Recent Work on Ontological Pluralism

Jason Turner

November 15, 2018

Ontological Pluralism is said in many ways, at least if two counts as 'many'. On one disambiguation, to be an 'ontological pluralist' is to be accommodating about theories with different ontologies. This is the pluralism of Carnap (1950) and Putnam (1987) who grant that there are competing ontological visions of reality but deny that any has an objectively better claim to correctness. We are free to accept an ontology of numbers or not, and there's no good philosophical debate to be had about whether there really are any numbers. This is the pluralism of the pluralistic society, where opposing ontological visions need to learn to just get along.

We will discuss the other disambiguation of 'Ontological Pluralism' here. According to it, there are different *ways of being*. In *The Problems of Philosophy*, for instance, Betrand Russell (1912: 90, 98) tells us that, while there are relations as well as people, relations exist in a deeply different *way* than people do.[1] The way in which the world grants being to relations is radically different, on this picture, then the way in which it grants it to people.

Despite its pedigree, during the 20th century analytic philosophers grew suspicious of the notion. Presumably, when the logical positivists tried to kill metaphysics, the idea things could exist in different ways was supposed to die with it. Quine's resurrection of metaphysics linked ontology with quantifiers, making it hard to see what 'things exist in different ways' could mean. Zoltán Szabó puts it this way:

> The standard view nowadays is that we can adequately capture the meaning of sentences like 'There are *F*s', 'Some things are *F*', or '*F*'s exist' through existential quantification. As a result, not much credence is given to the idea that we must distinguish between different kinds or degrees of existence. (2003: 13)

And this, I think it is fair to say, was the dominant view for quite some time.

But why think there is just one existential quantifier? If, as Russell tells us, the abstract exists in a different way then the concrete, perhaps this is because there are two different existential quantifiers — '$\exists_a$' and '$\exists_c$' — one of which ranges over *abstracta* and the other which ranges over *concreta*. Then we could make sense of multiple ways of existing while respecting the Quinean identification of existence with existential quantification. This idea — that there are multiple existential quantifiers we should use for metaphysics — fuels the contemporary revival of ontological pluralism.

This contemporary revival been carried out largely by Kris McDaniel (2009, 2010, 2017), who both puts the view in historical context and explores several of

---

[1]See also Moore 1903/1953: 110–113.

its potential applications. And there have, of course, been objections. A number of those objections have been addressed in McDaniel's work and my (2010), and I'm not going to rehash them all here.[2] Rather, I'll be looking at — and, to some extent, responding to — some more recent arguments against the view. Before doing that, though, we'll want to get a bit clearer about just what ontological pluralism is.

1   ELITE QUANTIFIERS

Contemporary thinking about ontological pluralism links it with *quantificational pluralism*, which says that are multiple existential quantifiers. Left unadorned, though, quantificational pluralism is cheap. Start with any existential quantifier '$\exists$'. We can define a 'smaller' quantifier — that is, an expression that acts like a quantifier over a smaller domain — by restriction. We pick an expression ψ and define $\ulcorner\exists_{\text{small}}x\phi(x)\urcorner$ by $\ulcorner\exists x(\psi(x) \wedge \phi(x))$. And we can also define a 'bigger' quantifier — that is, an expression that acts like a quantifier over a larger domain. Suppose that P is a proposition that completely describes a possible world just like the actual one except for the addition of a single unicorn. Then $\ulcorner\exists_{\text{big}}x\phi(x)\urcorner$ means $\ulcorner$if P had been true, $\exists x\phi(x)\urcorner$.[3] So there are surely multiple quantifiers. Quantificational pluralism comes easy.

Intuitively, '$\exists_{\text{small}}$' seems to have little to do with whether there are non-ψs, and '$\exists_{\text{big}}$' has little to do with whether there are unicorns. Quantifiers like these are mere linguistic artifacts. We should ignore them when doing ontology. Only certain quantifiers — following Ben Caplan (2011) we'll call them *elite* quantifiers — matter for metaphysics. '$\exists_{\text{small}}$' and '$\exists_{\text{big}}$' aren't elite quantifiers, and so don't tell us a straight metaphysical story about what there is.

Metaphysics should only care about what elite quantifiers range over. We can use this to answer the initial complaint against ontological pluralism. Pluralism isn't just the (unremarkable) claim that there are multiple existential quantifiers. It is the (surprising) claim that there are multiple *elite* existential quantifiers.

