulary that enables us to refer to new kinds of objects might, however, pragmatically enhance our ability to formulate explanations, and might in that sense aid in explanation" (Thomasson 2015, p. 157).

order to explain what it is that makes our existence claims true: we need in no case to posit an *x* which serves as truth-maker for "*x* exists".[24]

5. Concluding Remarks

In light of the above, one important conclusion that we can draw is that we should not simply assume that all forms of discourse have a descriptive, representational function. We must not simply assume that the work of all declarative sentences is to state facts, that the only tank of all singular terms is to pick out objects, and so on. As Sellars **(**1957, p. 7**)** reminds us:

> Once the tautology 'The world is described by descriptive concepts' is freed from the idea that the business of all non-logical concepts is to describe, the way is clear to an ungrudging recognition that many expressions which empiricists have relegated to second-class citizenship in discourse are not inferior, just different.

Besides concepts whose characteristic job is to describe features of the world, there are concepts whose primary function is to make explicit structural features of the discursive framework within which alone description is possible. Among the latter are ontological-categorial concepts, such as 'substance', 'kind', 'class', 'individual', 'thing', 'particular', 'object', property', etc.

In this paper, I have tried to give a plausible account of the function of ontological-categorial talk. Taking over Carnap's idea of understanding ontological-categorial vocabulary as covertly metalinguistic, I have argued that the role it plays is distinctive expressive. It makes explicit essential features of the use of other vocabularies. In particular, it makes explicit what is already implicit in the use of ground-level

[24] See also Augustin Rayo's arguments against what he calls the 'metaphysicalist' position that for an atomic sentence to be true there must be a certain kind of correspondence between the logical form of a sentence and the metaphysical structure of reality (Rayo 2013, pp. 6–11).

descriptive vocabularies. However, it would be wrong to think of ontological-categorial talk as conceptually prior to the use of ground-level descriptive vocabularies. The use of ontological-categorial vocabulary can indeed be elaborated from the use of ordinary predicates and declarative sentences. Therefore, it is possible to highlight two crucial features of such a vocabulary: being explicative of the framework within which descriptive vocabularies function and being elaborated from the use of those vocabularies.

The main aim of this paper, however, has been not negative but positive. Indeed, I have not tried to provide reason to reject ontological-categorial realism in favor of some forms of ontological nominalism; rather I have defended the idea that we are not necessarily entitled to draw nominalistic (semantic or ontological) conclusions from the identification of that distinctive expressive role. Pragmatic metalinguistic expressivism does not automatically preclude reference relations in semantics and realism in ontology. This allows us to maintain that a 'simple' (or 'default') kind of realism about the existence of ontological categories is at least compatible with an expressivist account of the use of ontological-categorial vocabulary.

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Transparent Contents and Trivial Inferences

Abstract

A possible way out to Kripke's 'Puzzle about Belief' could start from the rejection of the notion of 'epistemic transparency'. Epistemic transparency seems, indeed, irremediably incompatible with an externalist conception of mental content. However, Brandom's inferentialism could be considered a version of externalism that allows, at least in some cases, to save the principle of transparency. Appealing to a normative account of the content of our beliefs, from the inferentialist's standpoint, it is possible to state that a content is transparent when name-components of that content are *a priori* associated with some application conditions and, at the same time, reflection alone provides an *a priori* access to those application conditions, with no need of any empirical investigation. Nevertheless, such requirements are only met in 'trivial' cases. The aim of this paper is to argue that some application conditions of that sort, albeit trivial, can be 'ontologically ampliative'. As a result, the related contents can be regarded as transparent in a substantial and rich way.

Keywords: Referentialism, Transparency, Externalism, Application conditions, Trivial inferences

1. Introduction

Kripke's puzzle about belief shows the incompatibility between the principle of transparency and externalism. The principle of transparency states that anyone is in a position to notice and correct contradictory beliefs if one has them. If two of a thinker's token thoughts possess the same content, then the thinker must be able to know *a priori* that they do; and if two of a thinker's token thoughts possess distinct contents, then the thinker must be able to know *a priori* that they do. According to the principle of

transparency, a subject cannot consistently believe a proposition and its negation at the same time, since their contradictory nature must be reflectively accessible to her with no need for any empirical investigation. The intuitive appeal of this principle stems from the intuitive appeal of the idea that anyone is in a position to know the contents of one's propositional attitudes. But certainly, this idea cannot be taken for granted in an externalist framework.

Content externalism claims that the contents of linguistic expressions are determined partly by certain (environmental or social) factors external to an individual speaker's inner state. Once we endorse this thesis concerning the contents of linguistic expressions, then it becomes almost unavoidable to endorse the same thesis concerning the contents of propositional attitudes, since those two sorts of contents are arguably dependent on each other. The external factors that the thesis claims partly determine the contents of our statements and propositional attitudes can be completely unknown to us. Consequently, the thesis of content externalism entails that the contents of linguistic expressions and propositional attitudes are in a sense beyond our *a priori* grasp. Nevertheless, transparency of propositional attitudes seems to demand the opposite. If the contents of propositional attitudes are determined partly by certain external factors, of which we can be completely unaware, then the transparency principle is threatened. Therefore, epistemic transparency seems irremediably incompatible with an externalist conception of mental content.

It is in principle possible to give a normative account of the content of our beliefs. The inferential semantics can be considered as a paradigmatic example of such an account. According to the semantic inferentialist's standpoint, the content of a belief consists in certain inferential relations. The content of a belief, or the content expressed by a corresponding assertion, is given by the inferences the speaker is committed to and the

justifications that entitle the speaker to make the assertion. Speaking of contents of beliefs is, therefore, speaking of commitments and entitlements. These norms of commitments and entitlements may also be defined in terms of exit-rules for name-components (noun terms) of the propositions believed (which tell us what we are committed and entitled to on the basis of applying a term). However, other meaning-constituting rules for name-components of the propositions believed may also be involved, including not only exit rules but also application conditions which serve as something like introduction or entry rules. Given such a normative standpoint, it is possible to maintain that a content is transparent when it is *a priori* associated with application conditions of that sort and then reflection alone provides an *a priori* access to those application conditions, with no need of any empirical investigation. This is an account of transparency that also externalists may accept, although such requirements are taken to be met just in 'trivial' cases. Application conditions are taken to be trivial (in the sense of not requiring substantive investigation) when they reflect conceptual truths. Conceptual truths are articulations of constitutive semantic rules that govern proper use for the very noun terms we master as we acquire language. They are known *a priori* in the sense that competent speakers are licensed, based on their competence, to accept them, since they are just object-language expressions of rules they master. Rules of use entitle us to make trivial inferences, which can be considered as illustrations of such rules.

In what follows I shall try to argue that some application conditions of that sort, albeit trivial, are 'ontologically ampliative' and, as a result, the related contents can be regarded as transparent in a substantial and rich way. They are existence entailing (ontologically ampliative), in a minimalist or 'easy' approach to ontology, in the sense that beginning from an undisputed claim that makes no mention of a kind of entity F,

we end with a claim that there are Fs just by the undertaking of trivial inferences. Given an undisputed truth and by making use only of trivial reasoning, competent speakers are entailed to reach ontological conclusions that there are new entities not referred to in the undisputed truth. In this way, the existence of the entities in question can be known a priori insofar as the truth of the ontological claim may be inferred by any competent user of the term (who has mastered the relevant trivial inference) without the need for knowing any empirical truth (since one may begin the inference from conceptual truth).

In Sect. 2, I will present Kripke's puzzle about belief. In Sect. 3, I will argue that, in this puzzle, Kripke makes an assumption which conflicts with his referentialism: such an assumption is what Boghossian has called 'epistemic transparency'. In Sect. 4, I will focus on the incompatibility between epistemic transparency and the externalist conception of mental contents. In Sect. 5, I will introduce the semantic inferentialist's account of the content of our beliefs. In Sect. 6, I will conclude by rejecting the broader view that nothing is epistemically available simply on the basis of linguistic and conceptual competence.

2. The Puzzle

In *A Puzzle About Belief*[1] Kripke tries to disarm challenges to 'direct reference' theories of proper names that are based on the apparent failure of substitutivity in propositional attitude contexts. Kripke's puzzle is aimed at a variant of Frege's puzzle, which traditionally has been used to criticize referentialist views (Millianism). Kripke tries to draw the sting from Frege's puzzle by creating a similar paradox, but one which does not rest on Millianism in any way. The idea is, indeed, to show that it is illegitimate to blame the paradox on Millianism. Kripke's main contention is that the 'Pierre-puzzle'

[1] Kripke 1988, pp.102-148.

shows that the substitution-failures in propositional attitude contexts that are normally blamed on a substitutivity principle licensed by referentialism can be generated without using any such substitutivity principles. If correct, this contention would seem to disarm the argument from substitutivity failure as a criticism of referentialism.

In the original puzzle, Kripke constructs a situation in which the propositions expressed by the embedded sentences in belief ascriptions are contradictory. I will not present the details of Kripke's well-known article, which I assume to be familiar to the reader; I will just remind that Pierre in Kripke's example assents to two sentences that, unbeknownst to him, seem to contradict each other, namely that 'London is not pretty' and 'Londres est jolie'. The possibility of this being an accurate belief ascription is then challenged by Kripke on the basis that Pierre would be sufficiently rational not to believe contradictory propositions.

The puzzle rests on two principles. The first is the 'disquotation principle' (DP), which states that "if a normal English speaker, on reflection, sincerely assents to 'p', then he believes that p"[2]. Kripke also states a biconditional form of the DP, namely that "a normal English speaker who is not reticent will be disposed to sincere reflective assent to 'p' iff he believes that p"[3]. The biconditional DP implies that failure to assent indicates lack of belief, as assent indicates belief. The second principle that Kripke states is the 'principle of translation' (TP). It states that "if a sentence of one language expresses a truth in that language, then any translation of it into any other language also expresses a truth (in that other language)"[4].

It would seem that Pierre holds both beliefs, therefore, that he has contradictory beliefs. But, this option seems to lead to insuperable difficulties. We can assume that

[2] *Ibid*., p. 112.
[3] *Ibid*., p. 113.
[4] *Ibid*., p. 113.

Pierre is a leading philosopher and logician, and "surely anyone, leading logician or no, is in principle in a position to notice and correct contradictory beliefs if he has them"[5]. In brief, Kripke's puzzle attempts to arrive at a contradiction by stipulating that a subject is rational and then showing how the DP and TP lead to the subject having contradictory beliefs. This is supposed to be irrational, and hence a paradox arises. Kripke also constructs the so-called 'Paderewski-puzzle'. This is used to show that the above problem can also arise within a single language, using phonetically identical tokens of a single name.

According to referentialism, the sole semantic function of a proper name is simply to refer; in other words, the view that what a singular term '*a*' contributes to determining the proposition expressed by '*a* is F' is simply its referent. It follows that if referentialism is true, then so is substitutivity:

(SU) If 'Fa' is a sentence containing a referring term '*a*', then substituting '*a*' by a referring term '*b*' does not change the truth-value of 'Fa', if '*a*' and '*b*' have the same reference.

While Kripke has pointed out the difficulties of an indirect theory of reference for names, he does not offer a solution to the problem of substitution of co-extensive names in belief contexts. Nevertheless, in order to links rationality with the absence of logically contradictory belief, we need to postulate another auxiliary principle, consistency:

(CO) If a speaker S reflectively and occurrently believes that *a* is F and that *a* is not F, then S is not fully rational.

The foregoing suggests that since (SU) follows straightforwardly from the referentialist semantics, because it is semantically irrelevant how that proposition is

[5] *Ibid*., p. 122.

referred to, something better be amiss with (CO). The idea is then that if S is as rational as anyone gets, then S cannot hold contradictory beliefs. Reflection seems to be the operative principle behind 'consistency': since one can by reflection alone determine that one of one's occurrent beliefs is the negation of another of one's occurrent beliefs, if one is rational then upon reflection one should be able to detect the contradiction and thereby reject at least one of the beliefs[6]. No doubt most of us hold some contradictory beliefs without thereby being irrational, but we tend to think that had our cognitive abilities been as good as they get, we would not have held such belief.

Respectively, if the direct reference theorist does maintain this position, then we are left with the conflict between our logical instincts (if *a* equals *b*, then '*b*' can be substituted for '*a*' in a sentence without loss of truth) and our common sense (utterances may differ in truth value, because they may express different propositions). Nevertheless, I shall try to argue that the problem does not, strictly speaking, lie with the direct reference theory of names, but rather in the traditional view of believing.

3. Transparency of Inconsistencies

The referentialist, however, may reject consistency: if the logical properties of a belief content are not reflectively accessible to S, then S can hold contradictory beliefs without being irrational. The fact that Pierre's beliefs have logically contradictory properties is not reflectively accessible to him; it can only be discovered by appropriate empirical investigations. It means that Pierre lacks reflective access to key logical properties of the sole propositional contents of his occurrent beliefs, that is, he is ignorant of such basic inferential relations between them as identity or contradiction. Therefore, *a priori* reflection will not be sufficient for him to amend his error; what he needs to discover is

[6] Similar results hold for other logical relations among thoughts: e.g., if thought A is the negation of thought B, then I can know by reflection alone that thought A is the negation of thought B.

that he is thinking about two different individuals, which he can learn only by empirical investigation.

A number of philosophers have pointed out that Kripke makes an assumption which conflicts with his referentialism. This assumption is what Boghossian[7] has called 'epistemic transparency'. He formulates it as follows: Epistemic content is transparent if, and only if, "[when]…two of a thinker's token thoughts possess the same content, then the thinker must be able to know *a priori* that they do; and (b) if two of a thinker's token thoughts possess distinct contents, then the thinker must be able to know *a priori* that they do"[8].

If a person knows *a priori* whether or not the propositions expressed by two token thoughts are the same, then the logical properties of such propositions, i.e. whether they are consistent or contradictory, are similarly known by him *a priori*. Epistemic transparency would imply that determining and correcting contradictory beliefs is a matter of logical acumen, rather than acquiring information. But, as stated by Kallestrup: "[t]he fact that his beliefs have logically contradictory properties is not reflectively accessible to him; it can only be discovered by appropriate empirical means"[9].

