DOES ONTOLOGY REST ON A MISTAKE?

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ABSTRACT   The usual charge against Carnap's internal/external distinction is one of 'guilt by association with analytic/synthetic'. But it can be freed of this association, to become the distinction between statements made within make-believe games and those made outside them—or, rather, a special case of it with some claim to be called the metaphorical/literal distinction. Not even Quine considers figurative speech committal, so this turns the tables somewhat. To determine our ontological commitments, we have to ferret out all traces of non-literality in our assertions; if there is no sensible project of doing that, there is no sensible project of Quinean ontology.

> Not that I would undertake to limit my use of the words 'attribute' and 'relation' to contexts that are excused by the possibility of such paraphrase... consider how I have persisted in my vernacular use of 'meaning', 'idea', and the like, long after casting doubt on their supposed objects. True, the use of a term can sometimes be reconciled with rejection of its objects; but I go on using the terms without even sketching any such reconciliation.[1]
>
> Quine, *Word and Object*

I

Introduction. Ontology the progressive research program (not to be confused with ontology the swapping of hunches about what exists) is usually traced back to Quine's 1948 paper 'On What There Is'. According to Quine in that paper, the ontological problem can stated in three words—'what is there?'—and answered in one: 'everything'. Not only that, Quine says, but 'everyone will accept this answer as true'.

If Quine is right that the ontological problem has an agreed-on answer, then what excuse is there for a subject called ontology?

Quine's own view on this comes in the very next sentence: 'there remains room for disagreement over cases'. Of course, we know or can guess the kind of disagreement Quine is talking about.[2] Are

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1. Quine 1960, 210.

2. Quine 1960 lists 'disagreement on whether there are wombats, unicorns, angels, neutrinos, classes, points, miles, propositions' (233).

there or are there not such entities as the number nineteen, the property of roundness, the chance that it will rain, the month of April, the city of Chicago, and the language Spanish? Do 'they' really exist or do we have here just grammar-induced illusions?

And yet, there is a certain cast of mind that has trouble taking questions like these seriously. Some would call it the *natural* cast of mind: it takes a good deal of training before one can bring oneself to believe in an undiscovered fact of the matter as to the existence of nineteen, never mind Chicago and Spanish. And even after the training, one feels just a teensy bit ridiculous pondering the ontological status of these things.

Quine of course takes existence questions dead seriously.[3] He even outlines a program for their resolution: Look for the best overall theory—best by ordinary scientific standards or principled extensions thereof—and then consider what has to exist for the theory to be true.

Not everyone likes this program of Quine's. Such opposition as there has been, though, has centred less on its goals than on technical problems with the proposed method. Suppose a best theory were found; why shouldn't there be various ontologies all equally capable of conferring truth on it? Isn't a good theory in part an ontologically plausible one, making the approach circular?[4]

But again, there is a certain cast of mind that balks rather at the program's goals. A line of research aimed at determining whether Chicago, April, Spanish, etc. really exist strikes this cast of mind as naive to the point of comicality. It's as though one were to call for research into whether April is really the cruellest month, or Chicago the city with the big shoulders, or Spanish the loving tongue. (The analogy is not entirely frivolous as we will see.)

II

Curious/Quizzical. Here then are two possible attitudes about philosophical existence-questions: the *curious*, the one that wants

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3. I am talking about the 'popular', pre- late-1960s, Quine: the one who wrote 'A logistical approach to the ontological problem', 'On what there is' (ignoring the ontological relativism), 'Two dogmas of empiricism', 'On Carnap's views on ontology', and *Word & Object* (ignoring the ontological relativity). Quine's later writings are not discussed here at all.

4. Doubts have been expressed too about the extensionality of Quinean commitment. Particularly helpful on these topics are Chomsky & Scheffler 1958–9, Stevenson 1976, and Jackson 1980.

to find the answers, and the *quizzical*, the one that doubts there is anything to find and is inclined to shrug the question off.

Among analytic philosophers the dominant attitude is one of curiosity.[5] Not only do writers on numbers, worlds, and so on give the impression of trying to work out whether these entities are in fact there, they almost always adopt Quine's methodology as well. An example is the debate about sets. One side maintains with Putnam and Quine that the indispensability of sets in science argues for their reality; the other side holds with Field and perhaps Lewis that sets are not indispensable and (so) can safely be denied. Either way, the point is to satisfy curiosity about what there is.

How many philosophers lean the other way is not easy to say, because the quizzical camp has been keeping a low profile of late. I can think of two reasons for this, one principled and the other historical.

The principled reason is that no matter how oddly particular existence-claims, like 'Chicago exists', may fall on the ear, existence as such seems the very paradigm of an issue that has to admit of a determinate resolution. Compare in this respect questions about *whether* things are with questions about *how* they are.

How a thing is, what characteristics it has, can be moot due to features of the descriptive apparatus we bring to bear on it. If someone wants to know whether France is hexagonal, smoking is a dirty habit, or the Liar sentence is untrue, the answer is that no simple answer is possible. This causes little concern because there's a story to be told about why not; the predicates involved have vague, shifty, impredicative, or otherwise unstraightforward conditions of application.

But what could prevent there from being a fact of the matter as to *whether* a thing is? The idea of looking for trouble in the application conditions of 'exists' makes no sense, because these conditions are automatically satisfied by whatever they are tested against.

Don't get me wrong; the feeling of mootness and pointlessness that some existence-questions arouse in us is a real phenomenological datum that it would be wrong to ignore. But a feeling is,

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5. It might be safer to say that curiosity is the analytic movement's 'official' attitude, the one that most published research unapologetically presupposes. (This after a period of ordinary-language-inspired quizzicality, as in Ryle 1954, 'The World of Science and the Everyday World'.)

well, only a feeling. It counts for little without a *vindicating explanation* that exhibits the feeling as worthy of philosophical respect. And it is unclear how the explanation would go, or how it could possibly win out over the non-vindicating explanation that says that philosophical existence-questions are just very hard.

This connects up with the second reason why the quizzical camp has not been much heard from lately. The closest thing the quizzicals have had to a champion lately is Rudolf Carnap in 'Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology'. This is because Carnap *had* a vindicating explanation to offer of the pointless feeling: The reason it feels pointless to ponder whether, say, numbers exist is that 'numbers exist', as intended by the philosopher, has no meaning.[6] Determined to pronounce from a position external to the number-framework, all the philosopher achieves is to cut himself off from the rules governing the use of 'number', which then drains his pronouncements of all significance.

Quine's famous reply (see below) is that the internal/external distinction is in deep cahoots with the analytic/synthetic distinction and just as misconceived. That Carnap is widely seen to have *lost* the ensuing debate is a fact from which the quizzical camp has never quite recovered. Carnap's defeat was indeed a double blow. Apart from embarrassing the quizzicals' champion, it destroyed the only available model of how quizzicalism might be philosophically justified.

III

Preview. I don't especially want to argue with the assessment of Carnap as loser of his debate with Quine. Internal/external[7] as Carnap explains it *does* depend on analytic/synthetic. But I think that it can be freed of this dependence, and that once freed it becomes something independently interesting: the distinction between statements made within make-believe games and those made without them—or, rather, a special case of it with some claim to be called the metaphorical/literal distinction.

6. So says my Carnap, anyway; for a sense of the interpretive options see Haack, Stroud, Hookway, and Bird.

7. 'Internal/external' is short for 'the internal/external distinction'; likewise 'analytic/ synthetic'.

This make-believish twist turns the tables somewhat. Not even Quine considers it ontologically committing to say in a *figurative* vein that there are *X*s. His program for ontology thus presupposes a distinction in the same ballpark as the one he rejects in Carnap. And he needs the distinction to be tolerably clear and sharp; otherwise there will be no way of implementing the exemption from commitment that he grants to the non-literal.

Now, say what you like about analytic/synthetic, compared to the literal/metaphorical distinction it is a marvel of philosophical clarity and precision. Even those with use for the notion admit that the boundaries of the literal are about as blurry as they could be, the clear cases on either side enclosing a vast interior region of indeterminacy.