What makes a quantifier elite? That's a hard question. It's complicated by the fact that eliteness may come in degrees: Some non-elite quantifiers may be *more* elite than others. But it is a question that everyone faces, whether pluralists or not. We all need to explain why '$\exists_{\text{small}}$' and '$\exists_{\text{big}}$' just aren't important for metaphysics.

Some accounts of eliteness may render pluralism incoherent. But at least one popular account does not. Ted Sider (2001, 2009, 2011) has argued that we should extend the Lewisian (1983) notion of *naturalness* — of 'carving nature at the joints' — to expressions of any syntactic category. Some quantifier expressions 'carve nature at the joints' better than others, and the more joint-carving

---

[2]Spencer 2012 contains a nice introduction and overview of some of these arguments.

[3]Compare Sider 2009: 391–392, Dorr 2005: 256–257, and Turner 2010: 15–16 for similar tricks.

they are, the more elite they are. Nothing this account of eliteness rules out multiple existential quantifiers having it, and in fact contemporary proponents of pluralism have gravitated towards such an account.[4,5]

2 CAN PLURALISM BE DEFINED?

Contenporary ontological pluralists want to defend the idea that, for instance, the abstract and the concrete could exist in different ways. And they do it by saying that the abstract and the concrete could be ranged over by different elite existential quantifiers, say '$\exists_a$' and '$\exists_c$'. This suggests that we could *define* pluralism in terms of elite quantification. As a first pass, we might try:

Ontological Pluralism (first pass): There are multiple ways of being iff there are multiple elite existential quantifiers.

But this definition generates false positives. Consider George, an ontological monist. He is convinced that there are irreducibly *plural* quantifiers. Unlike the singular existential quantifier of first-order logic, which ranges over its domain one thing at a time, the plural quantifier ranges over its domain in groups. We use these plural quantifiers in claims such as 'Some tanks surrounded the fort'. These quantifiers can't be reduced to first-order existential quantifiers.[6] So George thinks there are *two* elite existential quantifiers: a singular one and a plural one.

But George, it seems, is no pluralist. He doesn't come to believe that there is a different, plural *way of being* when he comes to accept an irreducibly plural quantifier. He comes to believe rather that there is a different, plural *way to quantify* over some things the being of which he had already accepted.

To sort this out, let's back up and ask: Why did our first-pass definition put things in terms of elite *existential* quantifiers rather than elite quantifiers *generally*?

Here's one reason: Someone might think that an existential quantifier '$\exists$' is

---

[4]See e.g. McDaniel 2017: 35–37 and Turner 2010: 8–9. This is not to say that friends of such accounts cannot argue against ontological pluralism on other grounds, perhaps by arguing that pluralistic theories should be rejected for broadly theoretical reasons. (Although he doesn't explicitly make such an argument, this seems to be the subtext of Sider 2011: 206–208.) But the naturalness account at least renders pluralism *intelligible*.

[5]Theorists who prefer the grounding-theoretic framework (e.g. Schaffer 2009, Rosen 2010) could instead perhaps define eliteness along these lines: a quantifier '$\exists^*$' is elite iff, for every formula ϕ, if a truth of the form $\ulcorner \exists^* x \phi \urcorner$ is grounded in any truth of the form ψ, then ψ is itself of the form $\ulcorner \exists^* x \theta \urcorner$ for some θ. More prosaically: '$\exists^*$' is elite iff it's never grounded in anything else.

[6]Boolos 1984. McDaniel (2017: 39–40) seems surprisingly sympathetic to the view that, if both singular and plural existential quantifiers are elite, they correspond to different ways of being. I think this is too quick, as I hope this section will show.

just as elite as its universal dual '∀'.[7] Such a theorist doesn't think that there are two ways of being, though. They simply think that there are two ways of quantifying over some things with the *same* mode of being. So as to not classify them as pluralists, we restricted ourselves to existential quantifiers.

A quantifier '∃' and its dual '∀' are part of a *family* of quantifiers. It's baked into their semantics that they quantify over the same things. They just do it in different ways: one at a time or all at a time. The family may have more members as well. It may have plural quantifiers, or generalized quantifiers such as 'most' or 'uncountably many,'. These quantifiers are all part of the family because it's baked into their semantics that they range over the same domain.