On the contrary, 'epistemic opacity' (the denial of epistemic transparency) would imply that logical acumen is not sufficient to detect all contradictory beliefs. The person would not be in a position to determine and correct all potentially contradictory beliefs unless he has acquired information regarding the content of the terms he used and thereby gained knowledge of the logical properties of the propositions expressed by two given sentences. What epistemic opacity denies is that propositional content is

[7] Boghossian 1994, p. 33.
[8] *Ibid*., p. 36.
[9] Kallestrup 2003, p. 112.

transparent in the sense that if S fully apprehends two propositional contents with a certain logical property, then S can come to know just by reflection that they have that property. Only then we accept epistemic opacity, S can consistently believe a proposition and its negation at the same time, since only then their contradictory nature is not reflectively accessible to her[10].

Referentialism and epistemic transparency turn out to be jointly inconsistent and what must be rejected, it seems, is epistemic transparency. This means that the referentialist should reject consistency, at least on our assumption that (CO) pertains to the propositions expressed by the embedded sentences, i.e., that if S occurrently and on reflection believes a proposition and its negation, then S is less than fully rational. Rejecting epistemic transparency would entail that also "a leading philosopher and logician"[11] can have contradictory beliefs, without this being irrational. Therefore, the most basic cleavage when considering the semantics of belief-attribution turns out to be between theories that claim content to be transparent and theories that do not.

Let me sum up. The paradox poses a difficulty for referentialism, because of its adherence to (SU). This reasoning has been argued to be fallacious based on the assumption of epistemic transparency. However, the referentialist may reject (CO), which relies on epistemic transparency, and so avoid inconsistency. If epistemic transparency is rejected, then it is a trivial matter to construct cases where S's dissent from '*a* is F' does not imply that it is not the case that S believes that *a* is F. The implicit assumption of epistemic transparency is something that is peculiar to Kripkean puzzles; if epistemic transparency is refuse, then the referentialist can easily avert the puzzle.

[10]Salmon 1986, p. 132.
[11] Kripke 1988, p. 123.

With mental content being transparent, I mean the claim that for any two thoughts (or thoughts constituents) a subject can consider at a given time, at that time, that subject can know with no need for any empirical investigation whether those thoughts (or thoughts constituents) do share their contents or not. If the content is not transparent, then we will not be able to know *a priori* the logical properties of our thoughts and beliefs and we will not be able to know a priori what follows from our thoughts (and what does not). Now, there is no question that S, even if idealized, can simultaneously believe of *a* that it is both F and not-F without being reproached with inconsistency. There are undoubtedly cases where speakers believe things that they are not reflectively aware of. Psychoanalysis abounds with speakers suffering from cognitive illusions, self-deceptions, etc.

4. **Content Externalism**

A referentialist view of the semantic content of proper names seems to represent a paradigm case of externalist content leading to epistemic opacity. Both Kripkean and Fregean puzzles involve a situation where an externalist would contradict the truth-value that the subject of a belief-attribution would assign to the belief-attribution. The referentialist can attribute contradictory beliefs to Pierre, safe in the knowledge that such attributions are made possible by the very nature of externalism. Epistemic opacity would seem to be a direct implication of holding an externalist conception of mental content. In such a conception of mental content, "[s]ubject's intentional states are individuated in part by certain sorts of facts about the physical and/or social environment in which he happens to be situated"[12].

[12] Boghossian 1994, p. 34.

If my intentional states are individuated in terms of external facts (physical or social), then I cannot determine the logical properties of propositions expressed by token thoughts that are individuated in such a way without reference to, and knowledge of, these external facts. In other words, externalism would imply that determining the consistency of two token thoughts is sometimes a matter of acquiring information after all, and not only a matter of logical acumen. Boghossian, for instance, concludes that externalism entails a rejection of epistemic transparency, and takes this to be one of the main conclusions to be drawn from Kripke's puzzle: "Now, it is fairly easy to show that externalist conceptions of mental content do not satisfy the transparency of sameness. Kripke's notorious Frenchman, Pierre, already shows this for the special case of Millian contents (themselves, of course, a sort of externalist content)"[13].

Therefore, why are these semantical facts puzzling? They are puzzling because of transparency of inconsistency: that anyone is in principle in a position to notice and correct contradictory beliefs if he has them. So logic alone should teach Pierre that his beliefs are inconsistent, yet it cannot. No logical reflection can show him the inconsistency. The intuitive appeal of this principle draws from the intuitive appeal of the idea that anyone is, in principle, in a position to know the contents of one's propositional attitudes. But certainly, in the framework of externalist semantics, this idea cannot be taken for granted. Under the externalist supposition that the contribution of the name-components to the propositions believed is fully determined by the identity of the bearers of the names, then, those semantical data should be regarded as puzzling only once a compelling argument for the validity of this principle in an externalist framework is suggested.

[13] *Ibid*., p. 36.

Nevertheless, there may be convincing reasons why epistemic transparency is worth preserving. Usually, we think that it is an essential ingredient in what has come to be known as 'privileged access': the idea that S has a first-person authority with respect to the contents of her own occurrent mental states. If the subject lacks reflective access to key logical properties of the sole propositional contents of her occurrent beliefs, that is, she is ignorant of such basic inferential relations between them as identity or contradiction. This, in conjunction with the fact that our ordinary 'way of talking' when attributing beliefs always agrees with the truth-value assignment made by any rational subject of a belief-attribution, then suffices to generate problematic belief attributions. In fact, the falsehood of the intuitive reflection principle, that one can by reflection alone determine the simple logical relations among one's propositional attitudes, seems to conflict with our ordinary intuitions regarding belief. People commonly and without hesitation do accept the truth of the datum. This means that our common practices of belief-attribution treat the content embedded in propositional attitude contexts as epistemically transparent[14]. Therefore, externalist theories will result in attributions that contradict our normal practice of belief-attribution and, accordingly, we can characterize the problem cases as those where an externalist would contradict the assignment of truth-values of a rational agent[15].

We can differ from the truth-value assignments of a rational agent if the content is externalist, while internalist theories need not have these results. Internalism of this

[14] However, our common practices of belief-attribution, like accepting the datum, only show that our common practices are committed to epistemic transparency, not that it is correct. This raises an intriguing possibility: what if our 'folk semantics' is internalist, descriptivist and epistemically transparent, but actually wrong (and/or incoherent) in some sense?

[15] Against the intuition that the job of semantics simply is to treat our common attribution of truth-values as data, various referentialists, for instance Salmon (1986), have argued that the datum is, in fact, false and that our ordinary way of speaking is to be explained with reference to Gricean implicatures and the like. Salmon claims that we often take a true sentence like 'Lois Lane believes that Clark Kent can fly', which actually expresses a true singular proposition, to include the Gricean implicature that Lois Lane would assent to 'Clark Kent can fly'. Here the implicature of the sentence would "lead speakers to deny it, despite its literal truth-conditions [being] fulfilled" (*Ibid*., p. 115).

class thus decrees that some mental states are transparent in the general sense that they are fully 'open to view' or 'revealed by introspection'. From an internalist standpoint, it is natural to maintain that in some instances there is a necessary connection between believing a proposition and its truth[16]. This distinction and not the descriptivist/referentialist distinction could be considered the fundamental distinction in the semantics of belief-attributions.

In the same line, David Lewis states: "When we characterise the content of belief by assigning propositional (or other) objects, are we characterising an inner, narrowly psychological state of the believer? Are beliefs in the head? Or are we characterising partly the believer's inner state, partly the relations of that state to the outer world? If it is the latter, the objection may succeed; however, Kripke's puzzle vanishes. For if the assignment of propositional objects characterises more than the believer's inner state, then there is no reason to suppose that a leading philosopher and logician would never let contradictory beliefs pass, or that anyone is in principle in a position to notice and correct contradictory beliefs if he has them. Anyone is in principle in a position to notice and correct a state of the head which can be characterised by assigning contradictory propositional objects, but why should philosophical and logical acumen help him if the trouble lies partly outside?"[17].

And again: "As soon as we accept the consistency of Pierre's beliefs as a datum - as I did, on Kripke's invitation - we are committed to the narrowly psychological conception of belief and its objects. But on the narrowly psychological conception, the counterexample world does fit Pierre's belief […] That only means that 'Pierre believes that London is pretty' is not a narrowly psychological characterization. Indeed not; we

[16]However, internalism is a highly contentious position, reproved by the likes of Burge, Putnam, Kripke, and Williamson.

[17] Lewis 1981, pp. 288-289.

can see that directly. Someone might be exactly like Pierre psychologically and yet not believe that London is pretty"[18].

Briefly, if we agree with this kind of externalism that *a priori* reflection will not always suffice to ensure the validity of our inferences, then it looks like that embracing externalism and abandoning transparency "blurs the distinction between errors of reasoning and errors of fact"[19]. The point is that, if it were true that *a priori* reasoning did not suffice for avoiding logical errors, then we could not assure our status as rational agents by mere *a priori* reflection (and this last point is an important thesis for how we have traditionally understood what it is to be rational). But, even though we accept that content is not transparent and, therefore, that one might be condemned to make logical mistakes, we want, and must, consider Pierre to be a rational person!

Perhaps externalism is incompatible with claiming that content is transparent, perhaps, if content is not transparent, we will be condemned to make some wrong judgments on the validity of some arguments, and perhaps we are not always able to respect the norms of logic on *a priori* basis (that we are not able to conform out thoughts and beliefs to the norms of logic on a priori basis). Nevertheless, such logical mistakes by themselves do not involve necessarily flaws in rationality.

5. Content of Belief

What is the content of a belief expressed by a sentence with a proper name? It is very difficult to have a uniform conception of the content of a belief and it is exactly the main problem arising from the discussion of Kripke's puzzle. A relevant assumption, which does not enter directly into the argument of the puzzle, works as the background for Kripke's assumptions about the propositional content of a belief:

[18] *Ibid*., p. 289.
[19] Boghossian 2011, p. 458.

- Proper names are a basic ingredient in forming singular propositions, intended in a Russellian way; therefore the content of belief, or of other propositional attitudes, is given by an ordered pair with an object and a property; in the relevant cases - London, ugliness/prettiness - or - Paderewski, musical talent -.

At the end of his paper, Kripke speaks of the 'cloud' that the paradox places over the notion of content and this cloud seems to be placed mainly on the idea of a singular proposition. In general, if '*a* is F' expresses a singular proposition, then 'S believes that *a* is F' is true iff 'S believes of *a* that it is F' is true. According to millianism, singular propositions are individuated by their objectual constituents, independently of how they are conceptualized. An utterance of '*a* is F' thus expresses a singular proposition consisting of the referent of '*a*', and an utterance of '*b* is F' expresses the same proposition if *a* = *b*. Likewise, the sole propositional content of a belief is a singular proposition consisting of an object and a property which are what the embedded sentence '*a* is F' refers to and it is semantically irrelevant how that proposition is referred to**.** Hence, contradictory beliefs are between singular propositions. It is also possible to assume a relational principle of belief on the referentialist account, according to which S believes that '*a* is F' says that S is belief-related to a singular proposition B(S; (*a*, F-ness)) and the only propositional content of S's belief is a singular proposition. It is therefore not to be expected that speakers who entertain such propositions can come to know their logical properties "just by deploying their conceptual apparatus from the armchair"[20]. If so, then the content of one's belief would still be unknown to the subject, and transparency would not be preserved, after all.

Nevertheless, the answer to this question can be given adequately also in the spirit of the use theory of meaning, from the semantic inferentialist's standpoint. Roughly, the

[20] Kallestrup, 2003, pp. 112-113.

content of what we say and judge is inferentially articulated by being pragmatically determined in normative practices of scorekeeping. In accordance with Brandom's inferential role semantics, the content of a belief, or the content expressed by a corresponding assertion, is given by the inferences the speaker is committed to and the justifications that entitle the speaker to make the assertion. Speaking of the content of a belief is, therefore, speaking of commitments and entitlements. Propositional contents consist in their distinctive role in inferences and can be identified with the inferential relations one is committed to, or with the inferential commitments one undertakes in expressing a claim or a belief.

From the inferentialist semantic standpoint, the representational aspect of the propositional content of a claim consists of the inferential roles of various true identity statements that describe the identity condition of the object. Inferential roles are enabling us to make new substitutional commitments[21] through substitutional inferences, i.e. the inferences that draw a consequence by simultaneously replacing a certain term occurring in a premise with another term based on an identity statement. Therefore, grasping the content of a statement consists of the ability to derive various substitutional commitments from the original statement together with those true identity statements making through substitutional inferences. By analogy, contents of beliefs can be also explained in a similar way[22]. The occurring terms in belief ascription, as interpreted by the ascriber, reflect the ascriber's own acknowledged substitutional commitments, hence what the ascriber takes to be the objective substitutional norms governing these terms. And since objective norms bind everybody, the ascription thus captures substitutional commitments that, according to the ascriber, the ascribee is

[21]A substitutional commitment of a claim is the commitment undertaken by an interlocutor from *de re* viewpoint (see Brandom 1994, pp. 136-140, 370-376, 495- 520).

[22]The content of a belief can be defined as the commitment to correct substitutions with respect to anaphoric chains.

bound to acknowledge given the belief ascribed, whether or not the ascribee acknowledges them in fact.

One of the main tenets of *Making it Explicit*[23] is that the constituents of propositional contents are the objective semantic norms governing the use of among speakers of English: this commits Brandom to a version of semantic externalism[24]. In this sense, the content of a statement or belief is not only inferentially but also socially articulated in our inferential practice. In order to grasp the representational aspect of the propositional content of a statement or a belief, we should attend not merely to the inferentially articulated dimension, but also to the socially articulated dimension of our game of giving and asking for reasons. Moreover, a common content has to be considered not as something shared by every member of the society, but as generally accepted norms towards which all people should conform and do conform when properly guided.