An argument can thus be made that it is Quine's side of the debate, not Carnap's, that is invested in an overblown distinction. It goes like this: To determine our commitments, we need to be able to ferret out all traces of non-literality in our assertions. If there is no feasible project of doing *that,* then there is no feasible project of Quinean ontology. There may be quicker ways of developing this objection, but the approach through 'Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology' is rich enough in historical ironies to be worth the trip.

IV

Carnap's proposal. Existence-claims are not singled out for special treatment by Carnap; he asks only that they meet a standard to which all meaningful talk is subject, an appropriate sort of discipline or rule-governedness. Run through his formal theory of language, this comes to the requirement that meaningful discussion of *X*s—material objects, numbers, properties, spacetime points, or whatever—has got to proceed under the auspices of a *linguistic framework*, which lays down the 'rules for forming statements [about *X*s] and for testing, accepting, or rejecting them'.[8] An ontologist who respects this requirement by querying 'the existence of [*X*s] *within the framework*' is said by Carnap to be raising an *internal* existence-question.[9]

8. Carnap 1956, 208.
9. Carnap 1956, 206.

A good although not foolproof way to recognize internal existence-questions is that they tend to concern, not the Xs as a class, but the Xs meeting some further condition: 'is there a piece of paper on my desk?' rather than 'are there material objects?' I say 'not foolproof' because one *could* ask in an internal vein about the Xs generally; are there these entities or not? The question is an unlikely one because for any framework of interest, the answer is certain to be 'yes'. (What use would the X-framework be if having adopted it, you found yourself with no Xs to talk about?) But both forms of internal question are possible.

The point about internal existence-questions of either sort is that they raise no difficulties of principle. It is just a matter of whether applicable rules authorize you to say that there are Xs, or Xs of some particular kind. If they do, the answer is *yes*; otherwise *no*; end of story.[10] This alone shows that the internal existence-question is not the one the philosopher meant to be asking: it is not the 'question of realism'. A system of rules making 'there are material objects' or 'there are numbers' *unproblematically* assertible is a system of rules in need of external validation, or the opposite. Are the rules right to counsel acceptance of 'there are Xs'? It is no good consulting the framework for the answer; we know what *it* says. No, the existence of Xs will have to queried from a position outside the X-framework. The philosopher's question is an *external* question.

Now, Carnap respects the ambition to cast judgment on the framework from without. He just thinks philosophers have a wrong idea of what is coherently possible here. How can an external deployment of 'there are Xs' mean anything, when by definition it floats free of the rules whence alone meaning comes?

There are of course meaningful questions in the vicinity. But these are questions that mention 'X' rather than using it: e.g., the practical question 'should we adopt a framework requiring us to use 'X' like so?'[11] If the philosopher protests that she meant to be asking a question about Xs, not the term 'X', Carnap has a ready reply: 'You also thought to be asking a meaningful question, and

10. I am slurring over the possibility that the rules yield no verdict; cf. the treatment of solubility judgments in Carnap 1936/7.

11. Also mentioned is the theoretical question, 'how well would adopting this framework serve our interests as inquirers?'.

one external to the *X*-framework. And it turns out that these conditions cannot be reconciled. The best I can do by way of indulging your desire to query the framework itself is to hear you as asking a question of advisability'.

So that is what he does; the 'external question' becomes the practical question, and the 'question of realism' which the philosopher thought to be asking is renounced as impossible. There is something that the 'question of realism' was *supposed* to be; there is a concept of the question, if you like. But the concept has no instances.[12]

V

Internal/external and the dogma of reductionism. Quine has a triple-barrelled response, set out in the next three sections.[13] The key to Carnap's position (as he sees it) is that 'the statements commonly thought of as ontological are proper matters of contention only in the form of linguistic proposals'.[14] But now, similar claims have been made about the statements commonly thought of as *analytic*; theoretical-sounding disputes about whether, say, the square root of –1 is a number are best understood as practical disputes about how to use 'number'. So, *idea*: the external existence-claims can be (re)conceived as the analytic ones. The objection thus looks to be one of guilt-by-association-with-the-first-dogma: 'if there is no proper distinction between analytic and synthetic, then no basis at all remains for the contrast which Carnap urges between ontological statements and empirical statements of existence'.[15]

Trouble is, the association thus elaborated doesn't look all that close. For one thing, existence-claims of the kind Carnap would call analytic show no particular tendency to be external. Quine appreciates this but pronounces himself unbothered: 'there is in these terms no contrast between analytic statements of an ontological kind and other analytic statements of existence such

12. Is the concept incoherent? On my interpretation, yes. Yet as Bird remarks, Carnap says only that the question of realism has not been made out. I read the relevant passages as leaving the door open, not to the question of realism as he defines it (*his* definition can't be satisfied), but to an alternative definition.

13. Quine devotes most of his 1951b to another, seemingly much sillier, objection. See Bird for criticism.

14. Quine 1951b, 71.

15. Quine 1951b, 71.

as "There are prime numbers above a hundred"; but I don't see why he should care about this'.[16] Quine's proposal also deviates from Carnap in the opposite way; existence-claims can fail to be analytic without (on that account) failing to be external. An example that Carnap himself might give is 'there are material objects'. Quine apparently considers it a foregone conclusion that experience should take a course given which 'there are material objects' is assertible in the thing framework.[17] How could it be? It is not analytic that experience even occurs.[18]

All of that having been said, Carnap agrees that the distinctions are linked: 'Quine does not acknowledge [my internal/external] distinction' because according to him 'there are no sharp boundary lines between logical and factual truth, questions of meaning and questions of fact, between acceptance of a language structure and the acceptance of an assertion formulated in the language'.[19] The parallel here between 'logical truth', 'questions of meaning', and 'acceptance of a language structure' suggests that analytic/synthetic may define internal/external (not directly, by providing an outright equivalent, but) *indirectly* through its role in the notion of a framework. The assertion rules that make up frameworks are not statements, and so there is no question of calling them analytically *true*. But they are the nearest thing to, namely, analytically *valid* or *correct*. The rules are what give *X*-sentences

16. What is so hard to see? Internal/external was supposed to shed light on the felt difference between substantive, 'real world', existence-questions and those of the sort that only a philosopher could take seriously. 'Are there primes over a hundred?' as normally understood falls on one side of this line; 'are there numbers?' as normally understood falls on the other. Carnap should thus care very much if Quine's version of his distinction groups these questions together. The problem is by no means an isolated one. According to Carnap in the Schilpp volume, existence-claims about abstract objects are '*usually* analytic and trivial' (Schilpp 1963, 871, emphasis added).

17. He includes it on a list of sentences said to be 'analytic or contradictory given the language' (Quine 1951b, 71). Why a true-in-virtue-of-meaning sentence would be well suited for the role of a sentence that is untrue-in-virtue-of-being-cognitively-meaningless is not altogether clear.

18. On the other hand: 'Accepting a new kind of entity' involves, for Carnap, adopting a new style of variable with corresponding general term. 'There are material objects' thus translates as $(\exists m)\mathrm{MATOBJ}(m)$; which, given how the variable and term are coordinated, is equivalent to $(\exists m)m = m$; which, to come at last to the point, is logically valid in standard quantificational logic. On the third hand, Carnap *objected* to this feature of standard quantificational logic: 'If logic is to be independent of empirical knowledge, then it must assume nothing concerning the *existence of objects*' (Carnap 1937, 140). In his 'physical language', he notes, 'whether anything at all exists—that is to say, whether there is... a non-trivially occupied position—can only be expressed by means of a synthetic sentence' (ibid., 141).

19. Carnap 1956, 215.

their meanings, hence they 'cannot be wrong' as long as those meanings hold fixed.