We focused on existential quantifiers because they belonged to the same family as universal ones, and we wanted a way to pick one representative from the family. But there may be more than one existential quantifier in a given family. This suggests we should have started with a more general proposal. Call a family of quantifiers elite when at least one of its members is elite. Then we can try:

Ontological Pluralism (second pass): There are multiple ways of being iff there are multiple elite quantificational families.

This revised definition no longer misclassifies George.

In principle, different ways of being can overlap (depending on just what those ways of being are). So it could happen that there are two ways of being, and so two elite existential quantifiers, '$\exists_1$' and '$\exists_2$', that range over precisely the same domain. We might worry that '$\exists_1$' and '$\exists_2$' would be equivalent and our second-pass definition mis-classify this as a monistic view. But notice that, even if this happens, it is no part of the *semantics* of these two quantifiers that they range over the same domain — just as it's not part of *semantics*, but rather part of *geometry*, that 'three-sided planar figure' and 'three-angled planar figure' are necessarily equivalent. '$\exists_1$' and '$\exists_2$' can count as part of different families even if they range over the same domains so long as it's not baked into their meanings that they share a domain.

Arturo Javier-Castellanos (forthcoming) and Ross Cameron (2018) both raise a worry which appies to the second-pass definition just as much as it does to the first. Eli Hirsch (2002*a,b*) thinks that many ontological disputes aren't 'deep', because we could speak so as to make one party right or speak so as to make the other party right, and neither way of speaking is more metaphysically privileged than the other. For instance, when some particles are arranged in a tablewise fashion, we could use a 'compositionalist' quantifier '$\exists_{comp}$' to truly say '$\exists_{comp}x(x$ is a table)', or we could use a 'mereological nihilist' quantifier '$\exists_{nihl}$' to truly say 'it's not the case that $\exists_{nihl}x(x$ is a table)'. According to Hirsch, neither way of speaking has metaphysical primacy; the dispute is instead verbal.

---

[7]This follows from Sider's (2011: 217–222) views on the eliteness of logical expressions, for example.

If Hirsch is right and neither way of speaking is metaphysically privileged, '$\exists_{\text{comp}}$' and '$\exists_{\text{nihl}}$' ought to be equally elite. Since they don't range over the same domains, they must be in different, equally elite families. In that case, Hirsch would count, on the second-pass definition, as believing in different ways of being.

McDaniel (2017: 37–38) expresses some sympathy with the thought that Hirsch should be categorized as an ontological pluralist. But this seems wrong. Pluralism seems ontologically inflationary, whereas Hirsch wants to deflate.[8] Hirsch wants his multiple quantifiers to represent *alternative* ways of describing reality; saying '$\exists_{\text{nihil}} xs(xs$ are particles arranged tablewise)' is supposed to be an alternative, equally metaphysically good way of saying '$\exists_{\text{comp}} x(x$ is a table)'. If we describe reality just using '$\exists_{\text{nihil}}$', we haven't left anything out. But onto-logical pluralism shouldn't be like this. If we describe the world just using a quantifier for *concreta*, we leave out the *abstracta*. If there are multiple ways of being, then we must talk about all of them to say all that deserves saying.

This suggests a third attempt:

Ontological Pluralism (third pass): There are multiple ways of being iff there are some (multiple) quantificational families, and if any language that uses only quantifiers from some of these families is expressively impoverished compared to some language that uses all of them.

Javier-Castellanos (forthcoming: §IV) considers a suggestion like this and raises a concern about it, related to the first worry about the second-pass objection. Here is a modified form of his concern. Suppose Zed believes that there are two modes of being, but that those modes overlap completely, so that everything has both modes. Zed will only count as a pluralist if he thinks that each of the quantifiers corresponding to those modes of being are expressively ineliminable. Javier-Castellanos expresses a concern that this might be asking too much of Zed.

But I don't see why. When Zed says '$\exists_2 y(y = a)$', he either says something more than when he says '$\exists_1 y(y = a)$' or he doesn't. If he doesn't, then it is very hard to see in what sense he thinks there are two modes of being. But if he does, then '$\exists_2$' is expressively eliminable: There is something Zed can say with it that he can't say without it. This strikes me as the right result.