In line with such a position, Pierre's two beliefs differ in their inferential roles. The substitutional commitment is undertaken through the substitutional inference based on an identity statement to which the interlocutor is committed, regardless that the speaker may acknowledge the commitment or not. Accordingly, Pierre erroneously attaches to the same type of name two different sets of inferential commitments, which are two different ways to keep track of the one individual, without acknowledging it. Pierre has, therefore, two different contents of belief, even if his beliefs are actually connected to the same referent (to the same object of belief).

6. Application conditions and trivial inferences

As we have seen, roughly speaking the content of a propositional attitude is transparent if there is no significant gap between the thought and what the thought is

[23]Brandom 1994.
[24]*Ibid*., p. 632; Brandom 2000, pp. 359-360.

about. Unfortunately, the transparency seems incompatible with externalism conception of mental contents. The externalist cannot possibly maintain that contents are transparent due to some key logical properties, such as identity and contradiction, which are not immediately revealed by them. According to such a conception, contents are related to reality by facts external to our *a priori* grasp, hence it do lead us to deny that there can be any transparent contents. But, our terms also come with rules of use we master as we acquire language. Along with inferentialist account, we can speak more generally of the 'introduction rules' for terms. In some cases, the introduction rules may license us to apply a term if certain application conditions[25] are fulfilled. If one takes this general approach, application conditions for nouns can be treated as among the introduction rules licensing us to apply certain terms. All that is required here is that a content is transparent when it is *a priori* associated with application conditions of that sort and then reflection alone provides access to the application conditions for that content with no need of any empirical investigation or to be supported by empirical evidence about the relevant external conditions.

This is an account of transparency that also externalists may accept, although such requirements are taken to be met just in 'trivial' cases. That may be right, but it does not mean they never truly count as revealing anything. Indeed, some application conditions of that sort, albeit trivial, can be 'ontologically ampliative', and hence the related contents can be regarded as transparent in a substantial and rich way.

Application conditions are taken to be trivial (in the sense of not requiring substantive investigation) when they reflect conceptual truths. Conceptual truths are articulations of rules of use for the introduced noun term. Application conditions of that sort are among

[25] Application conditions can be, for instance, conditionals of the form 'If x is P, then x falls under concept C' (or 'If x falls under C, then x is P'), where P is some property (or set of properties) of the object x (see Levine 2001; Diaz-Leon 2014, p. 12).

the constitutive semantic rules that govern proper use for the very noun terms we master as we acquire language. Rules of use entitle us to make trivial inferences, which can be considered as illustrations of such rules. Therefore, conceptual truths may be seen as object-language articulations of the rules that may be used in introducing terms.

A 'trivial' inference that relies on application conditions of that sort can be ontologically ampliative without being informationally ampliative[26]. They are existence entailing (ontologically ampliative), conforming to a minimalist[27] or 'easy' approach to ontology, in the sense that beginning from an undisputed claim that makes no mention of an entity F, we end with a claim that there are Fs. That is, we obtain a derived claim which entails the existence of Fs, just by undertaking and making use of trivial inferences. In other words, given an undisputed truth and by engaging in trivial inferences, we can reach a truth that is intuitively redundant with respect to the first one, which yet leaves us with ontological commitments to disputed entities[28]. The point is that we can use trivial inferences of that sort to acquire commitments to trees, chairs, volcanoes or any ordinary object if we start (in a metaphysical dispute, for instance) from an undisputed claim such as 'there are particles arranged volcano-wise'. For it is a conceptual truth (a truth knowable *a priori* via command of the term) that the existence of volcanoes is guaranteed whenever there are particles arranged volcano-wise[29].

[26] David Chalmers speaks of an inference as 'ontologically ampliative' if, roughly, "the consequent makes an existential claim that is not built into the antecedent" (Chalmers, 2009, p. 95). It is worth noting that this use of 'ampliative' is crucially different from Contessa's sense of 'informationally ampliative': the inference from (a) to (b) is 'informationally ampliative': when (b) contains new information not present in (a) (Contessa 2016, *passim*; see also Thomasson 2017, p. 771)

[27] The expression 'ontological minimalism' is taken from Thomasson (2001), where she uses it to describe her own and Schiffer's view. Then Thomasson has moved away from that name and prefers 'easy ontology'. Her reason for moving away from ontological minimalism is that it suggests, not her view that the standards for ontological commitment are minimal, but that the entities that exist, according to the view, are somehow minimal, an implication she rejects.

[28] Thomasson 2015, p. 234.

[29] Schiffer 2003, p.52; Thomasson 2015, p. 149, 231.

In Schiffer's terms, they are 'pleonastic something from nothing inferences'. Engaging in pleonastic something from nothing inferences, we begin with undisputed truths and combine it with an analytic or conceptual truth that functions as what Schiffer calls a 'transformation rule', to give us a derived claim that is, intuitively, redundant with respect to the undisputed claim, yet leaves us with (apparently new) ontological commitments to the disputed entities[30]. Versions of inferentialism make use of such a kind of trivial inferences, endorsed by Schiffer and Thomasson, in developing the easy approach to ontology. According to easy ontological views, many ontological debates may be resolved by engaging in inferences that seem redundant in ordinary English as genuinely trivial from uncontroversial premises. The view is motivated by its ability to tackle directly the question of how propositional thoughts about such objects are possible and how they can be knowledgeable. For given the trivial inferences that take us to claims about objects, we can see how speakers may acquire knowledge of these objects by knowing the uncontroversial truths and mastering the rules of use for the terms that entitle them to make inferences from those uncontroversial truths to the existence of them[31].

What the easy ontologist needs is clearly a normative claim, about what competent speakers are entitled to conclude (and what would be a mistake), not a descriptive one about what competent speakers will be disposed to assent to. That is to say, a normativist version of inferentialism which treats possessing a concept not as entailing that speakers are disposed to assent to certain statements, but rather that they ought to assent. Inferential rules (typically expressed by conditionals, material or formal) do not primarily consist in obligations for speakers or believers; they rather constraint our linguistic practices by delimitating what, from an inferential point of view, we may and

[30] Shiffer 2003, p. 52.
[31]Thomasson 2015, Chapter 3, pp. 127-160.

may not do by entertaining propositional contents. They should better be seen as normative uniformities characterizing the pattern-governed behaviours of speakers. The view is not that someone's understanding the claim entails that she has a disposition to assent to it, but rather that mastery of the relevant linguistic rules governing the expressions used entitles one to make the relevant inference using those expressions and embrace the ontological conclusion and that rejecting it would leave one open to rebuke[32].

Consider another classical example: the question 'Is there a table?', asked for instance in a restaurant, can be straightforwardly answered by beginning from a claim that is not a point of controversy between realists and (most) eliminativists:

- Uncontroversial claim: 'There are particles arranged table-wise in the restaurant'.

But, the following seems to be a conceptual truth:

- Conceptual truth: 'If there are particles arranged table-wise, then there is a table'.

Indeed, the occurrence of the situation in which eliminativists would say particles are arranged table-wise guarantees that the application conditions for the ordinary term 'table' are met. Thus, competent speakers who master the application conditions for 'table' are licensed to infer the derived ontological claim:

- Derived/ontological claim: 'There is a table'.

[32] There seem to be two separate questions here: how can an individual be obliged to reason according to certain rules, and why ought we (collectively) to have those rules rather than any others. On the first, the right approach seems to be that one can be so obliged by presenting oneself as a participant in the relevant public norm-governed practice (just as one can be obliged to follow the rules of soccer by joining the soccer game). The question of why we ought to adopt certain rules (or norms) rather than any others is far more difficult. One might look to the work of inferentialist logicians (Beall and Restall 2013, Ripley 2013) for a way of understanding certain basic norms regarding acceptance and rejection as constitutive norms for thought, and thus as non-optional. And we might look for a pragmatic justification for adopting other (less basic) norms or rules.

In this way, ontological debates about the existence of concrete objects can be settled just as 'easily'. Ontological claims may be derived by competent speakers, through inferences, from uncontroversial claims combined with conceptual truths. Accordingly, by trivial reasoning a speaker may entitle her to reach new conclusions. For mastery of the rules of use for terms license the speaker to make easy inferences from basic, uncontroversial truths to the existence of the entities in question and to move from knowledge of the conceptual truth to knowledge that the things in question exist[33].

To conclude, let's focus again on attitude reports. Imagine that Pierre finally arrives in London and enters a restaurant. Pierre has meanwhile become a mereological nihilist, so that he assents to the two following sentences: 'there are particles arranged table-wise' but 'there is no table'. Accordingly, we can report:

i. Pierre believes there are particles arranged table-wise.

ii. Pierre believes that there is no table.

However, given the aforementioned conceptual truth 'if there are particles arranged table-wise, then there is a table', which is supposed to establish the application conditions of the noun term 'table' and to govern its use, if Pierre asserts that there are particles arranged table-wise and we take him to be a competent speaker, then we are licensed to infer 'Pierre believes that there is a table'. As a result, we end up attributing to Pierre both the belief in the proposition that 'there is a table' and the belief in its negation at the same time[34].

[33]By adopting, perhaps, a minimalist approach to truth (see Price 2011, pp. 253-279).

[34] In order to make this case fit with referentialism and *direct reference* theories of proper names, we can imagine Pierre naming the particles arranged table-wise in front of him as 'Sum' and the alleged non-existent table 'Tab'. Then we can report:

Pierre believes that Sum exists.

Pierre believes that Tab does not exist.

But, since the application conditions of 'Tab' allows to assert that if there is Sum, then there is Tab, we are licensed to infer 'Pierre believes that Tab exists' (or better, he should if he was a competent speaker). So, we end up by acknowledging that:

a) Pierre believes that Tab exists.

But, as I tried to show, Pierre can consistently believe both propositions at the same time, only if their contradictory nature is not reflectively accessible to him. That is not going to happen here. In this case, unlike Kripke's original example, we can accept epistemic transparency. Indeed, the fact that Pierre's beliefs have logically contradictory properties should be accessible to him simply by reflecting on the way the word 'table' is actually used in linguistic practice and not through any empirical investigation. Mastering the rules of use of the noun term 'table' in linguistic practice is sufficient to determine that one of his occurrent beliefs is the negation of another of his occurrent beliefs. It means that *a priori* reflection would be sufficient for him to detect that he is holding contradictory beliefs and to amend his error. Therefore, if in this case the logical properties of the belief content are reflectively accessible to Pierre, then Pierre cannot hold such contradictory beliefs without being regarded as irrational (or, at least, as a non-competent speaker). That is, if Pierre occurrently and on reflection believes the proposition 'there is no table' and its negation at the same time, then we cannot take him to be fully rational (or rather, we cannot take him to be a competent speaker). Because if Pierre was rational (or better, a competent speaker), then he should be able to detect the contradiction and thereby reject at least one of the beliefs.

7. Conclusion

In the light of the above, it is possible to conclude that competent speakers are *a priori* licensed to accept conceptual truths (object-language expression of rules they master) and to underwrite trivial inferences which are ontologically ampliative (without being informationally ampliative). Therefore, in those circumstances, they can reach and acquire ontological conclusions without the need for knowing any empirical truths. This

b) Pierre believes that Tab does not exist.

leads us to reject the broader view that nothing is epistemically available simply on the basis of linguistic and conceptual competence.

I started this paper by summarizing Kripke's puzzle about belief. I suggested that one of the main achievements of this puzzle is to show the incompatibility between Boghossian's principle of epistemic transparency and externalism of mental contents. According to the latter, contents are related to reality by facts external to our *a priori* grasp (epistemic opacity). As a consequence, there cannot be any transparent content.

I then focused on the semantic inferentialist's account of the content of our beliefs. I put forward the idea that, on the basis of this normative standpoint, a content can be taken to be transparent when name-components of that content are *a priori* associated with some application conditions and then reflection alone provides an *a priori* access to those application conditions, with no need of any empirical investigation. In this way, it was possible to provide an account of transparency compatible with externalism. An account, though, that works just in 'trivial' cases. Trivial application conditions reflect conceptual truths. I argued that inferences that rely on application conditions of that sort, albeit trivial, can be existence entailing - according to a minimalist or 'easy' approach to ontology. Accordingly, I concluded that some transparent contents (contents epistemically available simply on the basis of linguistic and conceptual competence) turn out to be, to some extent, 'ampliative'.

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Cross-Sortal Identity Claims

Abstract

One of the major themes of Sellars's (1963a) is the problem of fusing in a stereoscopic vision the 'manifest' and the 'scientific' image of the world. Such a possibility essentially depends on the truth of identity claims relating descriptive terms in the vocabulary of the manifest image and descriptive terms drawn from the vocabulary of the scientific image. Yet, these are almost always 'cross-sortal' identity claims: that is, identity claims relating terms whose governing sortals are governed by quite different criteria of identity and individuation. In this paper, I maintain that cross-sortal identity claims are never true. At the same time, though, I suggest that also attempts to find a rivalry between the two images are misleading. Usually, arguments that relate common-sense and scientific ontologies rely on the idea that we could make category-neutral reference to some *thing* we are talking about. But 'thing', in its neutral use, is not a sortal term, hence it cannot enable us to establish reference to something about which science and common sense may then agree or disagree. In order to overcome this impasse, I argue for a different understanding of claims linking the two images. Roughly, I take their primary role to be a (metalinguistic) expressive function.

Keywords: Sortals, Pseudosortals, Ontological-categorial vocabulary, Manifest Image, Scientific Image

1. Introduction

The issue I want to address in this paper concern the alleged rivalry between the *manifest* and the *scientific* images of the world. In particular, my goal will be to challenge Sellars's scientific naturalist rendering of the phenomena/noumena distinction, by tracing the way in which identity claims interact with the constellation of

criteria of identity, sortals semantically governed by them, and terms that fall under those sortals**.** In Sect. 2, I will try to argue that cross-sortals identity claims are never true (that is, they are always false!). At the same time, though, adding that cross-sortal identity claims are false because they equate two different *things* is, at least, controversial (that will be the subject-matter of Sect. 3). Or better, counting claims that relate terms falling under different sortals also face problems. This is because counting claims of that sort involve metaphysical notions, such as 'thing', 'object' 'entity', 'item' which are pseudosortals (or dummy sortals), rather than genuine sortals. Accordingly, in Sect. 4, I will put forward an expressivist approach to such ontological-categorial vocabulary. In particular, I will suggest that such vocabulary plays a metalinguistic expressive function, rather than a descriptive one. Finally, in Sect. 5, I will apply all this machinery in order to challenge the alleged rivalry or conflict between the *manifest* and the *scientific* images of the world.