Pulling these threads together, internal/external presupposes analytic/synthetic by presupposing frameworkhood; for frameworks are made up inter alia of analytic assertion rules. Some might ask, 'why should analytic rules be as objectionable as analytic truths?' But that is essentially to ask why Quine's second dogma—the reductionism that finds every statement to be linkable by fixed correspondence rules to a determinate range of confirming observations—should be as objectionable to him as the first. The objection is the same in both cases. Any observation can work for or against any statement in the right doctrinal/ methodological context. Hence no assertion *or rule of assertion* can lay claim to being indefeasibly correct, as it would have to be were it correct as a matter of meaning. Quine may be right that the two dogmas are at bottom one; still, our finding *narrowly* drawn is one of guilt-by-association-with-the-second-dogma.

VI

Internal/external & double effect. Quine's attack on internal/ external begins with his anti-reductionism, but it doesn't end there. Because up to a point, Carnap *agrees*: any link between theory and observation can be broken, and any can in the right context be forged.[20] It is just that he puts a different spin on these scenarios. There is indeed (thinks Carnap) a possibility that can never be foreclosed. But it is not the possibility of our correcting the rules to accommodate some new finding about the conditions under which *X*-statements are 'really true';[21] it is that we should decide for *practical* reasons to trade the going framework for another, thereby imbuing '*X*' with a new and different meaning.[22]

20. It is too often forgotten where Quine *gets* his anti-reductionism: 'The dogma of reductionism survives in the supposition that each statement, taken in isolation from its fellows, can admit of confirmation or infirmation at all. My countersuggestion, issuing essentially from Carnap's doctrine of the physical world in the *Aufbau*, is that our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but only as a corporate body' (Quine 1951a, 41).

21. There is no scope for such a finding, since there is no external vantage point from which *X*-statements can be evaluated.

22. This was Carnap's view already in the 1930s: 'all rules are laid down with the reservation that they may be altered as soon as it seems expedient to do so' (Carnap 1937, 318).

That Carnap to this extent *shares* Quine's anti-reductionism forces Quine to press his objection from the other side. Having previously argued that the 'internal' life, in which we decide between particular statements, is a looser and more pragmatic affair than Carnap paints it, he needs now to argue that the 'external' life, in which we decide between frameworks, is more evidence-driven and theoretical.

Imagine that the choice before me is whether to adopt a rule making 'there are Xs' assertible under such and such observational conditions. And assume, as may well be the case, that these conditions are known to obtain; they might obtain trivially, as when 'X' = 'number'. Then my decision is (in part) a decision about whether to say 'there are Xs'. Since Carnap gives no hint that these words are to be uttered with anything less than complete sincerity, what I am really deciding is whether to regard 'there are Xs' as *true* and to *believe* in Xs.[23] How then does adopting the rule fall short of being the acceptance of new doctrine?

Carnap could play it straight here and insist that adopting the rule involves only a *conditional* undertaking to assent to 'there are Xs' under specified observational conditions, while adopting the doctrine is categorically aligning myself with the view that there are Xs. But this is the kind of manoeuvre that gives the doctrine of double effect a bad name. Surely the decision to ϕ cannot disclaim all responsibility for ϕ's easily foreseeable (perhaps analytically foreseeable) consequences? To portray adopting the rule as taking a stand on what I am going to *mean* by 'X', as opposed to a stand on the facts, is just another version of the same manoeuvre; it is not going to make much of an impression on the man who called it 'nonsense, and the root of much nonsense, to speak of a linguistic component and a factual component in the truth of any individual statement'.[24]

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23. 'The acceptance of the thing language leads, on the basis of observations made, also to the acceptance, belief, and assertion of certain statements' (Carnap 1956, 208).

24. Quine 1951a, 42. The situation here is more complicated than it may look. Until the framework is adopted, 'there are Xs' has no meaning for me. I am thus faced with a package deal: do I want to mean a certain thing by 'there are Xs', and accept 'there are Xs' with that meaning? Since the meaning is not, pre-adoption, mine, it is questionable whether I can be described, pre-adoption, as considering whether there are Xs, or even considering whether to believe that there are Xs.

VII

Internal/external & pragmatism. Carnap has his work cut out for him. Can he *without* appeal to analytic/synthetic, and *without* assuming the separability of meaning and 'how things are' as factors in truth, explain why the adoption of new assertion rules is not a shift in doctrine?

He might try the following. *If* the decision to make 'there are *X*s' assertible were based in some independent insight into the ontological facts, or even in evidence relevant to those facts, then yes, it would probably deserve to be called a change of doctrine. If anything has been learned, though, from the long centuries of wheel-spinning debate, it is that independent insight and evidence are lacking. The decision to count 'there are *X*s' assertible has got to be made on the basis of *practical* considerations: efficiency, simplicity, applicability, fruitfulness, and the like. And what practical considerations rationalize is not change in doctrine, but change in action or policy.

This is where push famously comes to shove. Efficiency and the rest are *not* for Quine 'practical considerations', not if that is meant to imply a lack of evidential relevance. They are exactly the sorts of factors that scientists point to as favouring one theory over another, hence as supporting this or that view of the world. As he puts it in the last sentence of 'Carnap's Views on Ontology', 'ontological questions [for Carnap] are questions not of fact but of choosing a convenient conceptual scheme or framework for science; …with this I agree only if the same be conceded for every scientific hypothesis'.[25]

A three-part objection, then: anti-reductionism, double effect, and finally pragmatism. The objection ends as it began, by disparaging not the idea of a Carnapian linguistic framework so much as its bearing on actual practice.[26] The special framework-directed attitudes Carnap points to are, to the extent that we have them at all, attitudes we also take towards our theories. Between acceptance of a *theory* and acceptance of particular theoretical claims, there is indeed not much of a gap. But it is all the gap that is left between external and internal if Quine is right.

25. Quine 1951b, 72.

26. Quine on the back of his copy of Carnap 1956: 'When are rules really adopted? Ever? Then what application of your theory to what I am concerned with (language now)?' (Creath 1990, 417).

VIII

Superficiality of the Quinean critique. Here is Quine's critique in a nutshell. The factors governing assertion are an inextricable mix of the semantic and the cognitive; any serious question about the assertive use of '*X*' has to do both with the word's meaning *and* the *X*-ish facts. Accordingly Carnap's external stance, in which we confront a purely practical decision about which linguistic rules to employ, and his internal stance, in which we robotically apply these rules to determine existence, are both of them philosophical fantasies.

I want to say that even if all of this is correct, Quine wins on a technicality. His objection doesn't embarrass internal/external as such, only Carnap's way of developing the distinction. To see why, look again at the objection's three stages. The 'anti-reductionist' stage takes issue with Carnap's construal of the framework rules as something like analytic. But analyticity is a red herring. The key point about frameworks for Carnap's purposes is that

(*) they provide a context in which we are to say – –*X*– – under these conditions, = =*X*= = under those conditions, and so on, entirely without regard to whether these statements are in a framework-independent sense true.

This is all it takes for there to be an internal/external distinction. And it seems just irrelevant to (*) whether the rules telling us what to say when are conceived as analytically fixed.

Someone might object that analytical fixity was forced on us by semantic autonomy (by the fact that *X* has no other meaning than what it gets from the rules), and that semantic autonomy is non-negotiable since it is what licenses (*)'s insouciance about external truth. Numerical calculation does not answer to external facts about numbers for the same reason that players of tag don't see themselves as answerable to game-independent facts about who is really 'IT'; just as apart from the game there's no such thing as being 'IT', apart from the framework there's no such thing as being 'the sum of seven and five'.

But now wait. If the object is to prevent external claims from 'setting a standard' that internal claims would then be expected to live up to, depriving them of all meanin*g* seems like overkill. A more targeted approach would be to *allow X*-talk its external

meaning—allow it to that extent to 'set a standard'—but make clear that internal *X*-talk is not *bound* by that standard. How to make it clear is the question, and this is where the second or 'double effect' stage comes in.

Must internal utterances have the status of assertions? Carnap's stated goal, remember, is to calm the fears of researchers tempted by Platonic languages; he wants to show that 'using such a language does not imply embracing a Platonic ontology but is perfectly compatible with empiricism and strictly scientific thinking'.[27] If the issue is really one of use and access, then it would seem immaterial whether Carnap's researchers are asserting the sentences they utter or putting them forward in some other and less committal spirit.[28] This takes us to the third or 'pragmatic' stage of Quine's critique.