Even with these refinements, the definition faces some hard cases. One comes from higher-order quantification — quantification into positions other than name positions. Some have argued (e.g. Prior 1971: 35, Rayo and Yablo 2001, Williamson 2003: 458–460) that higher-order quantification isn't in the business of ranging over things. The variables don't *have* values, so there's no question about what kind of being their values have. But higher-order quantifiers may be elite and expressively indispensable. It doesn't seem that someone like Williamson, who eschews multiple first-order quantifiers, should be

---

[8]McDaniel recognizes this and suggests it's what fools us into thinking Hirsch isn't a plural-ist. I think he's right, except about the 'fools' bit.

thought of as an ontological pluralist. (Cf. Turner 2010: 12–13, McDaniel 2017: 40–41)

Cameron (2018: 8–9) raises as a second hard case. Some philosophers think that the world is filled with some undifferentiated *stufff*, which is then further divided into the countable *things* that it makes up. Defenders of such a view may, as Ned Markosian (2015) suggests, think that we need one kind of quantifier to range over the stuff and another to range over the things. And since stuff and things are equally metaphysically important, both quantifiers (and hence, their families) will need to be elite.

Both cases raise several tricky issues. For what it's worth, it isn't *obvious* to me that friends of higher-order quantification or stuffy quantifiers aren't thereby dabbling in ontological pluralism. It seems strange to say that they are; but it also seems a bit strange to say that they aren't. But this may be a problem in its own right. When we have murky judgments about some definiendum, a good analysis should give us an equally murky definiens. If our third-pass definition gives clear judgments on unclear cases, that may be reason to suspect it right there.

So far I've raised concerns about the right-to-left direction of the proposed definitions. We can raise concerns about the left-to-right direction, too. A metaphysician who thought that Wittgeinstein basically had it right in the *Tractatus* and that ontology should be done in terms of names rather than quantifiers might still think that there are multiple modes of being. Perhaps she will mark this by using a different color or font for names, or something, to mark the 'way of being' under which their referents are being referred to. (Cf. Turner 2010: 10) I don't know that this would be a particularly *good* theory; but I do not see why it would not just as well count as a form of ontological pluraism.

But why, we may wonder, were we trying to *define* ontological pluralism in the first place? We struggle to give unobjectionable definitions of many philosophical views. There is little consensus about precisely how to define 'deontology', 'physicalism', or 'epistemic internalism,' for instance. Yet most of us still think that there are coherent deontological, physicalist, or internalist views worth engaging with. Some of us might even think that some of these views are right.

We appealed to elite quantifiers to answer a charge of incoherence. That charge stemmed from the idea that existence is tied to existential quantification and that only one existential quantifier matters to metaphysics. We defuse the objection by noting that metaphysics might care about more than one existential quantifier. That only requires that some views (a) be recognizably pluralistic and (b) involve multiple elite existential quantifiers. This doesn't mean that every view which is (a) must also be (b), or vice versa. It is a difficult and interesting question as to whether we can give necessary and sufficient conditions for a view to be pluralistic, but the coherence of pluralism itself doesn't hinge on our ability to do this. (Cf. McDaniel 2017: 46)

6

3 Pluralism and Generic Quantification

A 'generic' quantifier is a quantifier that ranges over things with any kind of being whatsoever. The pluralist ought to admit that we use such quantifiers, both at home and at work, for the pluralist herself says that some things have different kinds of being. If that is to be both true and non-trivial the 'some' in 'some things' must range over things with different kinds of being.

Trenton Merricks has recently (forthcoming) argued that this causes problems for pluralism. Consider Annie, an ontological pluralist who thinks that there are two ways of being, represented by '$\exists_1$' and '$\exists_2$' and their duals '$\forall_1$' and '$\forall_2$'. Annie admits that there is a generic quantifier '$\exists$' and its dual, '$\forall$'. She can also *define* a pair of quantifiers which, by her lights, are satisfactory proxies for the generic quantifiers. She does it by:

(Df. $\exists^*$) $\ulcorner \exists^* x \phi(x) \urcorner := \ulcorner \exists_1 x \phi(x) \vee \exists_2 x \phi(x) \urcorner$.

(Df. $\forall^*$) $\ulcorner \forall^* x \phi(x) \urcorner := \ulcorner \forall_1 x \phi(x) \wedge \forall_2 x \phi(x) \urcorner$.