2. Sortals

Usually, common nouns (kind-terms) in English and other related languages (e.g., most Indo-European languages) are distinguished in two groups: mass nouns and count nouns.[1]Mass nouns include "water, paper, furniture, and grass" and count nouns include "cat, pebble, photograph, lamp, pea, and lake" (Hansen 1983, p.32). Mass nouns tend to map onto kinds of non-individuated portions. So that things falling under them can be measured (a sense has been given to questions of the form "How much?" for example "How much *heavy*?" or "How much *water*?"). On the other hand, count nouns, rather than being used to refer to some stuff, tend to map onto kinds of individuals. So that things falling under them can be counted (a sense has been given to questions of the

[1] The distinction was first made in modern times by O. Jespersen (1924) and L. Bloomfield (1933) and has since been discussed by linguists, philosophers of language, and psychologists alike.

form "How many?" for example "How many *cats*?" or "How many *electrons*?"). Count nouns are sortal terms.

Sortal terms come associated both with application conditions and with co-application conditions. Application conditions[2] determine whether the sortal term is successfully applied at all in a certain situation. This means that a sortal applies (or is satisfied) in a situation if its application conditions are fulfilled in that situation. For example, the application conditions for the term 'lion' may be satisfied by the presence of creatures with the same genetic structure as those creatures have; or the application conditions for 'piece of copper' may be fulfilled by a large number of Cu atoms tightly bonded together, so that the sortal 'piece of copper' is satisfied by the presence of such tightly bonded Cu atoms. Application conditions for a sortal must be distinguished from the co-application conditions that determine when it can be applied again, in different circumstances (such as in different times), to one and the same *individual.*[3] Therefore, they determine the individuation and identity conditions for anything falling under the sortal.

Speaking of concepts instead of terms, it is possible to define a sortal as a concept that provides criteria (principles) of individuation and criteria (principles) of identity.[4] Criteria of individuation enable us to answer the question "How many?". For in order to answer this question, we need to specify how many of what. On the other hand, criteria of identity allow us to answer the question "Is it the same?" For in order to answer this question we need to specify "The same what". Criteria of identity tell us about differences between objects of a given kind: distinct sets must differ in their

[2] See manly Thomasson (2015, Chap. 2.2).
[3] See Thomasson (2007, Chap. 2.3, in particular p. 40).
[4] By 'principle' or 'criteria' I don't mean just explicitly formulated rules that the agent consults; in fact, they are often rules that are implicit in the linguistic practice of using count nouns and that the agent follows blindly.

membership, instead distinct physical objects (let's suppose) must differ in their spatio-temporal locations.

Along these lines, we can talk of:

- Object individuation: the process of establishing object representations (which answers the question "How many?").
- Object identification: the process of binding property information to the existing object representations such that objects can be re-identified at another time (which answers the question "Which one?", "Is it the same?").

2.1 Cross-Sortal Identities Claims

Different sortals have different criteria of application and different criteria of identity. But sometimes two different sortals can have different criteria of application and the same criteria of identity. Examples are the so-called 'phase sortals'(Wiggins 1967): sortals typically only apply to some temporal segment of an object, such as 'kitten', 'tadpole' and 'colt', which are applicable only to proper subsets of what 'cat', 'frog' and 'horses'. In the same way, two different teenagers are two different persons, and two different persons who are teenagers are two different teenagers. Consider, for instance, the following inference:

- All teenagers are persons.
- There are at least 7 million teenagers in Spain.

Therefore

- There are at least 7 million persons in Spain.[5]

[5] According to the report "Youth in figures" (published by The Observatory of Youth in Spain, a study entity dependent on the Institute of Youth - Injuve), which dates its numbers to 1 January 2016, in Spain there are 7.11 million boys and girls over 15 and under 29 years, i.e. 15.3 percent of the population of 46 million inhabitants.

This is a good inference! In fact, the sortals ‘teenager’ and ‘person’ differ in their criteria of application (everything ‘teenager’ applies to, ‘person’ applies to, but not vice versa), but they have the same criteria of identity. Accordingly, also the following turns out to be a good inference:

- Marie and Toulouse are teenagers.
- Teenagers are persons (young ones).
- Marie and Toulouse are persons.
- Marie is the same person as Toulouse.

Therefore

- They are the same teenager.

In fact, if Marie and Toulouse are the same person, and they are teenagers, then they are the same teenager. Or, in other words, if Marie and Toulouse are the same teenager, then they are the same person. As a result, identities of the form:

i. Teenager *a* (at t) = person *b* (at time t′)

ii. This teenager = this person

can be true identities. It is thus possible to conclude that true identity claims can relate singular terms that fall under different sortals. In particular, cross-sortal identities involving terms falling under phase sortals and terms falling under the sortals of which they pick out phases (as in the case of ‘teenager’, which is a phase-sortal of ‘person’) are true. Following Brandom (2015, pp. 75, 220) let’s call them (the identity claims relating terms whose sortals are governed by different criteria of application but the same criteria of identity) ‘weak cross-sortal identity claims’. In the sense that identity claims relating terms falling under different sortals that share criteria of identity are only weakly cross-sortal.

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http://www.injuve.es/observatorio/demografia-e-informacion-general/juventud-en-cifras-poblacion-marzo-2017

But now consider this other inference:

- All passengers are people.
- Spanish airlines flew at least 70 million domestic passengers in 2009.

Therefore

- Spanish airlines flew at least 70 million (different) persons in 2009.[6]

Unlike the previous ones, this is not a good inference! In fact, Spanish airlines flew 74.5 million domestic passengers in 2009, while the population of Spain (the number of persons) was only 46.3 million. For although passengers are something like time-slices of persons (as with 'teenager', the criteria of application of 'passenger' apply to only a subset of things the criteria of application of 'person' do) they are counted differently. For instance, when M.P. (María Pilar) flew from Granada to Miami, she got counted as a different passenger than she did when he flew back. But it was only one person getting counted as two different passengers in those two airplane trips. If the airline counted her, say, as passenger #268 of the week on the way out and passenger #919 on the way back, these are two different passengers. Accordingly, also the following turns out to be not a good inference:

- #268 and #919 are passengers.
- Passengers are persons.
- #268 and #919 are persons.
- #268 is the same person as #919.

Therefore

- They are the same passenger.

[6] Economic Benefits from Air Transport in Spain, Oxford Economics, Oxford, 2011, p. 7. https://www.iata.org/policy/Documents/Benefits-of-Aviation-Spain-2011.pdf

In fact, even though #268 and #919 are the same person, and they are passengers, they are not necessarily the same passenger. Or, in other words, even though #268 and #919 are different passengers, they are not necessarily different persons. As a result, identities of the form:

a. Passenger #268 = person M.P.

b. Passenger #919 = person M.P.

c. This passenger = this person

cannot be true identities. The two names '#268' (or '#919') and 'M.P.' are associated with sortals that (while both have application conditions satisfied in that situation) have distinct co-application conditions that yield different identity conditions for the things (if any) that they refer to. Let's call them **(**the identity claims relating terms whose sortals are governed by quite different criteria of identity) 'strong cross-sortal identity claims' (Brandom 2015, p.75).

That difference in the criteria of identity manifests itself in different subjunctive-dispositional properties (modal properties), namely properties whose applicability or possession entails nonmonotonic (that is, defeasible) subjunctive conditionals. Properties that have to do with "what would be the case if…": that is to say, with the different conditions under which they *would* remain the same kind or sort. For instance, if M.P. had missed the plane, she would not have been the passenger #268, but would still have been the person M.P. In fact, '#268' and 'M.P.' are terms specifying entities that differ in their modal properties, reflecting the different criteria of identity associated with their governing sortals. Strong cross-sortal identity claims relate terms that differ in the non-monotonic subjunctive conditionals, which are necessary conditions of the applicability of those terms. It follows that assertions of strong cross-sortal identities violate Leibniz's Law of indiscernibility of identicals, but in a distinctive way. We

could say that the passenger #268 and the person M.P., during their coincidence, share all their actual properties, but they differ in some of their modal properties. Hence, they are not indiscernible with respect to (modally involved) properties that identity claims assert they must share.

The intelligibility of such identities depends, in turn, on restricting the principle of the indiscernibility of identicals so that it does not apply to subjunctive-dispositional properties. For, by definition, such properties will always distinguish the terms of strong cross-sortal identity claims. Or better, since the sortals involved in strong cross-sortal identity claims are associated with different criteria of identity, the items identified will always be distinguished by their possession of different subjunctive-dispositional properties. Nevertheless, as I will try to argue in the next Subsection, we cannot restrict Leibniz's Law to non-modal. Let's call this assumption 'modal identity absolutism' (Brandom 2015, pp. 229-230). This is the contention that the set of properties with respect to which identicals must be indiscernible must include modal (subjunctive, including counterfactual, and dispositional) properties if it includes ordinary descriptive properties. In short, this is the contention that we should understand the indiscernibility of identicals as including within its scope modal properties. Modal identity absolutism hereby contests the viability of any attempt of distinguishing modal, subjunctive, or dispositional properties as a special class for which Leibniz's Law does not hold.

2.2 Modal Kant-Sellars Thesis

According to modal identity absolutism, all descriptive properties (even paradigmatically non-modal properties) are modally involved, in the sense that their instantiation entails the instantiation of subjunctive-dispositional properties. Hence, there are no descriptive properties that are modally insulated, in the sense that they can

apply in one possible world regardless of what is true in any other. It means that every descriptive concept has subjunctive-dispositional consequences, which accordingly serve as necessary conditions of its correct applicability. This is because applying descriptive vocabulary to something in this world entails claims about what would happen in other worlds, namely it entails the truth of claims formulated in subjunctive-dispositional vocabulary. So that mastering the use of descriptive vocabulary is mastering subjunctive and counterfactual reasoning in which that vocabulary occurs, and thereby grasping descriptive concepts is grasping at least some of their subjunctive conditionals and counterfactual consequences.

For example, the concept of (Newtonian) mass essentially, and not just accidentally, is articulated by necessary connections to the concepts force and acceleration. In fact, describing an object as having a nonzero mass commits one to the claim that it would accelerate if and only if a nonzero force were applied to it (under suitable background conditions). Or in other words, to have a nonzero mass is to be disposed to accelerate if and only if a nonzero force is applied. If those subjunctive-dispositional claims are not true, neither is the claim about the possession of mass in this world.

Being implicitly modal or modally involved, in the sense of having subjunctive-dispositional necessary conditions, is in no way a special feature of scientific concepts. For example, the ordinary concept ‘flower’ also has such consequences of application. In fact, to be a flower is essentially, and not just accidentally, to be something that (under suitable background conditions) would bloom if watered regularly, but that would die if deprived of water, if kept in a dark place, if trampled, and so on. Therefore, to know what a flower and mass are requires knowing at least something about how they would behave under various circumstances.

This is, of course, a conclusion many others have come to. For instance, Sellars (1948) codified the point in a slogan he used as the title of one of his essays: *Concepts as Involving Laws, and Inconceivable without Them*. Indeed, as the title already suggests, Sellars there defends the idea that the laws determining the truth of counterfactuals related to descriptive concepts are part of the content of the descriptive concepts themselves (that is, they are part of their use and their application in judgments). However, this thought is also a core insight of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. As he might have put it, descriptive vocabulary is implicitly modal. So that lawful connections are already implicit in the use of descriptive concepts. Accordingly, modal concepts make explicit something implicit in the content of descriptive concepts. In particular, what is made explicit by alethic modal vocabulary is something fundamental to the use of any descriptive vocabulary whatsoever.

For this reason, following Brandom (2015), we can talk of a 'modal Kant-Sellars thesis'. The modal Kant-Sellars thesis tells us exactly that any descriptive vocabulary is implicitly modal: there are no modally insulated properties and that all descriptive properties are modally involved, in the sense that all descriptive predicates have subjunctive dispositional consequences. As a result, indiscernibility with respect to descriptive properties requires indiscernibility with respect to all the subjunctive-dispositional properties they entail. This means that we cannot restrict Leibniz's law of the indiscernibility of identicals, according to which identicals must not have different properties, to non-modal properties only ('modal identity absolutism'). That is to say, we cannot require that identicals be indiscernible only with respect to non-modal properties, ruling out as such all subjunctive conditional properties.

As we have seen, strong cross-sortal identity claims, by definition, relate terms falling under sortals associated with different criteria of identity. But differences in criteria of

identity entail differences in modal profile (that is, different subjunctive, counterfactual, and dispositional properties). If all this is right, then strong cross-sortal identity claims are never true. Therefore, no identity claims involving terms that fall under different sortals that exhibit different criteria of identity and individuation are true. The same reasoning underwrites the conclusion that no passenger is identical with any person (as counterintuitive as it might sound).

Anyway, the conclusion that cross-sortal identity claims are never true is not that far from Kripke's well-known doctrine that there are no contingently true identities and that all true identity claims are necessarily true, although for a quite different reason. Indeed, Kripke's argument relies on the very notion of 'rigid designation', whereas here the argument is based merely on the way sortals work (Kripke 1971).

Strong cross-sortal identity claims are at most contingently true (thus, the passenger #268 and the person M.P. could be at most contingently identical). But contingent identities turn out to be true only if the scope of Leibniz's Law is restricted, so as to rule out discernibility by subjunctive-dispositional properties. The modal Kant-Sellars thesis tells us that such discrimination cannot be made, since even paradigmatically non-modal properties are implicitly modal (in the sense their instantiation entails the instantiation of explicitly subjunctive properties).

