Existence as a Negative Property

An Enquiry into Existence Questions

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To my parents, who have borne with my philosophical peculiarities for the last five years and have supported me in all kinds of ways nonetheless.

Preface

After working on this topic for the last year or so, I finally feel that I have an understanding what *existence* means. It seems crazy that a notion so familiar to us can give us such a headache. Perhaps that is what philosophy boils down to at times: looking for the meaning of ordinary notions, only to find out that we do not understand them at all. And once we understand them anew, it seems that their meaning is completely trivial, allthough the process of finding out the meaning of the notion strongly suggests otherwise. It seems that because we take these familiar notions for granted, that we become totally estranged to their meaning. As a philosopher, I am dazzled by the most ordinary concepts. It is these peculiarities that might make a philosopher estranged to most people *in the outside world* that do not share that fascination. Luckily, I have found people in my surroundings that share that fascination and, as such, have helped towards bringing about this thesis.

There are many people who have helped in making this thesis come into existence in a relevant way. I would like to thank all the people present at the two WIPRMAPhil presentations that I gave of the development of my project, one during the fall of 2014 and one in the spring of 2015. Those meetings were most often attended by the usual group of people: Robin de Bruijn, Daan

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Introduction:

The Game of Metaphysics

In his validictory lecture, Johan van Benthem said something that has been a great source of inspiration for me. He said: "If people ask me 'What is your favourite game?' I always respond 'A conversation'". If conversations are games, we can conceive of all discourse as games as well, since discourse is just a very large conversation with many participants. If discourse is a game, philosophical discourse is a game as well. Even though Wittgenstein has warned us not to look for the common denominator—the essence—in games, I think that there are nice points of comparison. In every debate there are, latent sometimes, rules that are accepted. These may come in the form of interpretations, logical rules or etiquette and these constitute what moves are allowed.

Given that a nice way to think about debates is in terms of games and that we accept the analogy with martial arts, we may claim that philosophy is like *krav maga*: it seems that the only rule of philosophical debates is that there are no rules. This is particularly frustrating for someone like me, who has a first-things-first approach to philosophical questions. Perhaps this is why

I tried to find solace in the analytical project, because in that project there are rules to which philosophy proper must abide: be consistent, be logically rigorous, be unambiguous and be clear. But even in analytic philosophy, there can be a violation of rules. Sometimes such a violation of the rules is the product of proper philosophy, because that violation shows us that the game is rigged.

This thesis is a thesis about existence questions. My contention is that the metaphysical game, especially the game of existence questions, is rigged. One of my aims in this thesis is to attack one of the leading paradigms in contemporary metaphysics. This paradigm serves as the cornerstone to contemporary ontology: the Quinean notion of *ontological commitment* as the proper interpretation of *existence.* To be clear, I take this interpretation of *existence* to be a mischaracterization of existence questions. For that reason, we should look for a way to formulate existence questions anew. We should formulate them in a way that is as faithful as possible to the ordinary understanding of existence questions. Therefore, in the grander scheme of things, I propose a makeover of the way in which we should interpret existence questions in contemporary ontology. I will argue that there is a single notion of *nonexistence* and that *existence* is properly interpreted as its complement.

The overarching structure of this thesis is as follows. In the first chapter, I survey how the Quinean notion of *ontological commitment* became the leading paradigm in analytic metaphysics with respect to existence questions. I argue that the game that we play when engaging in ontology in this way is a very particular game, a game that does not conform to traditional metaphysics at all. In the second chapter, I develop the riddle of nonbeing and spell problems

for ontological commitment as an intuitive understanding of *existence*. In this section, I present examples of sentences where one would be committed to the existence of putative nonexistents, if one took *ontological commitment* to be the proper interpretation of "existence". In the third chapter, I survey six strategies to resolve the riddle of nonbeing: two of them Quinean, four of them Neo-Meinongian. The point of this chapter is to show that both a Quinean take and a Meinongian take on *existence* can be made consistent. Hence, there is no reason to drop either one of them as a valid interpretation of "existence". Hence, we have a stand-off between the two interpretations of existence. In the fourth chapter, I challenge a Neo-Carnapian approach to settling the matter of the proper use of "existence", which is deflationary about existence questions. If there were no fact of the matter about which use of "existence" is the correct one, we would be warranted to settle the convention any way we like. However, settling the convention any way we like leads to wrong interpretations of existence questions. In the fifth and final chapter, I argue that there are different senses of *being* that are suitable for characterizing the different debates. Hence, existence questions are characterized by different modes of *being*. In order to drive my argument home, I propose two methodologies for interpreting existence questions. One of them fails to reconstruct existence questions, but still may result in a valuable way to engage in metaphysical enquiry. The other one drives the point home that there may be multiple criteria for existence, but only one way to conceive of nonexistence.