Now, asks Merricks, what does Annie think about the relationship between the generic quantifiers and the defined $*$-quantifiers? Is, as he puts it, '$\forall$' just a *shorthand* for '$\forall^*$'? In other words, when Annie says 'everything is F', is that supposed to be mere shorthand for 'everything$_1$ is F and everything$_2$ is F'? Or not? Merricks argues, in essence, that problems loom either way:

> *The 'Shorthand' Argument*
>
> (1) If '$\forall$' is just shorthand for '$\forall^*$', then Annie has no way to express her disagreement with a pluralist who thinks that there are three ways of being. (This is a problem.)
>
> (2) If '$\forall$' is not shorthand for '$\forall^*$', then Annie believes that there is a third way of being enjoyed both by the things that exist$_1$ and the things that exist$_2$.
>
> (3) If Annie believes that there is a third way of being enjoyed both by the things that exist$_1$ and the things that exist$_2$, then ontological pluralism is unmotivated. (This is a problem.)
>
> (4) So either way, Annie has a problem.

Since Annie is a stand-in for any pluralist, if the argument is sound, pluralists have a problem.

But is it sound? First, why think (1)? Merricks argues as follows. Suppose that Boris is an ontological pluralist who thinks that there are three ways of being. Annie needs some way to express her disagreement with Boris. Presumably she will express this disagreement with

(Two) Everything either exists$_1$ or exists$_2$,

which she expects Boris to deny. In symbols, (Two) reads:

(Two$'$) $\forall x(\exists_1 y(y = x) \vee \exists_2 y(y = x))$.

In (Two) and (Two$'$), 'everything' and '$\forall$' express the generic quantifier, which ranges over things no matter what kind of being they have.

But if '$\forall$' is just shorthand for '$\forall^*$', then (Two$'$) becomes

(Two*) $\forall_1 x(\exists_1 y(y = x) \vee \exists_2 y(y = x)) \wedge \forall_2 x(\exists_1 y(y = x) \vee \exists_2 y(y = x))$.

Unfortunately, (Two*) is trivially true. So Boris won't deny it. Thus, it can't capture his disagreement with Annie.

So much for (1). Now, why think (2)? Here, Merricks is less explicit, but as far as I understand it, the thought goes like this. If generic existence is more than just existence*, then it is a genuine something over-and-above the specific ways of being, and not to be understood in terms of them. And if it is not to be understood in terms of them, then (since no other options for understanding present themselves), we ought to take it to be an elite quantifier. Then generic existence is thus a third mode of being.

Third, why think (3)? Here Merricks takes us through a host of historical motivations for pluralism which all rely on a core thought: some things are so radically unlike each other that they must have different modes of being. The particulars of the motivations are different in each case, but they each echo Russell's insistence that one kind of thing is so different from another that "we cannot say that it exists *in the same way* in which" (1912: 90) the other does. If the two things share a third, generic mode of being, then we can indeed say this, and the motivation is scuppered.

I suspect it's possible to quibble with (3), but I won't do that here. Instead I'll focus on premises (1) and (2). These premises use the phrase 'is shorthand for,' and I am not entirely sure how I am supposed to understand it. As a result, I cannot tell which of (1) or (2) Annie should reject.

Suppose Annie says the following:

> By my lights, '$\forall$' (and '$\exists$') are *analyzed* as '$\forall^*$' (and '$\exists^*$'). My analysis isn't 'conceptual,' by which I mean that our cognitive architecture probably doesn't explicitly represent generic quantification as conjunctions or disjunctions of other kinds of quantification. Instead, my analysis is *metaphysical*. It says that *what it is* for something to generically exist is for it to either exist$_1$ or exist$_2$, regardless of how we represent it to ourselves. But while I think I am right, I also think my claim is substantive, and reasonable people can disagree with it.

Now that she has said all this, we can wonder: Does Annie think that '$\forall$' is *shorthand* for '$\forall^*$?'

It depends on whether we use 'shorthand' to include analysis or not. Suppose we do. In this case, Annie should think that premise (1) is false and that the argument for it is just Moore's paradox of analysis, badly disguised. Boris will of course accept the trivial (Two*). But he would only thereby accept (Two$'$) if he also accepted Annie's analysis, which he doesn't.

We should know by now that disagreement about an analysis needn't entail disagreement about any particular analysands. The deontologist happily admits that an action maximizes utility without thereby agreeing that the action is *right*. Likewise, Boris can happily agree to (Two*) without thereby having to agree to (Two′), so there's no reason (Two′) can't capture Alice's and Boris's disagreement. If one way of being shorthand for something is being an analysis of it, then, premise (1) is false.