3. Counting Claims

One prominent problem said to arise here is that if we accept the existence of passenger #268 as well as that of person M.P., and we deny that they are identical (given their different identity conditions), we end up having to accept that in a certain airplane, over and above or in addition to a passenger, there is also a person. In other words, we end up having two colocated objects in this case (and in many other cases that follow the same

pattern: such as statue and clay of lump, money and paper, persons and bodies, performances and works of music, mind and brain[7]). Then we must either (contrary to the view developed above) hold that the two entities are identical or reject at least one of the objects supposedly colocated. Yet, various attempts to eliminate one but not the other would be unacceptably arbitrary (Merricks 2001, pp. 41–42).

The colocation problem violates the so-called 'principle of impenetrability'.[8] According to the spatio-temporal version of the principle, distinct concrete objects cannot have exactly the same spatial location for exactly the same period of time (Wiggins 1968, p. 90). So that if A is an object and B is an object, and A is not identical to B, then A and B cannot occupy the same volume at the same time. Or, according to the mereological version of the principle, no two objects may be composed of exactly the same parts at the same time (Merricks 2001, p. 38). So that A and B cannot be composed of exactly the same parts at the same time.

The wariness about colocation may be attributed at least in part to the fact that material objects must "compete for room in the world, and [...] tend to displace one another'' (Wiggins 1968, 94). Hence, ''intuitively, the problem with coincident entities is that of over-crowding. There just is not enough room for them'' (Heller 1990, p. 14). Merricks (2001, p. 39) draws out this rhetoric by appealing to counting: saying that there are two numerically distinct objects that occupy the same spatio-temporal location does sound like a crazy thing to say. Just as it is inappropriate to say: "He bought a left-hand glove, a right-hand glove and (also) a pair of gloves" (Ryle 1949, p. 22) or "She watched the battalions, squadrons, and (also) a division march past" (*Ibid.*, 16). As David Lewis

[7] Of course, the mind-brain case is a little trickier because mind, by definition, is not a material object. Instead, here I am focusing just on material objects, proper or not (such as artefactual). So, in order to avoid confusion, these further complications can be set aside.

[8] Following Sidelle (2002, p. 119), we can also call it the 'no coincidence principle'.

rightly pointed out, we are faced here with a problem of double counting (or 'duplication problem'):

> It reeks of double counting to say that here we have a dishpan, and we also have a dishpan-shaped bit of plastic that is just where the dishpan is. [...] This duplication of entities is absurd on its face (Lewis 1986, 252).

In short, the view that passengers are not identical to persons focuses on a supposedly problematic proliferation of objects at a given location (in a certain airplane, for example).

So, are there (in the airplane) two different *objects*? What I will try to suggest is that the duplication problem (facing spatio-temporally coincident objects of different kinds) is a pseudo-problem, but for reasons other than those traditionally put forward. Indeed, the reason there is something wrong with such a kind of counting claims is not that they are false but rather that they are based on false presuppositions. Consider the following example from Putnam (1988, pp. 110-111):

> We bring a friend into a room. There is a table, a chair, a book, and a cat sleeping on the chair. Nothing else. We ask: "How many objects are there?". Suppose that the friend's answer is: "Four". Again, we ask: "Which objects are there?". Answer: "A table, a chair, a book, and a cat". We insist: "Do you not count yourself?". Answer: "Then, five". "And what about the pages of the book? The chair legs? The cat's tail?". And so on.

One way to stop this chain of queries is to argue that the first question does not hold a determinate meaning. In fact, a question concerning counting is determinate, or appropriate, if and only if it is specified by a sortal term, so that there is a criterion of identity for the term falling under that sortal (since the identity conditions of specific objects are intrinsically given by sortals). Accordingly, that question would be rightly raised just if there was a specification of the kind or sort of objects to count (Dummett, 1981, p. 547; Geach, 1980, p. 63; Wright, 1983, p. 3).

3.1 Pseudosortals

Philosophical confusions have resulted from the existence in natural language of pseudosortals (or dummy sortals), such as 'object', 'thing', 'entity', 'item', etc. They sometimes function as anaphoric prosortals, as in the following example: "Martin, did you really eat a bowl of pasta carbonara, a slice of pepperoni pizza and an entire portion of tiramisu for dinner? With your cholesterol level, you should avoid eating all *those things*." Sometimes they are just sortal placeholders, where the specific sortals they are to be taken to stand in for are to be gathered from the context, for instance: "Milos, you look very pretty in that jacket!" "You think so? It's just a cheap *thing*" But sometimes they stand for an attempt to quantify over all possible genuine sortals whatsoever. As it is Putnam's uncontexted request to enumerate all the *objects* in a room. In this case, they occupy the grammatical places held by genuine sortals, but do not come associated with the identity criteria, which are semantically essential to real sortals. For this reason, they do not semantically support counting.[9]

Of course, general versions of counting questions can be revived by way of a covering use of pseudosortal terms. What we can do is to regain a kind of generality (albeit not an absolute generality) by conjoining as many categorial terms as we wish, and asking if there is something of any of those kinds. That is to say, we can revive somewhat general counts by employing as many categorial terms as we like, numbering the instances falling under each, and adding them up (Thomasson 2007, p. 125). That can presumably

[9] Note that the issue here is not at all one of vagueness (that is, of vague extensions), but of a lack of criteria of identity and individuation. For this reason they also differ from the examples Wiggins gives of terms that permit individuation but not counting, such as "wave, volume of fluid, worm, garden, crystal, piece of string, word-token, machine" (2001, p. 75). Wiggins provides those examples in order to show that criteria of individuation and identity are sometimes insufficient to count objects under a sortal: "[…] the concept crown gives a satisfactory way of answering identity-questions for crowns. But there is no universally applicable definite way of counting crowns. The Pope's crown is made of crowns. There is no definite answer, when the Pope is wearing his crown, to the question 'how many crowns does he have on his head" (1980, p. 73; 2001, p. 75).

be the case, although it should be noted that the resulting number will reflect the conjunction of the terms considered and the fulfillment of them. Therefore, that won't be an absolute generality at all!

The use of pseudosortal terms, such as 'object', which involves being treated neither as sortals nor as covering terms, is a neutral use.[10] 'Object' alone, in its neutral use, does not come associated with the identity criteria needed for counting **(**and it cannot enable us to establish reference to something either[11]). As a result, there is no definite answer to the question "How many *objects* are there (in the room)?" For such a generic question, on the alleged neutral use of 'object', turns out to be an ill-formed (and as such, unanswerable) question. Different answers will thus be the products of supplying 'object' with different individuation and identity criteria (that is, turning the term into a sortal in a different way). Accordingly, the different responses need not be seen as competing candidates for the correct answer.

4. Ontological-Categorial Vocabulary

Nevertheless, I do not want to float the idea that counting claims involving metaphysical notions are totally meaningless; quite the contrary, I take them to be faultlessly meaningful—albeit not in virtue of representing a certain range of entities in the world or describing pieces of reality. Indeed, it is wrong to think that we are referring to anything when we use terms like 'object', thing', 'individual', or 'particular' in such a *neutral* way (at least not as paradigmatically referring terms). In fact, following Carnap (1937), the use of ontologically classifying terms, (and the related concepts they express) is best understood as metalinguistic. Roughly, the

[10] Note that Fregean sortally unrestricted quantification runs the risk of having to be understood this way.

[11] Here, following the Hybrid-Theories of Reference (Devitt and Sterelny 1999), I assume the strong further claim that it is not possible to pick out an individual (i.e. a bare particular) without specifying some principle of individuation, which is supplied by sortals.

Carnapian idea is that the use of ontological-categorial vocabulary (that is, the vocabulary of ontological categories) appears to tell us something about the world: what ontological categories are in it. It seems to tell us that there are particulars, as well as properties and kinds related to those particulars. But actually, he claims, the information conveyed by the use of such ontological vocabulary concerns the syntactic form of language (and thought), and it is not about the world talked (and thought). In this way, speaking of 'object', 'things' or 'item' has to be understood as a metalinguistic way of talking about expressions (or better, about expression-types that stand to the expressions in question in a relation of functional equivalence).[12] The same holds for some classical examples in the literature:

- "Fido is a particular" (or "Fido is a primary substance, that is, an individual") should be analyzed as "'Fido' is a singular term".
- Saying "Dog is a kind" (or "Dog is a secondary substance, that is, a species") one is ascribing to this, roughly, the sense of "'Dog' is a common noun".
- "Circularity is a property" is the material mode for "'Circularity' is a one place predicate".[13]

Of course, ontologically classifying terms are metalinguistic neither in the narrow sense (Tarski's) of being common nouns that referring to expressions of a particular object-language (such as English) nor in a straightforward sense of being common nouns that apply to expression-types. In fact, they do not mention any linguistic expressions at all.

[12] Such a distinction between 'expressions' and 'expressions-types' is certainly more explicit in Sellars's (1963c, pp. 632-33).

[13] Or think also of more complex metaphysical statements such as, just by way of an example, the following from Fine (1994, p.9): "[…] each class of objects, be they concepts or individuals or entities of some other kind, will give rise to its own domain of necessary truths, the truths which flow from the nature of the objects in question. The metaphysically necessary truths can then be identified with the propositions which are true in virtue of the nature of all objects whatever."

This does not mean they could not be understood to be metalinguistic in a broader sense: as covertly metalinguistic.

However, contrary to what Carnap maintains, they are not to be understood by deflationary metalinguistic paraphrases either. What the ontologically categorizing vocabulary plays is rather a characteristic expressive function (one not played, for instance, by paradigmatically referring terms). In particular, my contention is that its primary role is to articulate structural features of the discursive framework within which description and explanation are possible. Ontological-categorial terms thus codify linguistic norms in force in our discursive practices. Roughly, they make explicit rules for deploying linguistic locutions.

Therefore, the principal expressive role of ontological-categorial vocabulary is non-descriptive.[14] Yet, while it is not itself a descriptive vocabulary, its use is already implicit in the use of any descriptive vocabulary. In this sense, its use is elaborated from the use of any descriptive vocabulary. At the same time, though, it is deployed in articulating the use of any descriptive vocabulary, making explicit what is implicit in the use of any descriptive vocabulary. That is to say, it makes explicit essential features implicit in the use of any descriptive vocabulary. In this sense, its use is explicative of the use of any descriptive vocabulary. In short, the ontological-categorial vocabulary is both elaborated from and explicative of the use of any descriptive vocabulary.[15]

Returning to the previous example, the principal idea I would like to stress is that what one is doing in saying something like "#268 is an object" (or "#268 is an /thing/item/entity"), where 'object' is used neutrally, is functionally classifying the expression '#268' as a meaningful singular term. The same holds, of course, for "M.P.

[14] This is not incompatible with such vocabulary also playing a descriptive role—albeit one that can only be understood against the background of its basic categorial expressive role.
[15] See Brandom 2015, p. 50.

is an object". Accordingly**,** what she is doing in claiming "M.P. and #178 are two different objects", is functionally classifying the expressions 'M.P.' and '#178' as two different singular terms in the linguistic framework in which they occur. In particular, she is expressing the commitment to use 'M.P.' and '#178' as two different singular terms that fall under two different sortals with different criteria of identity. Likewise, she is undertaking the commitment to withhold from using them in the same way, from inter-substituting them in a substitutional inference, from accepting as valid all possible substitutional inferences into which they can enter, and so on.

5. Stereoscopic Vision

The problem we are facing here is but a particular occurrence of one of the major themes of Sellars's (1963a): the problem of fusing in a stereoscopic vision the so-called 'manifest' and 'scientific' images in the world. According to Sellars, the key to obtaining such stereoscopy is "[t]o complete the scientific image we need to enrich it not with more ways of saying what is the case, but with the language of community and individual intentions" (*Ibid*., p. 78). Sellars's solution then consists in extending the descriptive vocabulary of theoretical representations of the world by introducing the normative vocabulary of communities of rational agents.

Nonetheless, the language of the manifest image (the language of the ordinary lifeworld, both before and after the advent of modern science) also deploys vocabulary to describe and explain the world and what surrounds us. In turn, the question addressed by Sellars results to concern the relations between the descriptions and explanations whose home is in the manifest image and those whose home is in the scientific

image.[16]The well-known Sellars's conclusion is that the latter trump the former. Quoting one of the most iconic passages from *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* (1956 pp. 82-83):

> In the dimension of describing and explaining science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not.

So understood, Sellars's ontological privileging "in the dimension of describing and explaining" of scientific descriptive vocabulary over the descriptive vocabulary of the manifest image can be seen as a scientific naturalist rendering of the classical Kantian phenomena/noumena distinction: where ordinary descriptive vocabulary expresses how things merely appear (phenomena), while scientific vocabulary expresses what there really is (noumena). That is to say, insofar as Sellars seems to conceive the transcendental distinction between appearance and reality in terms of the manifest and scientific images, the scientific naturalism of his *scientia mensura* passage can be understood as a contemporary version of Kant's phenomena/noumena distinction.

The two images would thus amount to two different realms of Fregean senses, picking out, if anything, the same referents (namely those picked out by the terms of the scientific image). The underlying idea is that descriptive terms from the manifest image refer, if they refer at all, to things specifiable in descriptive terms from the scientific image. So that if some non-scientific descriptive term refers to anything real (rather than presenting a mere appearance), it is only because it corefers with some scientific descriptive term. As Frege (1892) has taught us, co-reference of terms is identity of

[16] In particular: "My concern will be with what might initially be called 'factual truth'. This phrase is intended to cover both the truth of propositions at the perceptual and introspective level, and the truth of those propositions which, though 'empirical' in the broad sense that their authority ultimately rests on perceptual experience, involve the complex techniques of concept formation and confirmation characteristic of theoretical science" (Sellars 1968, p.116).

objects (and identity of objects is coreference). Consequently, Sellar's view is committed to there being true identity claims relating the descriptive terms in the vocabulary of the manifest image and descriptive terms drawn from the vocabulary of the scientific image. Or better, such a view (the scientific naturalism epitomized in Sellars's *scientia mensura* passage) essentially depends on the truth of identity claims relating items referred to in the vocabulary of the manifest image and items referred to in the vocabulary of the scientific image.