That frameworks are chosen on practical grounds proves nothing, Quine says, since practical reasons can also be evidential. Of course he's right. But why can't Carnap retort that it was the *other* (the non-evidential) sort of practical reason he had in mind— the other sort of practical reason he took to be at work in these cases? The claim Quine needs is that when it comes to indicative-mood speech behaviour, *no other sort of practical reason is possible*. There is no such thing, in other words, as just putting on a way of talking for the practical advantages it brings, without regard to whether the statements it recommends are in a larger sense true. (If there were, Carnap could take *that* as his model for adopting a framework.)

Does Quine allow for the possibility of ways of talking that are useful without being true, or regarded as true? A few tantalizing passages aside,[29] it seems clear that he not only allows for it, he

27. Carnap 1956, 206.

28. Compare van Fraassen on 'the realist and anti-realist pictures of scientific activity. When a scientist advances a new theory, the realist sees him as asserting the (truth of the) postulates. But the anti-realist sees him as displaying this theory, holding it up to view, as it were, and claiming certain virtues for it' (van Fraassen 1980, 57). A fuller treatment would explore analogies with constructive empiricism; see note 75 for a point of disanalogy.

29. See especially 'Posits & Reality', originally intended as the opening chapter of Quine 1960. 'Might the molecular doctrine be ever so useful in organizing and extending our knowledge of the behavior of observable things, and yet be factually false? One may question, on closer consideration, whether this is really an intelligible possibility' (Quine 1976, 248). 'Having noted that man has no evidence of the existence of bodies beyond the fact that their assumption helps him organize experience, we should have done well...to conclude: such then, at bottom, is what evidence is...' (ibid., 251).

revels in it. The overall trend of *Word & Object* is that a *great deal* of our day to day talk, and a great deal of the talk even of working scientists, is not to be taken ultimately seriously. This is Quine's famous doctrine of the 'double standard'. Intentional attributions, subjunctive conditionals, and so on are said to have 'no place in an austere canonical notation for science',[30] suitable for 'limning the true and ultimate structure of reality'.[31] Quine does not for a moment suggest these idioms are not useful. He goes out of his way to hail them as indispensable, both to the person in the street and the working scientist.[32] When the physicist (who yields to no one in her determination to limn ultimate structure) espouses a doctrine of 'ideal objects' (e.g., point masses and frictionless planes), this is welcomed by Quine as

> a deliberate myth, useful for the vividness, beauty, and substantial correctness with which it portrays certain aspects of nature even while, on a literal reading, it falsifies nature in other respects.[33]

Other examples could be mentioned;[34] their collective upshot is that Quine does not really doubt that practical reasons can be given for asserting what are on balance untruths. There is no in-principle mystery (even for him) about the kind of thing Carnap is talking about: a well-disciplined, practically advantageous way of talking that makes no pretence of being 'really true'.

IX

What is a framework and what should it be? About one thing Quine is right. Frameworks cannot remain what they were; they will have to evolve or die. Quine's own view is that he has pushed

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30. Quine 1960, 225.

31. Quine 1960, 221.

32. 'Not that I would forswear daily use of intentional idioms, or maintain that they are practically dispensable. But they call, I think, for bifurcation in canonical notation' (Quine 1960, 221). 'Not that the idioms thus renounced are supposed to be unneeded in the market place or the laboratory.... The doctrine is that all traits of reality worthy of the name can be set down in an idiom of this austere form if in any idiom' (ibid., 228).

33. Quine 1960, 250.

34. Just as the immaterialist 'stoop[s] to our [materialist] idiom...when the theoretical question is not at issue', and the nominalist 'agree[s] that there are primes between 10 and 20', condoning 'that usage as a mere manner of speaking', many of our own 'casual remarks in the "there are" form would want dusting up when our thoughts turn seriously ontological'. This causes no confusion provided that 'the theoretical use is...respected as literal and basic' (Quine 1966a, 99ff).

frameworks in the direction of theories. But his objection really argues, I think, for a different sort of evolution.

Look again at the three stages. The first tells us that frameworks are not to be seen as sole determinants of meaning. All right, let '*X*''s meaning depend on factors that the framework has no idea of; let '*X*' have its meaning quite *independently* of the framework. The second tells us that the rules about what to say when had better not be rules about what to believingly assert. All right, let them be rules about what to *put forward*, where this is a conversational move falling short of assertion. The third tells us that if frameworks are non-doctrinal, this is not because they are adopted for reasons like simplicity, fruitfulness, and familiarity. All right, let the conclusion be reached by another and more direct route; let us identify frameworks outright with practices of such and such a type, where it is independently obvious that to engage in these practices is not thereby to accept any particular doctrine.

Now, what is our usual word for an enterprise where sentences are put at the service of something other than their usual truth-conditions, by people who may or may not believe them, in a disciplined but defeasible way? It seems to me that our usual word is 'make-believe game' or 'pretend game'. Make-believe games are the paradigm activities in which we 'assent' to sentences with little or no regard for their actual truth-values.

Indications are that Carnap would have resisted any likening of the internal to the make-believe. He take pains to distance himself from those who 'regard the acceptance of abstract entities as a kind of superstition or myth, populating the world with fictitious... entities'.[35] Why, when the make-believe model appears to achieve the freedom from external critique that Carnap says he wants?[36]

First there is a difference of terminology to deal with. A 'myth' for Carnap is 'a false (or dubious) internal statement'—something

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35. Carnap 1956, 218.

36. The make-believe interpretation also offers certain advantages. Carnap says that practical decisions as between frameworks are informed by theoretical discussions about ease of use, communicability, and so on. But theoretical statements are always internal, and we are now by hypothesis occupying an external vantage point. Carnap might reply that internal/external is a relative distinction, and that we occupy framework *A* when considering whether to adopt framework *B*. But since the one framework may be just as much in need of evaluation as the other, this makes for a feeling of intellectual vertigo. A cleaner solution is to say that we occupy the external perspective when we in a *non*-make-believe spirit consider the practicality of engaging in make-believe. See also note 47.

along the lines of 'there are ghosts' conceived as uttered in the thing framework.[37] A 'myth' or fiction for me is a *true* internal statement (that is, a statement endorsed by the rules) whose external truth value is as may be, the point being that that truth value is from an internal standpoint quite irrelevant. So while a Carnapian myth *cannot* easily be true, a myth in my sense *must* be internally true and may be externally true as well. (Studied indecision about which of them *are* externally true will be playing an increasing role as we proceed.)

Now, clearly, that 'internal truths' are not myths$_1$ = *statements that pertinent rules of evidence tell us to believe-false* doesn't show they aren't myths$_2$ = *statements that pertinent rules of make-believe tell us to imagine-true*. That said, I suspect that Carnap would not want internal truths to be myths$_2$ either. This is because freedom from external critique is only part of what Carnap is after, and the negative part at that. There is also the freedom *to* carry on in the familiar sort of unphilosophical way. The internal life Carnap is struggling to defend is the *ordinary* life of the ontologically unconcerned inquirer. And that inquirer does not see herself as playing games, she sees herself as describing reality.

X

The effect on Quine's program. Playing games vs. describing reality—more on that dilemma in due course.[38] Our immediate concern is not the bearing of make-believe games on Carnap's program, it's the bearing on Quine's. Quine has not much to say on the topic but it is satisfyingly direct:

> One way in which a man may fail to share the ontological commitments of his discourse is... by taking an attitude of frivolity. The parent who tells the Cinderella story is no more committed to admitting a fairy godmother and a pumpkin coach into his own ontology than to admitting the story as true.[39]

Note that the imputation of frivolity is not limited just to explicit self-identified pieces of play-acting. Who among us has not slipped occasionally into 'the essentially dramatic idiom of propositional

37. Carnap 1956, 218.

38. I have hopes of enticing the Carnapians back on board by representing it as a false dilemma.

39. Quine 1961, 103.

attitudes',[40] or the subjunctive conditional with its dependence on 'a dramatic projection',[41] or the 'deliberate myths'[42] of the infinitesimal and the frictionless plane? Quine's view about all these cases is that we can protect ourselves from ontological scrutiny by keeping the element of drama well in mind, and holding our tongues in moments of high scientific seriousness.