But perhaps 'shorthand' is meant to *exclude* cases of analysis, applying only to cases of something like stipulative definition. In this case Annie ought to deny that '∀' is shorthand for '∀*' while continuing to insist that the former analyzes the latter. And then she should deny (2). For if '∀' is analyzed in terms of other quantifiers, it is not elite, and so no way of being.

Of course, '∀' will be a quantifier we can use to range over whatever exists$_1$ plus whatever exists$_2$. But Annie denies that this makes them share any sort of way of being — in the same way that '∃$_{big}$' 'ranging over' a unicorn fails to give unicorns any being at all. Annie grants that some linguistic expression covers both the existents$_1$ and the existents$_2$, but she denies that this implies the sort of similarity that Russell said those things couldn't have. According to Annie, saying that an existent$_1$ and an existent$_2$ both generically exist is a lot like saying that a green thing (observed before the set time) and a blue thing (observed after that time) are both grue. That's strictly speaking true, but we shouldn't get overly metaphysically excited about it. And this holds even if 'grue' is not *stipulatively* defined, but part of a community's native linguistic endowment, the way '∀' is part of our native endowment. As long as generic existence has an analysis, things that generically exist need not in any sense share a way of existing — just as things that are both grue need not in any sense share a color.

4   Notational Variance

Sometimes, a single theory can be presented in different guises. And sometimes we can mistakenly think that what is one theory is in fact two. So far, I have acted as though ontological pluralism is a different theory than ontological monism. But we might worry that it isn't.

Suppose that Cynthia considers herself an ontological pluralist, and thinks there are just two modes of being: the abstract one ('∃$_a$') and the concrete one ('∃$_c$'). Dan considers himself an ontological monist, replacing these two ways of being with the predicates 'is abstract' and 'is concrete'. Aside from this disagreement, Dan and Cynthia agree about everything else.

We can translate everything Cynthia says into something Dan will accept, and vice versa. We translate Cynthia's claims for Dan by turning her pluralist quantifiers into a generic quantifier restricted by 'is abstract' or 'is concrete,' as appropriate. And we translate Dan's claims for Cynthia by trading generic

quantification using the recipe in (Df. ∃*) and (Df. ∀*) above, and translating '*x* is abstract' and '*x* is concrete' as '$\exists_a y(y = x)$' and '$\exists_c y(y = x)$', respectively.

The existence of these translations might make us suspect that Cynthia's and Dan's theories are really the same one in disguise after all. I've argued elsewhere (2012), though, that this would be a mistake. The idea is that, if two theories are notational variants of each other, the translations between them ought to preserve logical truth. And this doesn't happen with the proposed translations. When Dan says

(1) Everything is either abstract or concrete,

that is not a logical truth; but it gets translated as

(2) $\forall_a x(\exists_a y(y = x) \lor \exists_c y(y = x)) \land \forall_c x(\exists_a y(y = x) \lor \exists_c y(y = x))$,

which is. The only wrinkle is that Dan might define 'is abstract' as 'is not concrete,' in which case (1) would be logically true after all. But in this case Dan must also think that

(3) Nothing is both abstract and concrete,

is logically true. Cynthia's translation of this won't be, though; it's no part of pluralism that the different ways of being won't overlap.

Bruno Whittle (forthcoming) has recently argued against this response. He suggests that we ought to treat 'is abstract' and 'is concrete' as logical expressions too. This, by itself, doesn't quite secure the desired result; we also have to say something about the 'logic' that they obey. In particular, we have to assume that the logic of 'is abstract' and 'is concrete' make (1) logically true. One we do that, the objection from logical equivalence is blocked.

Whittle is right. My argument relies on some assumptions about what counts as 'logical', and if those assumptions are rejected the argument won't go through. Furthermore, I don't really know quite how to *justify* those assumptions. Nonetheless, I'm still inclined to think that the observations about (1) and (2) are suggestive, and can help us resist the thought that pluralism must be a variant of monism.

First, the appeal to logic can be seen as an attempt to get at something deep about how we structure reality with different kinds of expressions. The argument can then be seen as suggesting that theories are different when they structure reality differently.