That's exactly the idea I want to contest! For identity claims relating items of manifest-image kinds to items of kinds specified in the vocabulary of an eventual natural science are (almost always) strongly cross-sortal. In fact, scientific and ordinary terms typically function differently, with a different range of application and co-application conditions. And the different criteria of individuation and identity associated with the sortals involved underwrite divergent subjunctive conditional properties. For instance, the manifest-image kinds are basically identified and individuated functionally, by their relations in complex systems articulated by social norms (and that is not true of any of the scientific-image kinds). Likewise, the scientific-image kinds (e.g., mereological sums of subatomic particles) are indifferent to the spatial rearrangement of their parts (a mereological sum is the same sum no matter where its parts are, and that is not true of any of the manifest-image kinds).

As we have seen, strongly cross-sortal identity claims are ruled out by the modal Kant-Sellars thesis (and the modal identity absolutism). If all this is right, then the relation between the objects referred to in the manifest image and those referred to in the scientific image cannot be identity. That is to say, the subjunctive conditionals specified in the two kinds of vocabulary should match, but this does not happen. Therefore, no identity between scientific objects (such as particles arranged table-wise, flower-wise,

person-wise, and so on) and ordinary objects (such as tables, flower, persons, etc.) turns out to be true. For all these kinds of things have criteria of identity that are radically different from those of mereological sums of subatomic particles. And such a difference in the criteria of identity manifests itself in the fact that they are subjects of quite different subjunctive-dispositional properties. In short, the manifest image and scientific image are each concerned with different categories of entities and employ different characteristic sortal terms.

Yet, if science and common sense are using sortals of different categories, the things picked out by the two descriptions cannot be identical. The linguistic frameworks of common sense and physical science turn out to be so different that it is hard to find a common ground (a common sortal framework) enabling them to pick out the same individuals (and ascribe them conflicting properties). Thereby, physical science cannot be said to falsify the claims of common sense, taken individually, because it does not speak in those terms at all (inasmuch as it adopts a different sortal framework). However, they can be found to compete in the sense that each image purports to offer a true and complete account of what things there are in the world. Accordingly, any account that attempted to incorporate both the manifest and scientific images "would contain a redundancy" (Sellars 1963b, p. 31). So understood, they turn out to be rival schemes between which we must choose. And given this choice, Sellars argues, we must choose the scientific image.[17]

In a nutshell, one attempt to find a rivalry would be to claim that the two images provide rival responses to the demand of offering a complete account of what *things* there are in the world. But, how is 'thing' being used here? Surely not in a sortal use

[17] Note that, Sellars's view, physical science is in the business of offering us a superior alternative to the entire framework of common sense not because there is some inconsistency within the manifest image, but simply because the scientific image provides a more intelligible and more explanatory account of the *things* there are in the world (Sellars 1963a, p. 29).

jointly accepted by those who speak in terms of the manifest and scientific images[18]. As already stated, the terms each image uses are different and purport to pick out things of different sorts. Presumably, here we have a neutral use of 'thing': a use that neither involves treating that term as a sortal nor as a covering term. Therefore, arguments for a rivalry rely on the idea that both images may provide category-neutral yet complete inventories of what things exist. Nevertheless, where 'thing' is being used neutrally, we cannot say that the two images provide rivals responses to the demand to offer a complete account of what things there are in the world. For, as we have seen, if 'thing' is not being used as a sortal term, it does not come associated with the identity criteria needed for counting **(**and so we cannot in principle answer the question whether a given list covers all of the things there are or if there might be more).

In conclusion, such a neutral use of 'thing' could not be used in claims of either image to offer a complete account of what things there are that could be held to rival that of the other. Neither the scientific image nor the manifest image may thus legitimately purport to be complete in a way that would rule out the other.[19] And, of course, neither the scientific image nor the manifest image may then legitimately purport to only offer the true description of the world.[20]

[18] If that is not the case, what is the intended use? What are the shared criteria of application and identity?

[19] Although in this case 'thing' seems to be typically used non-sortally, it may be used as a sortal if it is associated with some application and identity conditions. In fact, each contender could replace 'thing' with one or more sortals from its own framework, but then clearly neither is purporting to offer a complete account of 'things', but only of entities of those sorts. As a consequence, if each party uses 'thing' in a covering sense that presupposes a different range of sortals, their resulting accounts of what things there are cannot be true rivals. In this way, they only even purport to rule out other accounts that are done in the same terms, purporting to provide a complete account of things of the same sort or sorts as those of other accounts.

[20] Note that this does not rule out the idea that, according to the circumstances, we cannot choose to favor one linguistic framework over the other for some practical purposes, because in those circumstances the adoption of one linguistic framework can have such and such advantages over the adoption of the other. Even though the choice between them is not objective, there can be considerable practical advantages in adopting one over the other (depending on the circumstances); debates about which linguistic framework to adopt consist exactly in pointing out such comparative advantages.

6. Concluding Remarks

In the light of the above, if correct, the two images cannot be taken as providing either merely alternative or complementary views of the same entities. For it just is not the case that everything we talk about in the manifest image "of those that are, that they are, and of those that are not, that they are not" is something specifiable in the language of an eventual natural science. For this reason, contemporary physics cannot be said to conflict with accepting claims about the existence of ordinary objects and to exist an ordinary object does not require being identical to some object picked out by some term of the scientific image. As a result, accepting the scientific image does not require us to reject the idea that the ordinary objects of the manifest image exist. And the distinction between the manifest and scientific images is thus not best thought in terms of appearance and reality.

This does not, of course, rule out the idea that in some limited contexts scientific inquiry can conflict with (and overrule) claims of common sense—provided that both are using terms with the same sense. So, to use a familiar example (and sadly, as topical as ever), it is plausible that the common sense claim that the earth is flat was contradicted by the scientific discovery that the earth is actually an oblate spheroid. In this case, though, we pretty clearly have common sense and scientific discovery speaking in the same terms (and if they are not, the case for a conflict evaporates). Similarly, scientific investigation shows that there is a common ancestor of humans and chimpanzees, that there is a measles vaccine but no absolutely simultaneous events, that global warming is real, and so on. These existence judgments may not all comport with common sense, but they are plausible in light of all of the facts that serious and

sustained scientific investigation has turned up. In these cases, it seems, the right course is to indulge more in the way of "tolerance, and an experimental spirit" (Quine, 1948, p. 38).

However, this is precisely not the case regarding common sense claims (about there being tables, flowers, persons, etc.) and the claims of contemporary physics couched in terms of waves and particles. Of course, this does not mean that physics cannot tell us the real truth about the stuff of which tables and chairs are constituted**.** But, as the old saying goes: "Material constitution is not identity" (Johnston 1992; Baker 1997). At most, given of the above, we could endorse a substantially weakened version of Sellars's slogan:

> Claiming not that science is the measure of all things, but just that in the dimension of description and explanation, when science *collides* with common sense, when common sense descriptions and explanations are contradicted by science, that the superior authority of science should be acknowledged. (Brandom 2015, p. 88)

Anyway, for the considerations I have tried to advance, such collisions and contradictions will be the exception, not the rule. Therefore, the existence of some conflicts, in which supposedly common sense claims have been overturned by scientific ones, does nothing to show that claims about the existence of ordinary objects conflict with and have been overturned by contemporary physics. Where that does not happen, namely when science and common sense do not collide, claims of a rivalry between the two images ought to be understood differently. What I have tried to argue is that they are better understood as performing not a descriptive function, but rather a (metalinguistic) expressive function. In particular, what one is doing in claiming them is expressing, and undertaking, *practical* commitments to the adoption (or rejection) of one linguistic framework (as a whole) over the other. Note, to conclude, that they can easily take the form of *pseudo-empirical* claims (claims that express *pseudo-empirical*

propositions)[21] stating certain skeptical conclusions about the nature of the external physical world, such as: "There are not material objects", "Physical objects aren't really colored" (Sellars 1956, p. 82), or "Physical objects aren't really solid" (as in the well-known 'two tables paradox' from Eddington [1928]).

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[21] Or *grammatical propositions,* in Wittgenstein's terms (1963).

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Categories and the Language of Metaphysics

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to better understand what ontologists are doing when they ask questions about the ultimate categories of the world. I will take Cumpa's attempts to find out the fundamental structure of the world as a case-study. In one of his latest paper (Cumpa 2014), he conceives the classical ontological question about the existence of the fundamental categories of the world (what are the fundamental categories of the world?) as a question about the category able to unify the two Sellarsian images of the world: the manifest and scientific images, considered as two different languages. According to him, the only category with such an explanatory power is the category of 'facts' (or 'state of affairs'): the fundamental category of what he calls 'the metaphysical language.' I will argue that if Cumpa takes the latter to be a broader language or framework, in Carnap's terms, common to both the ordinary and the scientific ones, then his proposal turns out to be rather problematic (as they are ultimately 'incommensurable'). On the other hand, if he understands it as external to both of them, then his solution ends up being meaningless and devoid of any cognitive content, with at best a practical character and/or an expressive function.

Keywords: Categorial ontology; sortalism; ontological disputes; scientific image; manifest image.

"[T]he tendency represented by the running-up against the limits of language *points to something*. St. Augustine already knew this when he said: What, you wretch, so you want to avoid talking nonsense? Talk some nonsense, it makes no difference!"
(Wittgenstein L., *On Heidegger on Being and Dread*)

1. Introduction

In a recent paper, Cumpa proposes a new criterion for establishing the fundamental category of the world: 'the materialist criterion of world-fundamentality' (Cumpa 2014). According to such a criterion, the fundamental category is that with the greatest explanatory power at the time of reconciling the manifest image and the scientific image of the world. Starting from the well-known Carnapian distinction [see (Carnap 1950)] between questions of existence inside and outside a linguistic framework,[1] I will try to examine Cumpa's related argument in two different ways.

In the first one, I will interpret Cumpa's proposal as that of looking for the common fundamental category of both the manifest and the scientific image. In this way, I will consider his categorial question as being asked within a common framework to the two languages (the 'realistic' and the 'scientific' ones, as he calls them). That is to say, a broader framework in which the category he proposes, the category of 'facts,' is a common category shared by both, or at least the only one among the various alternatives proposed able of turning this function. Assuming that Cumpa's analysis is correct, the category of 'facts' will have greater explanatory power, hence a greater epistemic value compared to other categories taken into account. In order to defend such an interpretation of Cumpa's standpoint, I will try to point out that it is possible to allow for epistemic values only inside a given framework.

On the other hand, in the second one, I will understand Cumpa's proposal as an effort to find out the fundamental category of the world beyond and outside any framework, trying to answer the ontological question "which category does *really* exist?" in its

[1] The notion of 'framework' here is quite intuitive: the conjunction of the rules of use of some expressions and the circumstances in which such expressions work. That is, the system of linguistic expressions (key terms like substantives and predicates) and semantic rules (or at least core of rules, constitutive rules) governing those expressions. And, at the same time, the circumstances in which such expressions work.

external reading (according to Carnap's dictates). In this case, the conclusions he reaches play just an expressive function. By this I mean they cannot have any semantic or cognitive content at all (at least a straightforwardly factual content) and at best they can be understood as expressions of commitments to certain language choices. They turn out to be just expressions of commitments to adopt the categorial framework in which a specific category (in this specific case, the category of 'facts') occupies the fundamental level. And this not because of some presumed epistemic values that framework has over others, but rather because of some implicit practical virtues (perhaps, the practical advantages of coping with today's increasingly pressing demand to incorporate scientific expressions with those already in use in ordinary language?). Anyway, I will try to underline how the choice of one framework or another appeal to any epistemic value (as the greatest explanatory power), since epistemic values can be assessed only within a given framework. At most, indeed, one can appeal to some implicit practical virtues, which Cumpa should in this sense make explicit in his inquiry.

The remainder of the paper is divided along these lines: in the next Section, I will summarize Cumpa's solution to the fundamental category problem, drawing attention mainly to his (2014) paper. Then, in Section 3, I will assess his solution from a 'sortalist' point of view. I will present this first analysis of Cumpa's conclusions and lay out my principal worries about that solution (though, perhaps, not decisive). In Section 4, I provide an alternative reading. Following Carnap's well known distinction between 'internal' and 'external' existence questions, I will argue for an 'external' approach to categorial issues (and to ontological claims in general). Although promising respect to the previous one, that alternative does encounter some difficulties and does not avoid to pose some problems to Cumpa's model. Or, at least, it leads to rethinking the issue

Cumpa raises in a totally different way. The concluding Section 5 consists of a short recap.

As already mentioned, in what follows, my primary aim will be to provide a concise summary and sympathetic critique of Cumpa's solution. I say 'sympathetic' insofar as I believe he has gotten a great deal in his account of the fundamental structure of the world, making significant and original contributions to this important area of ontology and metaphysics. However, I find the particular solution he develops in (Cumpa 2014) potentially problematic or, at least, not sufficiently developed. While I do not think these concerns are quite as pressing as the ones facing Cumpa's account, they are weighty. Nevertheless, in the end, perhaps the primary lesson for those reflecting on the problem of the fundamental category structure of the world is just that further work may still be needed.

2. The Materialist Criterion of Fundamentality

'Fundamental' is a much debated term in contemporary metaphysics. 'Fundamentality' is also the main concern of Cumpa's work in the last few years.[2] Especially in (Cumpa 2014), he focuses on what he calls "world fundamentality;" that is to say, the fundamental structure of the world. The question he seeks to answer deals with one of the most classic problems in ontology and metaphysics: "Is our world a world of Aristotle's ordinary substances, Locke's physical substances, Husserl's wholes, Wittgenstein's facts, Sellars's processes, or Quine's sets?" (Cumpa 2014, 319). In short, what are the most basic categories that make up our world?