Now, the way Quine is usually read, we are to investigate what exists by reworking our overall theory of the world with whatever tools science and philosophy have to offer, asking all the while what has to exist for the theory to be true. The advice at any particular stage is to

(Q) count a thing as existing iff it is a commitment of your best theory, i.e., the theory's truth requires it.

What though if my best theory contains elements S that are there not because they are such very good things to believe but for some other reason, like the advantages that accrue if I *pretend* that S? Am I still to make S's commitments my own? One certainly hopes not; I can hardly be expected to take ontological guidance from a statement I don't accept, and may well regard as false!

It begins to look as though (Q) overshoots the mark. At least, I see only two ways of avoiding this result. One is to say that the make-believe elements are never going to make it into our theories in the first place. As theorists we are in the business of describing the world; and to the extent that a statement is something to be pretended true, that statement is not descriptive. A second and likelier thought is that any make believe elements that do make their way in will eventually drop out. As theory evolves it bids stronger and stronger to be accepted as the honest to God truth. These options are considered in the next few sections; after that we ask what sense can still be made of the Quinean project.

XI

Can make-believe be descriptive?[43] The thread that links all make-believe games together is that they call upon their participants to

40. Quine 1960, 219.

41. Dramatic in that 'we feign belief in the antecedent and see how convincing we then find the consequent' (Quine 1960, 222). This hints (quite by accident) at an analogy between the make-believe theory and 'if-thenism' that I hope to pursue elsewhere.

42. Quine, 248ff.

43. This section borrows from Yablo 1997.

pretend or imagine that certain things are the case. These to-be-imagined items make up the game's *content*, and to elaborate and adapt oneself to this content is typically the game's very point.[44]

An alternative point suggests itself, though, when we reflect that all but the most boring games are played with *props*, whose game-independent properties help to determine what it is that players are supposed to imagine. That Sam's pie is too big for the oven doesn't follow from the rules of mud pies alone; you have to throw in the fact that Sam's clump of mud fails to fit into the hollow stump. If readers of 'The Final Problem' are to think of Holmes as living nearer to Hyde Park than Central Park, the facts of nineteenth century geography deserve a large part of the credit.

Now, a game whose content reflects the game-independent properties of worldly props can be seen in two different lights. What ordinarily happens is that we take an interest in the props because and to the extent that they influence the content; one tramps around London in search of 221B Baker street for the light it may shed on what is true according to the Holmes stories.

But in principle it could be the other way around: we could be interested in a game's content because and to the extent that it yielded information about the props. This would not stop us from playing the game, necessarily, but it would tend to confer a different significance on our moves. Pretending within the game to assert that BLAH would be a way of giving voice to a fact holding *outside* the game: the fact that the props are in such and such a condition, viz., the condition that makes BLAH a proper thing to pretend to assert.

Using games to talk about game-independent reality makes a certain in principle sense, then. Is such a thing ever actually done? A case can be made that it is done all the time—not indeed with explicit self-identified games like 'mud pies' but impromptu everyday games hardly rising to the level of consciousness. Some examples of Kendall Walton's suggest how this could be so:

> Where in Italy is the town of Crotone? I ask. You explain that it is on the arch of the Italian boot. 'See that thundercloud over there—the big, angry face near the horizon', you say; 'it is headed this way'.... We speak of the saddle of a mountain and the shoulder of a

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44. Better, such and such is part of the game's content if 'it is to be imagined.... *should the question arise*, it being understood that often the question *shouldn't* arise' (Walton 1990, 40). Subject to the usual qualifications, the ideas about make-believe and metaphor in the next few paragraphs are all due to Walton (1990, 1993).

highway.... All of these cases are linked to make-believe. We think of Italy and the thundercloud as something like pictures. Italy (or a map of Italy) depicts a boot. The cloud is a prop which makes it fictional that there is an angry face… The saddle of a mountain is, fictionally, a horse's saddle. But our interest, in these instances, is not in the make-believe itself, and it is not for the sake of games of make-believe that we regard these things as props… [The make-believe] is useful for articulating, remembering, and communicating facts about the props—about the geography of Italy, or the identity of the storm cloud…or mountain topography. It is by thinking of Italy or the thundercloud…as potential if not actual props that I understand where Crotone is, which cloud is the one being talked about.[45]

A certain kind of make-believe game, Walton says, can be 'useful for articulating, remembering, and communicating facts' about aspects of the game-independent world. He might have added that make-believe games can make it easier to reason about such facts, to systematize them, to visualize them, to spot connections with other facts, and to evaluate potential lines of research. That similar virtues have been claimed for metaphors is no accident, if metaphors are themselves moves in world-oriented pretend games:

The metaphorical statement (in its context) implies or suggests or introduces or calls to mind a (possible) game of make-believe... In saying what she does, the speaker describes things that are or would be props in the implied game. [To the extent that paraphrase is possible] the paraphrase will specify features of the props by virtue of which it would be fictional in the implied game that the speaker speaks truly, if her utterance is an act of verbal participation in it.[46]

A metaphor on this view is an utterance that represents its objects as being *like so*: the way that they *need* to be to make the utterance pretence-worthy in a game that it itself suggests. The game is played not for its own sake but to make clear which game-independent properties are being attributed. They are the ones that do or would confer legitimacy upon the utterance construed as a move in the game.

Assuming the make-believe theory is on the right track, it will not really do to say that sentences meant only to be pretended-true are nondescriptive and hence unsuited to scientific theorizing. True, to pretend is not itself to describe. But on the one hand, the

45. Walton 1993, 40–1.
46. Ibid., 46. I should say that Walton does *not* take himself to be offering a general theory of metaphor.

pretence may only be alluded to, not actually undertaken. And on the other, the reason for the pretence may be to portray the world as holding up its end of the bargain, by being in a condition to make a pretence like that appropriate. All of this may proceed with little conscious attention. Often in fact the metaphorical content is the one that 'sticks to the mind' and the literal content takes effort to recover. (Figurative speech is like that; compare the effort of remembering that 'that wasn't such a great idea', taken literally, leaves open that it was a very *good* idea.)

<div align="center">XII</div>

Flight from figuration. What about the second strategy for salvaging (Q)? Our theories may start out partly make-believe (read now metaphorical), but as inquiry progresses the make-believe parts gradually drop out. Any metaphor that is not simply junked—the fate Quine sometimes envisages for intentional psychology—will give way to a paraphrase serving the same useful purposes without the figurative distractions.[47] An example is Weierstrass with his epsilon–delta definition of limit showing how to do away with talk of infinitesimals.

This appears to be the strategy Quine would favour. Not only does he look to science to beat the metaphors back, he thinks it may be the only human enterprise up to the task. He appreciates, of course, that we are accustomed to thinking of 'linguistic usage as literalistic in its main body and metaphorical in its trimming'. The familiar thought is however

> a mistake…. Cognitive discourse at its most dryly literal is largely a refinement rather, characteristic of the neatly worked inner stretches of science. It is an open space in the tropical jungle, created by clearing tropes away.[48]

The question is really just whether Quine is *right* about this—not about the prevalence of metaphor outside of science, but about its

47. The notion of paraphrase has always been caught between an aspiration to symmetry—paraphrases are supposed to *match* their originals along some semantic dimension—and an aspiration to the opposite—paraphrases are supposed to *improve* on their originals by shedding unwanted ontological commitments. (See Alston 1957). Quine avoids the paradox by sacrificing matching to improvement; he expects nothing like synonymy but just a sentence that 'serves any purposes of [the original] that seem worth serving' (Quine 1960, 214). But while this is technically unanswerable, there is still the feeling in many cases that the paraphrase 'says the same' as what it paraphrases, or the same as what we were trying to say by its means. A reversion to the poetry-class reading of 'paraphrase'—a paraphrase of *S* expresses in literal terms what *S* says metaphorically—solves the paradox rather neatly.