Intuitively, 'something has no way of being' is ruled out *by the very nature of quantification*. It doesn't matter whether the quantifiers are for *abstracta* and *concreta* or anything else instead. The quantifier 'flavors' aren't really relevant. By contrast, 'something is neither abstract nor concrete' isn't ruled out just by the nature of predication. It matters what the predicates mean, and that we think the two are exhaustive. Treating 'is abstract' and 'is concrete' as logical terms doesn't defuse the argument by itself; we also have to suppose that (1) is

logically true. Nothing about predication generally makes (1) logically true. It's rather something specific to abstractness and concreteness. On the other hand, the logical truth of (2) stems merely from general facts about quantification and identity. The fact that the quantifiers stand in for abstract and concrete ways of being is immaterial. This suggest that the theories aren't notational variants, because they represent reality's structure very differently — and that calling (1) a logical truth is merely *hiding* this fact.

Second, I worry that Whittle's response overgeneralizes. Consider a toy case. Ethel and Finnegan both think that space is infinite. They agree about almost everything, with one exception: Finnegan thinks, and Ethel denies, that one point of space is the objective 'center' of the universe.[9] Intuitively, Ethel and Finnegan have different theories. Finnegan believes that there is *more* structure in the world than Ethel does, because Finnegan believes it makes sense to ask which point is the objective center of the universe, and Ethel does not.

Now comes Gerald, who tries to argue that Ethel's and Finnegan's theories are notational variants of each other. Suppose that p is the point of space that Finnegan thinks is at the center. Finnegan thinks 'x is the objective center of the universe' is satisfied by p; Ethel claims this predicate makes no sense. Gerald points out that Finnegan's predicate could be translated into '$x = p$', which of course Ethel can make sense of. Ethel will think that everything Gerald says is true under this translation.

Does this make Ethel's and Finnegan's theories notational variants after all? To argue otherwise, we might point out that

(4) p is the objective center of the universe,

is not a logical truth according to Finnegan, but turns into one (namely, '$p = p$') under Gerald's proposed translation. This is one way to emphasize that Finnegan recognizes more theoretical possibilities than Ethel does, which is a good reason to think their views distinct. But Gerald may insist that 'is the objective center of the universe' must also be treated as logical, and in a way that renders (4) logically true, rendering the objection toothless.

This seems misguided to me. Ethel and Finnegan's theories really are different, and the difference in status between (4) and '$p = p$' seems diagnostic of this fact. I'm leery of any argumentative move that would suggest that it isn't.

Even if neither of the first two responses are persuasive, a third consideration might be. Cynthia and Dan *take themselves* to have different theories. Given this, why should any hostile third party get to insist that (1) be treated as a logical truth? It's Dan's theory, after all; he should be the one to decide what logic he accepts for his terms. If he doesn't want his theory to be a notational variant

---

[9]Finnegan's view is pretty silly, and I know of nobody who endorses it. But the disagreement between Ethel and Finnegan is structurally similar to real debates, such as the debate between those who accept Newtonian 'absolute velocities' and the Galileans who don't, or the Lorentzians who accept 'absolute simultaneity' and the special relativists who don't. I could make the same point with respect to either of these debates; it would just require more setup.

of Cynthia's, then he shouldn't treat (1) as logically true; and I don't see where we get the authority to tell him he's wrong about that. If (1), as it shows up in Dan's theory, is not logically true — and Dan is the one who should tell us whether it is or not — then the original response goes through.

Perhaps Whittle's point is different: If Dan *wanted* his theory to be a notational variant of Cynthia's, he could make it so by treating (1) as logically true. Maybe he could. For the record, while I think a logical-truth-preserving translation between two theories is a necessary condition for notational variance, I doubt it is sufficient.[10] Still, if Dan wants his theory to be Cynthia's in disguise, he can treat (1) as logically true to ensure that this necessary condition is met. But that will be a special case driven by Dan's particular decisions. There is still no argument that, *in general*, pluralist theories are always disguised versions of monist ones. Pluralists who want to be genuinely different from their monist counterparts can deny that certain truths are *logically* true.

5   Conclusion

Ontological pluralism is certainly in a much better position today than it was a decade ago. Its rehabilitation by appeal to elite quantifiers has helped resurrect it from the positivist's graveyard. But that's not to say it has come to dominate the metaphysical scene. The view remains niche, with detractors eager to argue against it. I have tried to evaluate a few of those arguments here. Surely, though, more arguments will be brought to bear before all is said and done.