[2] There are of course important issues here as to what we mean by 'fundamental;' on this subject, see (McKenzie 2011, 2014).

Cumpa suggests that this long-standing dilemma is only possible to be solved by appealing to epistemic values, those in literature are generally labeled as 'theoretical virtues.' Nevertheless, according to him, the traditional epistemic values (or theoretical virtues) usually invoked in metaphysics, such as 'independence' and 'simplicity,' are old-fashioned and fruitless criteria to be used as a guide to find out the most fundamental category of the world. Thereby, he proposes to add a new epistemic value as a criterion of world-fundamentality to the existing catalog of independence and simplicity: the explanatory power. In particular, the explanatory power to account for the relation between 'ordinary world' and 'physical universe.' Therefore, the only categories he thinks can be considered fundamental are those which manage to understand the reconciliation of the ordinary and the scientific description of the world. Or better, he attempts to show that the fundamental categories are just those which have the explanatory power to account for the relation between the ordinary and the scientific image. According to such a criterion, which he calls "the materialist criterion of world-fundamentality," in order to establish whether or not an alleged category can be deemed as fundamental, metaphysicians should consider its explanatory power to account for the relation between the ordinary world and the physical universe.

Next, he argues that the only category which satisfactorily accounts for the relationship between the ordinary and scientific levels of thinghood is the category of 'facts' (or 'state of affairs'). And this leads him to conclude that "the world is a world of facts" (Cumpa 2014, 321). In order to demonstrate such an explanatory power of 'facts' to rationally reconstruct the supposed relation, he discusses first some classical alternatives to them as explanatory categories. First, he considers the cases of 'sets' and 'substances,' and he shows why such categories fail to account for the relationship between the two levels, despite the fact that they are usually held to satisfy the

traditional criteria of fundamentality (such as 'simplicity,' for instance). Given the division in which the categories at stake are customarily compound, such as substance–accident, set–member or fact–constituent, just the latter has the epistemic primacy to manage to account for the relationship between the ordinary and scientific description of the world. As an example, he takes the 'arrangement of particles' of which a table consists and its 'perceptual properties' as the two constituents of a fact. And, in light of the above outlook, he maintains that just the fact–constituent division can account for the explanatory relationship between the arrangements of elementary particles of the physical universe and the emerging properties of the ordinary world (Cumpa 2014, 322).

Since it is not my intent here to question this particular point, I will not go into more detail on this stage of Cumpa's argument, so I will take for granted that the division between facts and constituents has the advantage, over other alternatives under consideration, to possess this cross-sectional character. The issue I am most interested in is the distinction, at the bottom of his view, between the ordinary and scientific levels. What does he exactly mean with 'ordinary world' and 'physical universe?' As he explicitly states, with those expressions he means something similar to what Wilfrid Sellars defined 'the manifest image' and 'the scientific image' [see (Sellars 1963)]. Therefore, by 'ordinary world' he means "an ordinary level of thinghood with which ordinary people are acquainted in their commonsensical and practical experiences" (Cumpa 2014, 319). On the other hand, by 'physical universe' he means "a scientific level of thinghood with which scientists are acquainted in their experimental research, such as fundamental physics, chemistry, or biology" (Cumpa 2014, 320).

Here, in both Cumpa and Sellars, the background seems to be a unity-of-science view[3] that sees the sciences as forming a reductive explanatory hierarchy, with fundamental physics at the bottom, chemistry built on it, biology on it, the special natural sciences above them, and psychology and the social sciences hovering somehow above them, at least insofar as they deserve to count as 'real' sciences. The ideal is to be able to do all the explanatory work of the upper levels by appeal only to vocabulary and laws of the lower levels.[4]

The alleged fundamental categories of 'facts' should thus account for the world as a complex composed of ordinary objects and the imperceptible objects postulates by fundamental sciences. However, what is more important for the general aim of this paper is that Cumpa clearly considers the source of knowledge of these levels to be respectively the ordinary discourse and scientific theories.

In order to ground the epistemology of 'commonsense realism' and 'scientific materialism,' he accordingly proceeds in the analysis of verbal behavior and scientific laws. What turns out to be at issue are ultimately 'the ordinary language' and 'the scientific language,' or better "the realistic language,"[5] as he calls the former, as opposed to the "the physicalistic language," as he calls the latter (Cumpa 2014, 320, 322).

[3] Championed by Neurath and the first Carnap among others, and more recently endorsed by Kim (1992).

[4] Yet today, hardly any philosopher of science would subscribe to the explanatory hierarchy central to the unity-of-science idea. It now seems clear that science works at many explanatory levels, and that generalizations available at one level cannot be replaced by those formulable in the vocabulary of other levels [see especially (Fodor 1974), (Putnam 1975), (Dennett 1991), and (Wilson 2008)]. The explanatory heterogeneity and incommensurability of the various sciences, from which no 'best realizer' emerges, is sometimes called the "Many Levels" view. Thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing this out.

[5] Note that the language of the manifest image (the language of the ordinary lifeworld, both before and after the advent of modern science) does not only deploy normative vocabulary, but also deploys vocabulary to describe and explain.

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In order to address the question concerning the relations between the descriptions and explanations whose home is in the manifest image and those whose home is in the scientific image (or better, in any scientific images), he conjectures that it is possible to build a cross-sectional language with the explanatory power of reconstructing the two images in one. He trusts in the possibility of 'a metaphysical language' (Cumpa 2014, 321) able to display an image of the world as a whole. That is to say, the world composed of the ordinary world and the physical universe. Metaphysical language is not either the realistic language or the scientific language, but at the same time it cannot dispense with both of them. And in this language, the fundamental category is, of course, that of 'facts.' In this way, Cumpa shifts to a special language that smells like the Ontologese and thereby revives hard metaphysical debates.

At this stage, the question I would like to raise is therefore whether the 'metaphysical language' must be taken as a common language to the ordinary and scientific ones, a language which both share (at least at the fundamental categorial level); or instead, it should be better understood as another language different from both of them (to some extent, beyond and outside of both of them). In the next chapter, I will try to develop this concern in the light of the well-known Carnap's distinction between 'internal' and 'external' ontological questions about the existence or reality of entities. Besides, in doing so, I will take a category to be fundamental if and only if it is not derived from another category in a language or framework.

3. A Sortalist Reading

The divergence between the world-descriptions provided by physical science and common sense has led to some of the oldest and most persistent arguments for eliminating ordinary objects. For if, as some have thought, the descriptions of science

compete with those of common sense, usually the former has primacy over the latter and we must accept that common sense descriptions of the world (as containing trees, battles, and basketballs) apply to nothing. Eliminativism about ordinary objects may seem a radical position to adopt but it is one that meshes with our understanding of contemporary physics, according to which there is only a limited number of certain fundamental kinds of elementary particles and four fundamental forces.

One of the strongest forms that such arguments can take, inspired but apparently not endorsed by the astronomer Sir Arthur Stanley Eddington, alleges not just that the descriptions or claims of physical science compete with those of common sense, but that there is a real conflict between them, a conflict that physical science wins. Thus, if the two are rivals, surely (it is said) the scientific view must win out at the expense of the common sense view, and we must deny the existence of ordinary objects in favor of an ontology sanctioned by physical science. The idea that the descriptions of the world provided by physical science conflict with those of common sense was initially advanced by Eddington's famous discussion of the 'two tables':

> Yes; there are duplicates of every object about me—two tables, two chairs, two pens […] One of them has been familiar to me from earliest years. It is a commonplace object of that environment which I call the world […] It has extension; it is comparatively permanent; it is coloured; above all it is substantial […] Table No.2 is my scientific table […] My scientific table is mostly emptiness. Sparsely scattered in that emptiness are numerous electric charges rushing about with great speed; but their combined bulk amounts to less than a billionth of the bulk of the table itself. (Eddington 1928, ix–x)

The descriptions of the 'table of science', Eddington emphasizes, do not merely differ from the descriptions of the 'table of common sense', they conflict with it in various ways, e.g. that common sense table is 'substantial' and solid, while the scientific table is "nearly all empty space" (Eddington 1928, x) and so neither substantial nor solid. Quite similarly, Sellars himself maintains that, since each of them purports to be true and complete, any account which attempted to incorporate both the manifest and scientific

images "would contain a redundancy" (Sellars 1963, 25). Eddington's attack has been taken up again more recently by Thomasson (2007), who defends an ontology of ordinary objects against eliminativist arguments. According to her, there can be a conflict between them only if the two sides are talking about the same thing. That is to say**,** in order to demonstrate a conflict one must show that the two descriptions are talking about the same thing with one asserting that it is, say, solid, and the other denying that it is solid. But, Thomasson maintains, any account of what there is presupposes a certain sortal framework. For either side, in order to make a definite claim, must employ some sortal term capable of establishing what is being talked about (and attributed or denied solidity). The sortal which common sense uses (and that Eddington uses) is "table." Nevertheless, it is at least doubtful that scientific theories use sortals such as "table." Susan Stebbing, for instance, famously argued that it is absurd to speak of the object of scientific description as a "table" at all (supposedly in competition with the familiar table) (Stebbing 1937, 54), since scientific objects are mostly 'simples.' We pretty clearly have examples of common sense and scientific discoveries speaking of the same things, in the same terms (and if they are not, the case for a conflict evaporates). However, this is precisely not the case regarding common sense claims about there being tables, apples, and tennis balls, and the claims of contemporary physics couched in terms of waves and particles.

In short, we can define 'sortalism' as the view that highlights the importance of sortal terms and concepts in establishing reference and the truth-conditions of metaphysical claims.[6] In particular, here sortal considerations enter the picture insofar reference to things is fixed via some categorial framework. Hence, Thomasson concludes:

[6] According to Jonathan Lowe (1989), that consists of three claims:

1. Sortal terms and concepts are (generally) associated with semantic principles that supply criteria of application and criteria of individuation and identity for anything that is to fall under them.

> Scientific theories […] do not use sortals such as 'table,' and if science and common sense are using sortals of different categories, the 'things' picked out by the two descriptions cannot be identical. (Thomasson 2007, 142)

Reference is only determinate to the extent that a term is associated with a categorial conception determined by the application and coapplication conditions associated with our terms.[7] In other words, counting claims rely on identity claims, the truth-conditions for which are, she argues, category-relative (Dummett 1973/1981, 74; Geach 1962/1980, 63). Of course, categorial conceptions may be expressed in categorial terms (such as 'organism,' 'artifact,' etc.), which are just highly general sortal terms. And, according to the sortalist view, since the scientific image and manifest image are using sortals of different categories (associated with different application and coapplication/identity conditions), so that they are each concerned with different categories of entities and employ different characteristic sortal terms, we cannot say that the two descriptions conflict with each other. Likewise, we cannot say that there are true identity claims relating the descriptive terms in the vocabulary of the manifest image that refer at all and descriptive terms drawn from the vocabulary (or vocabularies) of the scientific image.[8]

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2. Individuals may only be referred to, (re-)identified, and counted by (explicitly or tacitly) employing a sortal.
3. Individuals *a* and *b* can only be identical if they are of sorts with the same criteria of identity, and they meet those criteria.

[7] According to Thomasson (2007, 2009) 'application conditions' are the rules for using nominative terms which establish in what situations they are properly applied, and where they are to be refused; on the other hand, 'coapplication conditions' are the rules for using nominative terms which establish under what conditions we may use the term to refer again to the same entity.

[8] These are in general what we can call 'strongly cross-sortal' identity claims: claims relating terms whose governing sortals are governed by quite different criteria of identity and individuation. But, strongly cross-sortal identities are never true. For the different criteria of identity and individuation associated with the sortals. The claim that strongly cross-sortal identities are never true is a radical one. But, if all that is right, then the relation between the objects referred to in the manifest image and those referred to in the scientific image cannot be identity.

Moreover, since such images are distinguished from each other in terms of the sortal and categorial terms each employs (with the manifest image omitting terms for imperceptible fundamental particles and the like, and the scientific image omitting terms for artifacts, social objects, and the like), they, in fact, do not employ all possible categorial terms. An account can only offer a complete description in terms of that framework in the sense of covering all the things in those categories. The scientific and manifest images presuppose different sortal frameworks and hence they cannot be deemed to be complete in any way that renders those rivals (Thomasson 2007, 148). Consequently, acceptance of the scientific image does not require rejection of the ontology of the manifest one. Therefore, even if each categorial framework purports to be complete in some sense (i.e. offering a complete account of things of those sorts), they still do not purport to be complete in some absolute and 'external' sense.

Of course, conditions of application and/or coapplication for some terms may be built upon others [as, e.g., the conditions for application and coapplication of nation terms may be built upon those for person-terms, landmass terms, etc.; (Thomasson 2009, 451)], making some more basic than others. In this respect**,** since the manifest image and scientific image employ different characteristic sortal terms, they are each concerned with different categories of entities, and hence with different most fundamental ones. So, even if each categorial framework purports to offer its own account of what the fundamental category of the world is in some sense, they still do not purport to offer its own account of what the fundamental category is in some external and absolute sense.

In sum, the supposed rivalry between scientific and manifest image accounts of what there is can only arise based on the assumption that each image purports to offer (at least in principle) a true and complete account of what there is (Sellars 1963, 20). But,

properly understood, neither of the two images (with its own characteristic sortal terms) can really purport to offer a complete account of what there is. Therefore, there is no obvious sense in which either the scientific image or the manifest image may legitimately purport to be complete in a way that would rule out the other. In the same way, each image purports to offer (at least in principle) a true account of what the fundamental category of the world is. However, each image (with its own characteristic sortal terms) can purport to offer a true account of what the fundamental category of the world is in some sense. But, properly understood, neither of the two images (with their own characteristic sortal terms) can really purport to offer a true account of what the fundamental category of the world is in some absolute and 'external' sense.