48. Quine 1981, 188–9.

eventual dispensability within.[49] And here we have to ask what might have drawn us to metaphorical ways of talking in the first place.

A metaphor has in addition to its *literal* content—given by the conditions under which it is true and to that extent belief-worthy— a *metaphorical* content given by the conditions under which it is 'fictional' or pretence-worthy in the relevant game. If we help ourselves to the (itself perhaps metaphorical[50]) device of possible worlds, we can put it like so:

$$S\text{'s} \left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{literal} \\ \text{metaphorical} \end{array} \right\} \text{content} =$$

the set of worlds that,
considered as actual, make S $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{true} \\ \text{fictional} \end{array} \right\}.$

The role of pretend games on this approach is to warp the usual lines of semantic projection, so as to reshape the region a sentence defines in logical space:[51]

literal content   **metaphorical content**
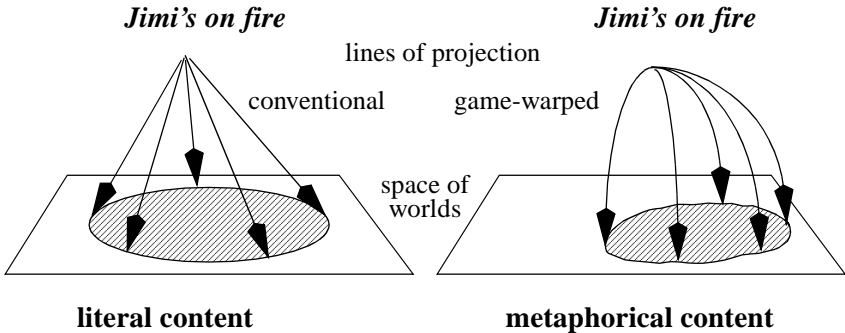
The straight lines on the left are projected by the ordinary, conventional meaning of 'Jimi's on fire'; they pick out the worlds which make 'Jimi's on fire' true. The bent lines on the right show what happens when worlds are selected according to whether they make the very same sentence, meaning the very same thing, fictional or pretence-worthy.

49. Quine speaks of the 'inner stretches' of science; is that to concede that 'total science' has no hope of achieving a purely literal state?

50. Yablo 1997. Derrida was right; one uses metaphor to explain metaphor.

51. A lot of metaphors are literally impossible: 'I am a rock'. Assuming we want a non-degenerate region on the left, the space of worlds should embrace all 'ways for things to be', not just the 'ways things could have been'. The distinction is from Salmon 1989.

If it is granted that there are these metaphorical contents—these ensembles of worlds picked out by their shared property of legitimating a certain pretence—then here is what we want explained: what are the reasons for accessing them *metaphorically*? I can think of at least three sorts of reason, corresponding to three progressively more interesting sorts of metaphor.

Representationally Essential Metaphors

The most obvious reason is lack of a literal alternative; the language might have no more to offer in the way of a unifying principle for the worlds in a given content than that *they* are the ones making the relevant sentence fictional. It seems at least an open question, for example, whether the clouds we call *angry* are the ones that are literally *F*, for any *F* other than 'such that it would be natural and proper to regard them as angry if one were going to attribute emotions to clouds'. Nor does a literal criterion immediately suggest itself for the pieces of computer code called *viruses*, the markings on a page called *tangled* or *loopy*, the glances called *piercing*, or the topographical features called *basins*, *funnels*, and *brows*.

The topic being ontology, though, let's try to illustrate with an *existential* metaphor: a metaphor making play with a special sort of object to which the speaker is not committed (not by the metaphorical utterance, anyway) and to which she adverts only for the light it sheds on other matters. An example much beloved of philosophers is *the average so-and-so*.[52] When someone says that

(*S*) The average star has 2.4 planets,

she is not quite serious; she is pretending to describe an (extraordinary) entity called 'the average star' as a way of really talking about what the (ordinary) stars are like on average. Of course, this *particular* metaphor can be paraphrased away, as follows:

(*T*) The number of planets divided by the number of stars is 2.4,

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52. I am indebted to Melia 1995. Following the example of Quine, I will be using 'metaphor' in a very broad sense; the term will cover anything exploiting the same basic semantic mechanisms as standard 'Juliet is the sun'-type metaphors, no matter how banal and unpoetic.

But the numbers in *T* are from an intuitive perspective just as remote from the cosmologist's intended subject matter as the average star in *S*. And this ought to make us, or the more nominalistic among us, suspicious. Wasn't it Quine who stressed the possibility of unacknowledged myth-making in even the most familiar constructions? The nominalist therefore proposes that *T* is metaphorical too; it provides us with access to a content more literally expressed by

(*U*) There are 12 planets and 5 stars or 24 planets
and 10 stars or...[53]

And now here is the rub. The rules of English do not allow infinitely long sentences; so the most literal route of access *in English* to the desired content is *T*, and *T* according to the nominalist is a metaphor. It is only by making *as if* to countenance numbers that one can give expression in English to a fact having nothing to do with numbers, a fact about stars and planets and how they are numerically proportioned.[54]

Presentationally Essential Metaphors

Whether you buy the example or not, it gives a good indication of what it would be like for a metaphor to be 'representationally essential', that is, unparaphrasable at the level of content; we begin to see how the description a speaker wants to offer of his *intended* objects might be inexpressible until *unintended* objects are dragged in as representational aids.

Hooking us up to the right propositional contents, however, is only one of the services that metaphor has to offer. There is also

53. Why not a primitive '2.4-times-as-many' predicate? Because 2.4 is not the only ratio in which quantities can stand; 'we will never find the time to learn all the infinitely many [*q*-times-as-many] predicates', with *q* a schematic letter taking rational substituends, much less the *r*-times-as-long predicates, with *r* ranging schematically over the reals (Melia 1995, 228). A fundamental attraction of existential metaphor is its promise of ontology-free semantic productivity. How real the promise is—how much metaphor can do to get us off the ontology/ideology treadmill—strikes me as wide open and very much in need of discussion.

54. Compare Quine on states of affairs: 'the particular range of possible physiological states, each of which would count as a case of [the cat] wanting to get on that particular roof, is a gerry-mandered range of states that could surely not be encapsulated in any manageable anatomical description even if we knew all about cats.... Relations to states of affairs,... such as wanting and fearing, afford some very special and seemingly indispensable ways of grouping events in the natural world' (Quine 1966b, 147). Quine sees here an argument for counting states of affairs (construed as sets of worlds!) into his ontology. But the passage reads better as an argument that the *metaphor* of states of affairs allows us access to theoretically important contents unapproachable in any other way.

the fact that a metaphor (with any degree of life at all) 'makes us see one thing as another'[55]; it 'organizes our view'[56] of its subject matter; it lends a special 'perspective' and makes for 'framing-effects'.[57] Dick Moran has a nice example:

> To call someone a tail-wagging lapdog of privilege is not simply to make an assertion of his enthusiastic submissiveness. Even a pat metaphor deserves better than this, and [the] analysis is not essentially improved by tacking on a... list of further dog-predicates that may possibly be part of the metaphor's meaning...the comprehension of the metaphor involves *seeing* this person as a lapdog, and...experiencing his dogginess.[58]

The point is not essentially about seeing-as, though, and it is not only conventionally 'picturesque' metaphors that pack a cognitive punch no literal paraphrase can match. This is clear already from scientific metaphors like *feedback loop*, *underground economy*, and *unit of selection*, but let me illustrate with a continuation of the example started above.