The importance of this entire thesis is predicated on the premise that existence questions are important. They are. Perhaps one of the most important questions of our life on earth and how we should come to grips with our own

existence is whether God exists. According to traditional existentialists like Dostoievski and Kierkegaard, the existence of God is crucial for our moral life, for the meaning of our lives and the way we relate to everything in the cosmos.

Chapter 1

A Short History of Existence and Ontology

1.1   Two Pre-Analytic Assumptions

This chapter gives a gloss of where we are in the debate on ontology. I will describe the short history in the analytic tradition that is related to the status of metaphysics in general and ontology in particular, starting from Frege's treatment of the notion of *existence* and culminating in Quine's pragmatic approach to ontology. The upshot of this overview is to show that Quinean metaphysics is a very particular game and Quine's take on ontology should not be considered a landslide victory for traditional realistic metaphysics. The discussion below is twofold. One the one hand, we discuss the notion of *existence* as it has been developed in analytic philosophy. On the other hand, we will situate this notion of *existence* within a debate about the status and feasibility of metaphysics as a discipline, focussing on ontology.

The following gloss presupposes some assumptions that have been developed through the ages[1]. These assumptions are:

Assumption 1 Existence is different from essence.

Assumption 2 Existence is not a real property.

The first one of these assumptions is motivated by Avicenna. He argues that God is the only substance that has existence as its essence, and that is why it is a necessarily existent being. Avicenna radically departs from Aristotle, who says that "we speak in many ways of what is" (Aristotle 1994, Metaph. 1028a10), and that the being of a certain thing is the exemplification of its essence. Hence, for Aristotle, for something to exemplify its essence and for it to exist are the same thing (see Miller 2002, §1). Not so for Avicenna, since he argues that there are essences that are not instantiated. The existence of something needs to be granted by the necessarily existent being. Other than God, all beings are just possible in themselves, but necessary by virtue of something else, i.e. God or some other derivative entity. Although this reasoning seems hopelessly outdated, I think that the assumption itself may be salvaged. It is not strange to think that when we think of something—to grasp its essence so to say—this does not involve its existence. The essence precedes the existence.

Aquinas echoes Avicenna in this respect:

> But every essence or quiddity can be understood without understanding anything about its existence: I can understand what a

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[1]For a more extensive discussion of these assumptions and their development, see Miller (2002, §1). Most of what I say about Aristotle, Avicenna, Hume and Kant is based on this SEP-entry.

man is or what a phoenix [a nonexistent] is and nevertheless not
know whether either has existence in reality. (1976, Chapter 4)

This observation invites an investigation into whether things exist that is in-
dependent from the investigation of what the essences of those things are.

The second assumption is motivated by Hume and Kant. They claim that
existence is not a real property since we add nothing to the concept once
we declare that it exists. Kant famously states that there is no difference
between the *ten existing talers*-concept[2] and the *merely possible ten talers*-
concept (1998, B627-628). Hence, existence is not a real property. Rather,
Kant says:

> **Being** is obviously not a real predicate, i.e., a concept of something
> that could be added to the concept of a thing. It is merely the
> positing of a thing, or of certain determinations in themselves. In
> the logical use it is merely the copula of a judgment. (Kant 1998,
> B624, his bold text.)

As such, assumption 2 seems to be at odds with assumption 1. Assumption 2
is at odds with assumption 1, since assumption 2 claims that the existence of
something precedes its having properties. Hence, if we consider a thing's *having
properties* as its *having essence*, then existence precedes essence. But that is
only the case if we demand of essences that they are always instantiated and
Kant would not want that. It undermines the whole intuition that is expressed
by the example with the talers. The non-existent talers also have properties,
but not in the same way that existing talers have them. So, existence does

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[2]Talers were a currency.

make a difference, as Kant admits to when he says that "A hundred real
[talers] have a different effect on my financial position from the effect of the
mere concept of them (i.e. of their possibility)" (Kant 1998, B627). But how
to account for this difference?

1.2   Frege and Russell:

Existence as a Second-Order Concept

To start this discussion in analytic philosophy on the notion of existence off,
we need to turn to the founding father of analytic philosophy: Frege. In
Die Grundlagen der Arithmetik (1884, §53), he claims that existence is not a
first-order concept. That means that existence is not granted to individuals.
Rather, he says, *existence* is not a property of individuals, but existence means
that a concept is instantiated. For example, when we say that horses exist,
the property of horseness is instantiated. As such, the notion of existence is
closely related to the notion of *number*. To say of something that it exists
is just to say that the set under which it falls uniquely is non-empty. When
we say that horses exist, we do not simply say of every horse that it exists,
says Frege, but we say that the set of horses is non-empty. We treat numbers
similarly. If we say that there are four horses, we do not predicate "four" of
every horse, but we say that the cardinality of the set of horses is four.