At this point, one option can be to explore the possibility of meshing the common sense framework with the physics one by constructing some metaphysical relations; another, as we shall see, is to radically remove the necessity for positing certain such relations cleaving them entirely apart, as Thomasson does. According to the first way, the two frameworks are kept in touch with each other. Trying to find a common fundamental category utilized in both scientific and common sense descriptions, Cumpa seems to move exactly in that direction. First, Cumpa dismisses the possibility that, among others, the categories of substance or set are able to achieve this goal. Likewise, Thomasson rejects the possibility to appeal to a common notion of, for instance, 'physical object' or 'occupant of a spatio-temporal region,' insofar the former finds no place within physics itself, and the latter is hardly common in everyday descriptions. Nevertheless, unlike Thomasson who maintains that the conceptual frameworks and ontologies of common sense and physical science are so different that it is hard to find a common conceptual or categorial ground, Cumpa attempts to advance a positive account. Indeed, he argues for the category of 'facts' as able to build such a bridge

between the two images (at least according to this first interpretation of his argument). Cumpa's issue then is to establish whether such a relationship effectively holds while neither reducing the common sense framework to the scientific one, nor considering the general metaphysical characterization of such relationships in terms of 'grounding.'[9] To some extent, he takes this relation seriously, metaphysically speaking**,** without the kind of dependence that 'in virtue of' signifies and he indicates, in at least a preliminary way, how an appropriate metaphysics might be constructed on this basis. Now, explanatory relations, such as the one he outlines, offer a broader framework than, say, causal accounts, whilst not trivializing the relationships as deductive accounts do [see (Thomasson 2007)].

Anyway, endorsing this solution one could face with some problems. As we have seen, claims involving 'facts' (as well as 'physical objects,' 'things,' etc.) are truth-evaluable just if the speaker uses it sortally. And 'facts,' like 'things' or 'objects,' (although it seems to be used non-sortally) is used as a sortal just if it is associated with application and identity conditions outlining what it would take for there to be a fact in a given situation, and under what conditions we would have the same fact again. Clearly, each framework could replace 'facts' with one sortal from its own framework, but then neither is purporting to offer a complete account of 'facts,' but just of 'facts' of that sort. Sortal uses of 'facts' will not help bolster claims to absolute fundamentality either, since, if 'facts' is being used as a sortal (even if it is understood as the fundamental category in that framework) it does not rule out the possibility there being different fundamental categories in other frameworks (for other sortal uses of 'facts'). And besides, if each uses 'facts' in this covering sense that presupposes a different range of

[9] Say: *a* is said to be grounded in *b* in the sense that *a* holds in virtue of *b* (without being the case that only *b* exists). Thus, for example, the 'fact' of there being a table in front of me (or Eddington) is grounded in facts about the relevant aggregate of quantum particles in the sense that the former fact holds in virtue of the latter [see (North 2013, 26)].

sortals, then their resulting accounts of what the most fundamental category is cannot even be true rivals.[10]

In spite of this supposed incommensurability between the two images, Cumpa seems to offer a picture able to retain the category of 'facts' as fundamental and, at the same time, shared by both the realist and the physicalist languages. The dilemma is effectively resolved insofar 'facts' is understood as a compound category which has the highest category of both languages as constituents. In this way, the manifest and the scientific images turn out to be not two different frameworks, but two branches of a broader one which has the category of 'facts' as the most fundamental one. That could be a manner of conceiving what he calls 'language of metaphysics.' In this light, Cumpa's proposal could be taken as a viable option and a plausible answer to the original question: "What are the fundamental inhabitants of the world?" Moreover, this approach would also undermine the kind of reductive analysis that physics appears to push us toward. Nevertheless, in order to demonstrate the non-incommensurability of the two frameworks at hand, surely further work needs to be addressed. Complicated issues arise about whether this metaphysical maneuver is really available, but we do not need to address them here, for even if such a move is possible, it will help revive neither a rivalry nor compatibility between them, strictly speaking.[11]

[10] It must be noticed that arguments put forward in this Section are also available for any other metaphysical category (e.g. events, processes or states of affairs) insofar as the cross-sectional feature required by the fundamentality mentioned in relation to 'facts' are not met by other metaphysical categories either.

[11] A related worry is that, even if a category that covers all possible (first-order) categorial concepts is possible, set-theoretic-style paradoxes, such as a Russell-style paradox, quickly arise. We can postulate a category that covers all possible (firstorder) categorial concepts ('organism,' 'artifact,' etc.) and all of their compliants, but then there are possible (second-order) categorial concepts which are not covered (e.g. first-order category), so there is a sense in which we have not covered absolutely universally. So that it seems there is no category of which one could rightly claim to be absolutely universal. But more than that, it seems that we can "form no definite conception of the totality of all objects which could be spoken of" (Dummett 1973/1981, 566–67, 582–83).

4. The External Reading

As we have seen, the sortalist position gives us reason to doubt that each of the two images could legitimately purport to provide an account of what the fundamental category *absolutely* is. Since each image (with its own characteristic sortal terms) purports to offer its own account of what the most fundamental category is in some sense, we cannot legitimately say they provide rival accounts of what the fundamental category is. Nevertheless, there is at least another possible interpretation of Cumpa's project. Employing Carnap's terminology, I will call it 'external reading.' Indeed, one might try to present the conflict in terms of some neutral sense of 'facts,' external to any framework that establishes the rules of use for such a term. But 'facts,' in that sense, would not then be a sortal term and could not be used to establish reference. That is, if 'facts,' in its neutral use, is not a sortal term, then, on the sortalist view, it cannot enable us to establish reference to something, about which science and common sense may then agree or disagree. Consequently**,** we cannot legitimately say that 'facts' is the fundamental category of the world, where 'facts' is being used neutrally. For if 'facts' is not being used as a sortal term, it does not come associated with application conditions needed to establish if it is properly applied and the identity criteria (coapplication conditions) needed for counting. Thence, we have serious reason to doubt that such alleged neutral uses of 'facts' could be used to answer the question about what the fundamental category of the world is. The question "is 'facts' the fundamental category of the world?", understood externally (external to any framework), turns out to be an ill-formed, unanswerable question. Likewise, claiming that "'facts' is the fundamental category," so understood, will also result meaningless and devoid of any cognitive content. In sum, if 'facts' is really used neutrally in attempts to state these debates, then that should raise our suspicions that the claims involved are incomplete and not truth-

evaluable. In the same way, that should raise our suspicions that the corresponding metaphysical questions are ill-formed and unanswerable, and that apparently competing answers to them do not really conflict with each other.

Nevertheless, even though they so understood result to be cognitively meaningless and fail at bipolarity (they have no true values), they may still have a different sort of 'meaning:' a normative one. Indeed, the statement "the fundamental category is that of 'facts,'" in its external use, may express the commitment to adopt a framework in which 'facts' occurs as the fundamental categorial term (in that particular framework).[12] And, perhaps, such a framework could be identified with what Cumpa calls 'the metaphysical language.' Anyway, this external use says nothing about that framework itself, what actually it is, how it is constituted and whether it is a possible language at all. Moreover, if the 'metaphysical language' is taken to be different from both the realistic and the scientific language, it will be deprived of any relationship with them, and to a certain extent, it will be incommensurable with both of them. Thus, 'facts,' understood as the fundamental category of the metaphysical language, will certainly not play that role also in the other languages at stake. However, if Cumpa has in mind some kind of relationship (even some kind of metaphysical relationship) between the alleged metaphysical language and the two other mentioned, I think he should make it explicit, specifying or at least clarifying the supposed contact point.

Furthermore, if this is effectively the most reliable interpretation of Cumpa's proposal, appealing to epistemic virtues (as Cumpa suggests when he argues for the greatest explanatory power of 'facts') does not seem to be a possible strategy to be followed. According to the present view, no framework can be deemed more correct or valid than any other. Or better, since speaking of correctness (or validity) here does not apply at

[12] For an expressivist (non-cognitivist) approach to ontological claims and questions, taken externally, see (Kraut 2016).

all, then it is applied in the same way. Likewise, among the frameworks, there is none that is uniquely best (viz. the 'correct' one). But this formulation certainly does not suggest that the frameworks are all equally good: definitely, a framework might be better than another according to some goals. The linguistic rules we adopt need not be arbitrary, given our purposes, since some rules may serve those purposes better than others. Some languages may be better than others for various purposes and there may be practical issues, or reasons, involved in determining which language is better for that given purpose (or set of purposes). Hence, it follows that virtues for opting for one language over another cannot be epistemic but at most practical in character. It is also important to notice that, insofar as such practical virtues (or non-epistemic values) act like norms or standards of evaluations, these comparative judgements, of which frameworks are better than which, turn out to be normative. Or in other words, even when based in part on non-normative descriptions, they can only be made from those norms. Therefore, such judgements of betterness must be understood as involving a hidden relativity to a norm; in particular, some practical value or virtue. In this sense, it may be quite reasonable to engage in debates about the merits of these various proposals, practical proposals about which set of concepts (or revisions of our current concepts) would best serve some particular set of purposes, though it would be misguided to think of these as substantive debates about how the world is actually made up.

This reading is very close to how Carnap suggests we should understand external ontological questions in general: as practical questions about the advisability of adopting certain linguistic forms. Although, according to Carnap, external questions have no cognitive content at all, they are still significant questions. Indeed, they are not meant to be questions about what there is in the world, but rather questions about what

we should do: questions about which framework we ought to use according to some practical goals. Correspondingly, ontological claims, taken externally, are to be conceived as implicitly answering practical questions about whether or not to accept the related linguistic framework as a whole. And those, of course, are quite different from the (internal) cases in which "we have to make the choice whether or not to accept and use the forms of expression in the framework in question" (Carnap 1950, 207). Therefore, the relevant distinction turns out to be the one between the theoretical issues about what true statements (including existence claims) may be made using a given linguistic framework and the purely practical issues of which linguistic frameworks to choose and adopt. And the choice of a language is nothing but a purely practical choice about what tool to use, rather than as a theoretical decision that is either correct or incorrect: "it does not need any theoretical justification because it does not imply any assertion of reality" (Carnap 1950, 214). In short, if we take external categorial questions literally (as attempted theoretical or factual questions), they are ill-formed pseudo-question. The best we can do is then to consider them as implicitly asking questions about whether or not to accept and use a given categorial framework (with its own categorial structure and fundamental categories).

But, Cumpa does make no reference at all to the practical purposes for which such a metaphysical language should be adopted. Might these be, perhaps, the practical advantages of coping with today's increasingly pressing demand to incorporate scientific expressions with those already in use in ordinary language? Anyway, if that is precisely how Cumpa intends the role of the claim that "'facts' is the fundamental category of the world" and the function of 'metaphysical language' in general, then, I guess, he should at least mention them, as long as it is possible. In that direction, in

order to reveal what they actually might be, further investigations are certainly still needed.

5. Conclusion

The distinction between structure and content is one that has arisen repeatedly in discussions over the relationship between the scientific and the everyday ontology, but it evaporates as far as Eliminativism is concerned, since all relevant content is taken to be cashed out in structural terms. However, according to Thomasson, Eddington's standpoint is undermined because, she claims, there is a "lack of conflict between the merely structural properties physics imputes to the world and the qualitative content involved in ordinary world descriptions" (Thomasson 2007, 139). Insofar as the two manifest and the scientific images involve different linguistic/categorial frameworks, we are not in a position to compare them and then it would be a mistake both to maintain that there is and that there is not a conflict between them.[13]

Cumpa (2014) adopts a different strategy. He argues neither for the incommensurability of the two languages nor for the reducibility of the ordinary level to the scientific level of thinghood. Instead, he attempts to find a category able to reconcile the two images. He identifies the category of 'facts' as the only one which meets this requirement: the best category to account for the relation between the ordinary world and the physical universe. As he defines it: "The fundamental category of the world." Nevertheless, it turns out to be not clear at all how he suggests the relationship between

[13] In the same spirit, the general view I have been elaborating and defending in this paper is that many manifest-image descriptive expressions which scientific naturalists have relegated to second-class citizenship in discourse are not inferior, just different. It just is not the case that everything we talk about in the manifest image that exists at all is something specifiable in the language of an eventual natural science and that "in the dimension of describing and explaining the world, science is the measure of all things, of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not" (Sellars 1956, §41).

the alleged category of ‘facts’ and the two descriptions of the world ought to be understood.

The aim of this paper has been to outline two possible ways in which Cumpa’s factualist approach could be conceived. Both, however, present some difficulties, or at least they need further investigations. According to the first one, common sense image and scientific image are taken to be two branches of a single broader linguistic framework, which he calls ‘metaphysical language.’ Along these lines, ‘facts’ turns out to be the fundamental category in that language and, as such, a category shared by both images. Nevertheless, rather than a category common to the realist language and the scientific language, ‘facts’ is considered to be a compound category, which has the highest category of both (‘arrangement of particles’ and ‘perceptual properties’) as constituents. In other words, ‘facts’ should be understood as the fundamental category of a broader framework (the metaphysical language), but at the same time as constituted by the highest categories of both those narrower frameworks (the realist language and the scientific language). Appealing to a sortalist standpoint, in Section 3, I have tried to reveal the limits of this way of conceiving Cumpa’s proposal.

Alternatively, in Section 4, I have introduced what I called an ‘external’ reading. Here, evoking Carnap’s well known distinction between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ ontological questions, I have presented Cumpa’s claim that “‘facts’ is the fundamental category of the world” as external to any linguistic/categorial framework and the term ‘facts’ as used in some neutral sense (as a non-sortal term). I have argued that such an external categorial statement is meaningless as devoid of any cognitive content. Following Carnap, I have suggested that at best it might be understood as a normative claim. That is, not as a descriptive claim, but rather as a claim about what we should do. In particular, a statement about what categorial framework we ought to adopt. In this

respect, it will express commitments to the adoption of a categorial framework in which the fundamental category is that of 'facts.' Then, I have tried to show how such a reading clashes in principle with Cumpa's conception of a 'metaphysical language.'

In conclusion, whichever of the two interpretations is closer to Cumpa's original purpose, further explanations and clarifications, I think, are needed. I hope Cumpa is willing to take up my suggestions and to address these issues developing his account in one direction or another.

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