Suppose that I am wrong and 'the average star has 2.4 planets' is representationally accidental; the infinite disjunction 'there are five stars and twelve planets etc.' turns out to be perfect English. The formulation in terms of the average star is still on the whole hugely to be preferred—for its easier visualizability, yes, but also its greater suggestiveness ('that makes me wonder how many moons the average planet has'), the way it lends itself to comparison with other data ('the average planet has nine times as many moons as the average star has planets'), and so on.[59]

Along with its representational content, then, we need to consider a metaphor's *presentational force*. Just as it can make all the difference in the world whether I grasp a proposition under the heading '*my* pants are on fire', grasping it as the retroimage of 'Crotone is in the arch of the boot' or 'the average star has 2.4 planets' can be psychologically important too. To think of Crotone's location as the place it would *need* to be to put it in the

55. Davidson 1978.

56. Max Black in Ortony 1993.

57. Moran 1989, 108.

58. Moran 1989, 90.

59. Similarly with Quine's cat example: the gerrymandered anatomical description *even if available* could never do the cognitive work of 'What Tabby wants is that she gets onto the roof'.

arch of Italy imagined as a boot, or of the stars and planets as proportioned the way they would need to be for the average star to come out with 2.4 planets, is to be affected in ways going well beyond the proposition expressed. That some of these ways are cognitively advantageous gives us a second reason for accessing contents metaphorically.

Procedurally Essential Metaphors

A metaphor with only its propositional content to recommend it probably deserves to be considered *dead*; thus 'my watch has a broken hand' and 'planning ahead saves time' and perhaps even 'the number of Democrats is decreasing'. A metaphor (like the Crotone example) valued in addition for its presentational force is *alive*, in one sense of the term, but it is not yet, I think, all that a metaphor can be. This is because we are still thinking of the speaker as someone with a definite *message* to get across. And the insistence on a message settled in advance is apt to seem heavy-handed. 'The central error about metaphor', says Davidson, is to suppose that

> associated with [each] metaphor is a cognitive content that its author wishes to convey and that the interpreter must grasp if he is to get the message. This theory is false… It should make us suspect the theory that it is so hard to decide, even in the case of the simplest metaphors, exactly what the content is supposed to be.[60]

Whether or not all metaphors are like this, one can certainly agree that a lot are: perhaps because, as Davidson says, their 'interpretation reflects as much on the interpreter as on the originator';[61] perhaps because their interpretation reflects ongoing real-world developments that neither party feels in a position to prejudge. A slight elaboration of the make-believe story brings this third grade of metaphorical involvement under the same conceptual umbrella as the other two:

> Someone who utters *S* in a metaphorical vein is recommending the project of (i) looking for games in which *S* is a promising move, and (ii) accepting the propositions that are *S*'s inverse images in those games under the modes of presentation that they provide.

60. Sacks 1978, 44.
61. Sacks 1978, 29. I hasten to add that Davidson would have no use for even the unsettled sort of metaphorical content about to be proposed.

The overriding principle here is *make the most of it*;[62] construe a metaphorical utterance in terms of the game or games that retromap it onto the most plausible and instructive contents in the most satisfying ways.

Now, should it happen that the speaker has definite ideas about the best game to be playing with *S*, I myself see no objection to saying that she intended to convey a certain metaphorical message —the first grade of metaphorical involvement—perhaps under a certain metaphorical mode of presentation—the second grade.[63] The reason for the third grade of metaphorical involvement is that one can imagine various *other* cases, in which the speaker's sense of the potential metaphorical *truthfulness* of a form of words outruns her sense of the particular truth(s) being expressed. These include the case of the *pregnant* metaphor, which yields up indefinite numbers of contents on continued interrogation;[64] the *prophetic* metaphor, which expresses a single content whose identity, however, takes time to emerge;[65] and, importantly for us, the *patient* metaphor, which hovers unperturbed above competing interpretations, as though waiting to be told where its advantage really lies.[66]

Three grades of metaphorical involvement, then, each with its own distinctive rationale.[67] The Quinean is in effect betting that these rationales are short-term only—that in time we are going to

62. David Hills's phrase, and idea.

63. This of course marks a difference with Davidson.

64. Thus, each in its own way, 'Juliet is the sun', 'Eternity is a spider in a Russian bathhouse', and 'The state is an organism'.

65. Examples: An apparition assures Macbeth that 'none of woman born' shall harm him; the phrase's meaning hangs in the air until Macduff, explaining that he was 'from his mother's womb untimely ripped', plunges in the knife. Martin Luther King Jr. told his followers that 'The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice'; recent work by Josh Cohen shows that a satisfyingly specific content can be attached to these words. A growing technical literature on verisimilitude testifies to the belief that 'close to the truth' admits of a best interpretation.

66. 'Patience is the key to content' (Mohammed).

67. I don't say this list is exhaustive; consider a fourth grade of metaphorical involvement. Sometimes the point is not to advance a game-induced content but to map out the contours of the inducing game, e.g., to launch a game, or consolidate it, or make explicit some consequence of its rules, or extend the game by adjoining new rules. Thus the italicized portions of the following: 'you said he was a Martian, right? well, *Mars is the angry planet*'; '*the average star has a particular size*—it is so many miles in diameter—*but it is not in any particular place*'; 'that's close to right, but *close only counts in horseshoes*'; '*life is a bowl of cherries*, sweet at first but then the pits'. A fair portion of pure mathematics, it seems to me, consists of just such gameskeeping.

outgrow the theoretical needs to which they speak. I suppose this means that every theoretically important content will find literal expression; every cognitively advantageous mode of presentation will confer its advantages and then slink off; every metaphorical 'pointer' will be replaced by a literal statement of what it was pointing at. If he has an argument for this, though, Quine doesn't tell us what it is. I therefore want to explore the consequences of allowing that like the poor, metaphor will be with us always.

XIII

Can the program be rijiggered? An obvious and immediate consequence is that the traditional ontological program of believing in the entities to which our best theory is committed stands in need of revision. The reason, again, is that our best theory may well include metaphorical sentences (whose literal contents are) not meant to be believed. Why should we be moved by the fact that *S* as literally understood cannot be true without *X*s, if the truth of *S* so understood is not something we have an opinion about?

I take it that any workable response to this difficulty is going to need a way of *sequestering* the metaphors as a preparation for some sort of special treatment. Of course, we have no idea as yet what the special treatment would be; some metaphors are representationally essential and so not paraphrasable away. But never mind that for now. Our problem is much more basic.

If metaphors are to be given special treatment, there had better be a way of telling *which statements the metaphors are*. What is it? Quine doesn't tell us, and it may be doubted whether a criterion is possible. For his program to stand a chance, something must be done to fend off the widespread impression that the boundaries of the literal are so unclear that there is no telling, in cases of interest, whether our assertions are to be taken ontologically seriously.

This is not really the place (and I am not the person) to try to bolster the sceptical impression. But if we did want to bolster it, we could do worse than to take our cue from Quine's attack on the analytic/synthetic distinction in 'Two Dogmas'.

One of his criticisms is phenomenological. Quine says he cannot tell whether 'Everything green is extended' is analytic, and he feels this reflects not an incomplete grasp of 'green' or 'extended' but

the obscurity of 'analytic'. Suppose we were to ask ourselves in a similar vein whether 'extended' is metaphorical in 'after an extended delay, the game resumed'. Is 'calm' literal in connection with people and metaphorical as applied to bodies of water, or the other way around—or literal in connection with these and metaphorical when applied to historical eras? What about the 'backs' and 'fronts' of animals, houses, pieces of paper, and parades? Questions like these seem unanswerable, and not because one doesn't understand 'calm' and 'front'.

A second criticism Quine makes is that analyticity has never been explained in a way that enables us to decide difficult cases; we lack even a rough criterion of analyticity. All that has been written on the demarcation problem for metaphor notwithstanding, the situation there is no better and almost certainly worse.

A lot of the criteria in circulation are either extensionally incorrect or circular: often both at the same time, like the idea that metaphors (taken at face value) are outrageously false.[68] The criteria that remain tend to reinforce the impression of large-scale indeterminacy. Consider the 'silly question' test; because they share with other forms of make believe the feature of settling only so much, metaphors invite outrageously inappropriate questions along the lines of 'where exactly is the hatchet buried?' and 'do you plan to *drop*-forge the uncreated conscience of your race in the smithy of your soul, or use some alternative method?' But is it silly, or just mind-bogglingly *naive*, to wonder where *the number of planets* might be found, or how much *the way we do things around here* weighs or how it is coloured? It seems to me that it is silly if these phrases are metaphorical, naive if they are literal; and so we are no further ahead.