References

Boolos, George (1984). "To Be is to be a Value of a Variable (or to be Some Values of Some Variables)." *The Journal of Philosophy* 81: 430–449.

Cameron, Ross P. (2018). "Critical Study of Kris McDaniel's *The Fragmentation of Being*." *Res Philosophica* 95(4).

Caplan, Ben (2011). "Ontological Superpluralism." *Philosophical Perspectives* 25: 79–114.

Carnap, Rudolf (1950). "Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology." *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 4: 20–40. Reprinted in Carnap 1956, pp. 205–221.

— (1956). *Meaning and Necessity*. 2nd edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

---

[10]See McSweeney 2017 for an argument for its necessity. On sufficiency, note that the advanced modal logic of Cresswell 1990 can be shown to be intertranslateable with a language involving quantification over possible worlds, and in a way that preserves logical truth. But I doubt that the world-involving theory and the world-free one are notational variants of each other.

Chalmers, David, David Manley and Ryan Wasserman (eds.) (2009). *Metametaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cresswell, Max J. (1990). *Entities and Indices*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Dorr, Cian (2005). "What We Disagree About when we Disagree About Ontology." In Mark E. Kalderon (ed.), *Fictionalism in Metaphysics*, 234–286. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hirsch, Eli (2002*a*). "Against Revisionary Ontology." *Philosophical Topics* 30: 103–127.

— (2002*b*). "Quantifier Variance and Realism." *Philosophical Issues* 12, *Realism and Relativism*: 51–73.

Javier-Castellanos, Arturo (forthcoming). "Quantifier Variance, Ontological Pluralism and Ideal Languages." *Philosophical Quarterly* .

Lewis, David (1983). "New Work for a Theory of Universals." *The Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 61: 343–377. Reprinted in Lewis 1999: 8–55.

— (1999). *Papers in Metaphysics and Epistemology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Markosian, Ned (2015). "The Right Stuff." *The Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 93(4): 665–687.

McDaniel, Kris (2009). "Ways of Being." In Chalmers et al. (2009).

— (2010). "A Return to the Analogy of Being." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 81(3): 688–717.

— (2017). *The Fragmentation of Being*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McSweeney, Michaela Markham (2017). "An Epistemic Account of Metaphysical Equivalence." *Philosophical Perspectives* 30(1): 270–293.

Merricks, Trenton (forthcoming). "The Only Way to Be." *Noûs* .

Moore, G. E. (1903/1953). *Principia Ethica*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Prior, A. N. (1971). *Objects of Thought*. Ed. Peter T. Geach and Anthony Kenny. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Putnam, Hilary (1987). *The Many Faces of Realism*. La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Press.

Rayo, Agustín and Stephen Yablo (2001). "Nominalism Through De-Nominalization." *Noûs* 35(1): 74–92.

Rosen, Gideon (2010). "Metaphysical Dependence: Grounding and Reduction." In Bob Hale and Aviv Hoffman (eds.), *Modality: Metaphysics, Logic, and Epistemology*, 109–135. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Russell, Bertrand (1912). *The Problems of Philosophy*. Home University Library. Reprinted by Oxford University Press, 1959.

Schaffer, Jonathan (2009). "On What Grounds What." In Chalmers et al. (2009).

Sider, Theodore (2001). "Criteria of Personal Identity and the Limits of Conceptual Analysis." *Philosophical Perspectives* 15: 189–209.

— (2009). "Ontological Realism." In Chalmers et al. (2009).

— (2011). *Writing the Book of the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Spencer, Joshua (2012). "Ways of Being." *Philosophy Compass* 7(12): 910–918.

Szabó, Zoltán Gendler (2003). "Nominalism." In Michael J. Loux and Dean W. Zimmerman (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Metaphysics*, 11–45. Oxford University Press.

Turner, Jason (2010). "Ontological Pluralism." *The Journal of Philosophy* 107(1): 5–34.

— (2012). "Logic and Ontological Pluralism." *The Journal of Philosophical Logic* 41(2): 419–448.

Whittle, Bruno (forthcoming). "Ontological Pluralism and Notational Variance." In Dean W. Zimmerman and Karen Bennett (eds.), *Oxford Studies in Metaphysics*, volume 12. Oxford: Oxford Univerisity Press.

Williamson, Timothy (2003). "Everything." *Philosophical Perspectives* 17: 415–465.