But it seems strange to say that we cannot say that individuals exist. It
seems very reasonable to say that Albert Visser exists. Even more so, the only
argument that Frege gives for this account of existence is based on an analogy
with number. Only if the analogy between existence and number holds, it

seems that Frege's argument is valid. But it is exactly the intuition whether the analogy holds that seems very feeble to me. It seems feeble because it seems quite natural to say that individuals exist. Russell endorses Frege's view (see Russell 1918/1972, Lecture 5), but also acknowledges the problem mentioned above:

> If you take such a proposition as "Romulus existed", probably most of us think that Romulus did not exist. It is obviously a perfectly significant statement, whether true or false, to say that Romulus existed. If Romulus himself entered into our statement, it would be plain that the statement that he did not exist would be nonsense, because you cannot have a constituent of a proposition which is nothing at all. [...] [A]lthough it looks as if Romulus were a constituent of that proposition, that is really a mistake. Romulus does not occur in the proposition "Romulus did not exist". [...] [W]hen you say that Romulus did not exist you are simply saying that that propositional function is never true, that it is impossible [...] that there is no value of x that makes it true. (see ibid., pp. 78-79)

The mistake is that we take the occurrence of "Albert Visser" in a sentence, such as "Albert Visser exists", to have the logical form of a name: it is the wrong logical form to redescribe the sentence, according to Russell. Rather, we should take "Albert Visser" to be a propositional function. In that way we take "Romulus" not to be the name of Romulus, but to be the set of Romuluses. And if we claim that Romulus does not exist, we claim that the set of Romuluses is empty, according to Russell. This move to definite descriptions is the building block for Quine's notion of ontological commitment and the key

to doing ontology in the second half of the twentieth century (see §2.2). From
this way of spelling out how existence works, Russell is quite optimistic about
the capability of doing metaphysics, but says that we should be cautious in
our metaphysical investigations. That is why he says :

> I think that practically all traditional metaphysics is filled with mis-
> takes due to bad grammar, and that almost all the traditional prob-
> lems of metaphysics and traditional results—supposed results—of
> metaphysics are due to a failure to make the kind of distinctions in
> what we may call philosophical grammar [...] (Russell 1918/1972,
> p. 110)

The metaphysics that Russell proposes is based on a program of philosophical
grammar, i.e. logical reconstruction of reality. This program is based on the
assumption that an ideal language, logic and the world are isomorphic. If
so, we can do metaphysics by doing logical investigations. Hence, Russell
advises logical rigour when doing metaphysics. Although he dismisses most of
traditional metaphysics, he is still optimistic about metaphysics.

1.3   Wittgenstein and the Vienna Circle: The Death of Metaphysics?

With Wittgenstein (1922), however, there is a departure from the Russell op-
timism about metaphysics. The most significant departure is Wittgenstein's
dismissal of metadiscourse (ibid., S3.33). Just to be sure, by metadiscourse I
mean any talk over and above judgments related directly to the world. Ac-

cording to Wittgenstein, metadiscourse does not say (*sagen*) anything. Metalinguistic truths *show* themselves, like logic does (ibid., S3.334). Philosophy is in the business of metalinguistic truths, quite similar with logic and mathematics (ibid., §4.0031). These metalinguistic truths are typical examples of metadiscourse and hence, do not say anything. Rather, they show themselves. These different ways of dealing with discourse show themselves in the respective ways in which Wittgenstein and Russell deal with logical paradoxes. Whereas Russell introduces type-theory to make the distinction between object and metalanguage to avoid logical paradoxes, Wittgenstein dismisses this talk about logical paradoxes as senseless. The logical paradoxes are typical examples of meta-discourse. They are not about the world, but about ways in which we talk about the world. Hence, logical paradoxes need no resolving at all. Whereas Russell dismisses logical paradoxes as category mistakes because of the application of first-order predicates in second-order judgments, Wittgenstein claims that these second-order judgments make no sense at all. Hence, according to Wittgenstein, second-order judgments are not true nor false. Rather, they either show (*zeigen*) themselves or they do not. Truth or falsity only applies to first-order propositions, which are about the world. Of course, this leaves up for grabs what *the world* is. But Wittgenstein says that there is nothing philosophically deep about what the world is. He famously says that "*The limits of my language* mean the limits of my world" (ibid., S5.6) and "I am my world. (The microcosm.)" (ibid., S5.63). Hence, Wittgenstein restricts what we can say about the world to the truth and falsity of first-order propositions. Everything else is senseless, i.e. it cannot be said. And of such things, Wittgenstein says "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be