The heart of Quine's critique is his vision of what it is to put a sentence forward as (literally) true. As against the reductionist's claim that the content of a statement is renderable directly in terms of experience, Quine holds that connections with experience are mediated by surrounding theory. This liberalized vision is supposed to cure us of the *expectation* of a sharp divide between the analytic statements, which no experience can threaten, and the

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68. 'Taken at face value' means 'taken literally'; and plenty of metaphors are literally true, e.g, 'no man is an island'. A general discussion of 'tests for figuration' can be found in Sadock's 'Figurative Speech and Linguistics' (Ortony 1993).

synthetic ones, which are empirically refutable as a matter of meaning.

As it happens, though, we have advanced a similarly liberalized vision of what it is to put a sentence forward as metaphorically true. By the time the third level of metaphorical involvement is reached, the speaker may or may not be saying anything cashable at the level of worlds. This is because a statement's truth-conditions have come to depend on posterity's judgment as to what game(s) it is best seen as a move in.[69] And it cannot be assumed that this judgment will be absolute and unequivocal: or even that the judgment will be made, or that anyone expects it to be made, or cares about the fact that matters are left forever hanging.

Strange as it may seem, it is this third grade of metaphorical involvement, supposedly at the furthest remove from the literal, that most fundamentally prevents a sharp delineation of the literal.[70] The reason is that *one* of the contents that my utterance may be up for, when I launch *S* into the world in the make-the-most-of-it spirit described above, is its *literal* content. I want to be understood as meaning what I literally *say* if my statement is literally true—count me a player of the 'null game', if you like—and meaning whatever my statement projects onto via the right sort of 'non-null' game if my statement is literally false. It is thus indeterminate from my point of view whether I am advancing *S*'s literal content or not.[71]

Isn't this in fact our common condition? When speakers declare that there are three ways something can be done, that the number of *A*s = the number of *B*s, that they have tingles in their legs, that the Earth is widest at the equator, or that Nixon had a stunted superego, they are more sure that *S* is getting at *something* right

69. There are limits, of course; I should say, posterity's *defensible* judgment.

70. It prevents a sharp delineation, not of the literal *utterances*, but of the utterances in which speakers are committing themselves to the literal *contents* of the sentences coming out of their mouths. This indeterminacy would remain if, as seems unlikely, a sharp distinction between literal and metaphorical utterances could be drawn.

71. Indeterminacy is also possible about whether I am advancing a content at all, as opposed to (see note 67 on the fourth grade of metaphorical involvement) articulating the rules of some game relative to which contents are figured, i.e., doing some gameskeeping. An example suggested by David Hills is 'there are continuum many spatiotemporal positions', uttered by one undecided as between the substantival and relational theories of spacetime. One might speak here of a fifth grade of metaphorical involvement, which—much as the third grade leaves it open *what* content is being expressed—takes no definite stand on whether the utterance *has* a content.

than that the thing it is getting at is the proposition that *S,* as some literalist might construe it. If numbers exist, then yes, we are content to regard ourselves as having spoken literally. If not, then the claim was that the *A*s and *B*s are equinumerous.[72]

Still, why should it be a bar to ontology that it is indeterminate from my point of view whether I am advancing *S*'s literal content? One can imagine Quine saying: I always told you that ontology was a long-run affair. See how it turns out; if and when the literal interpretation prevails, that will be the moment to count yourself committed to the objects your sentence quantifies over.

Now though we have come full circle—because how the literality issue turns out depends on how the ontological issue turns out. Remember, we are content to regard our numerical quantifiers as literal precisely if, so understood, our numerical statements are true; that is, precisely if there *really are* numbers. Our problem was how to take the latter issue seriously, and it now appears that Quine is giving us no help with this at all. His advice is to countenance numbers iff the *literal* part of our theory quantifies over them; and to count the part of our theory that quantifies over numbers literal iff there turn out to really be numbers.[73]

XIV

The trouble with 'really'. The goal of philosophical ontology is to determine what really exists. Leave out the 'really' and there's no philosophy; the ordinary judgment that there exists a city called Chicago stands unopposed. But 'really' is a device for shrugging off pretences, and assessing the remainder of the sentence from a

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72. 'When it was reported that Hemingway's plane had been sighted, wrecked, in Africa, the New York *Mirror* ran a headline saying, "Hemingway Lost in Africa", the word 'lost' being used to suggest he was dead. When it turned out he was alive, the *Mirror* left the headline to be taken literally' (Davidson 1978, 40). I suspect that something like this happens more often than we suppose, with the difference that there is no conscious equivocation and that it is the metaphorical content that we fall back on.

73. If literal/metaphorical is as murky as all that, how can it serve Carnapian goals to equate external with literal and internal with metaphorical? Two goals need to be distinguished: Carnap's 'official' goal of making quantification over abstract entities nominalistically acceptable in principle; and his more quizzicalistic goal of construing *actual* such quantification in such a way that nominalistic doubts come to appear ingenuous if not downright silly. The one is served by arranging for the quantification to be clearly, convincingly, and invincibly metaphorical; I have said nothing to suggest that a determined metaphor-maker is dragged against her will into the region of indeterminacy. The other is served by construing our actual quantificational practice as metaphorical-iff-necessary, that is, literal-iff-literally-true.

perspective uncontaminated by art. ('That guy's not *really* Nixon, just in the opera'.) And what am I supposed to do with the request to shrug off an attitude that, as far as I can tell, I never held in the first place?

One problem is that I'm not sure what it would *be* to take 'there is a city of Chicago' more literally than I already do.[74] But suppose that this is somehow overcome; I teach myself to focus with laserlike intensity on the truth value of 'there is a city of Chicago, *literally speaking*'. Now my complaint is different: Where are the methods of inquiry supposed to be found that test for the truth of existence-claims thus elaborated? All of our ordinary methods were designed with the unelaborated originals in mind. They can be expected to receive the 'literally speaking' not as a welcome clarification but an obscure and unnecessary twist.

Quine's idea was that our ordinary methods could be 'jumped up' into a test of literal truth by applying them in a sufficiently principled and long-term way. I take it as a given that this is the one idea with any hope of attaching believable truth values to philosophical existence-claims. Sad to say, the more controversial of these claims are equipoised between literal and metaphorical in a way that Quine's method is powerless to address.[75] It is not out of any dislike for the method—on the contrary, it is because I revere it as ontology's last, best hope—that I conclude that the

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74. Or to commit myself to taking it more literally than I already may. I have a slightly better idea of what it would be to commit myself to the literal content of 'the number of *A*s = the number of *B*s'. This is why I lay more weight on a second problem; see immediately below.

75. Which existence-claims am I talking about here? One finds more of an equipoise in some cases than others. These are the cases where the automatic presumption in favour of a literal interpretation is offset by one or more of the following hints of possible metaphoricality. *Insubstantiality*: The objects in question have no more to their natures than is entailed by our conception of them, e.g., there is not much more to the numbers than what follows from the 2nd-order Peano Axioms. *Indeterminacy*: It is indeterminate which of them are identical to which, e.g., which sets the real numbers are. *Silliness*: They give rise to 'silly questions' probing areas the make-believe does not address. *Unaboutness*: They turn up in the truth-conditions of sentences that do not intuitively concern them, e.g., 'this argument is valid' is not intuitively about models. *Paraphrasability*: They are oftentimes paraphrasable away with no felt loss of subject matter; 'there are more Fs than Gs' captures all we meant by 'the number of Fs exceeds the number of Gs'. *Expressiveness*: They boost the language's power to express facts about less controversial entities, as in the average star example. *Irrelevance*: They are called on to 'explain' phenomena that would not on reflection suffer by their absence; if all the one–one functions were killed off today, there would still be as many left shoes in my closet as right. *Disconnectedness*: Their lack of naturalistic connections threatens to prevent reference relations and epistemic access. I take it that mathematical objects exhibit these features to a higher degree than, say, God, or theoretical entities in physics.

existence-questions of most interest to philosophers are moot. If they had answers, (Q) would turn them up; it doesn't, so they don't.[76]

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