silent" (§7). Traditional philosophy is no exception to this, since traditional philosophy is considered to be a senseless "critique of language" (Wittgenstein 1922, §4.0031). According to Wittgenstein, philosophy should not be considered with first-order propositions, but with clarifying thought and separating the thinkable from the unthinkable (ibid., §4.112). Hence, philosophy should have no proper subject apart from the natural sciences: it is the handmaiden of science. Its job is to take away all the logical confusions that may arise due to the misuse of language. Philosophy needs to show that all philosophical problems are mere linguistic confusions. Hence, philosophy needs to dissolve rather than solve philosophical problems. Philosophy needs to show that the problems that are generated are not genuine problems at all.

This line of thought is developed further by the philosophers of the Vienna Circle, especially by Carnap (1928/2003). Carnap is very keen on taking away confusions that, according to him, have arisen due to the misuse of language. This misuse mostly involves what he calls *mixing of spheres* (ibid., §30). To understand what this means, we have to look first to what Carnap's system looks like. Carnap tries to give an account of science as a unity. In this unity, there is a logical relation between different sciences. All those sciences have their respective objects and all those sciences have importance in their own right, but those objects can be reduced to a single base. All objects of all sciences reside within different spheres (ibid., §25). A sphere is defined by the likeness of relations that are applicable to the objects of that sphere: i.e. there are predicates that apply to the objects of chemistry, but do not apply to the objects of physics. The problem of the mixing of spheres occurs when we use the predicates of one sphere to characterize entities in another sphere or when

we try to establish relations of identity across spheres. The predicates we use to characterize objects of different spheres are sort-specific. Hence, trying to establish identity across spheres is a misuse of language. To come back to our former example: to say of a particle that it boils is a misuse of language, since it applies a predicate ("boiling") to an entity of which it does not make sense to say whether the predicate applies to it or not. Or to say of a certain action that it is identical to the the emotion of pain is a misuse of language, since it applies an identity predicate across object-spheres. The only way in which we can make sense of this is to say that for the purposes of science, these two are identical, because we know the latter through the former. But the predicates are—strictly speaking—sorted, according to Carnap.

Let us return to the reduction part. What we said about identity has shown sufficiently that, according to Carnap, the reduction is not ontological. Rather, it is logical (ibid., §49-50). The reduction mentioned is only such that it indicates the epistemic priority of a certain type of entity to another (ibid., §54). For instance, we know that John is in pain because he manifests certain behavior that indicates that pain. In that case, John's behavior is epistemically prior to John's pain. Carnap distinguishes four spheres: the *autopsychological*, the *physical*, the *heteropsychological* and the *cultural*. Carnap takes the autopsychological to be basic (ibid., §60)[3]. Hence, in order for this system to work, everything we say in science is reducible to reports on sense-experience. Hence, the ultimate domain of objects that we use for science are the autopsychological objects. This does not mean that we can reduce everything we say about those other spheres to things we say about the autopsychological sphere.

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[3]However, he makes the caveat that we can also take the physical as the basis (Carnap 1928/2003, §59).

Hence, Carnap says, there is an epistemic difference between physical objects
and its reduction base (i.e. the set of sense-experiences corresponding to that
physical object) but no logical difference (Carnap 1928/2003, §50). For in-
stance, the claim that John's pain *is just* John's behavior is not trivial. But
if we take John's pain to be constructed from John's behavior—i.e. we take
John's behavior as that out of which we construct John's pain, then John's
pain is just defined as that behavior that expresses John's pain. Similarly with
all kinds of other objects. For instance, we *construct* the physical object out of
the reduction base: we construct a rock out of the rock-experiences we have.
This does not mean that the rock *is* the set of rock-experiences in an onto-
logical sense, but *insofar as science is concerned* the rock is just that set of
rock-experiences. The confusion that arises in doing metaphysics or ontology
is especially the neglect of this difference. What we do in logic and in science
has nothing to do with the world in itself, it has only to do with the way in
which we conceive of the world and what we do in science. Carnap tends to be
as noncommittal as possible about what science says about reality. What we
do in science is a logical construction of the world, and that may be something
different from the world itself.

The typical metaphysical questions are questions that lay principally out-
side of science. As such, they cannot be answered by science. And, since
science is in the business of telling us what we can know and these questions
are principally outside of science, it follows that they cannot be answered. As
such, those problems are not meaningful, since meaningful questions need to
be answerable by science, at least, in principle. Take, for instance, the prob-
lem of the external world (see ibid., §175-178). Since this problem is about the

metaphysical status of the logical construction outlined above, the problem is not contained in the construction itself. As such, the problem is not a question internal to science, but it is about the relation between science and the reality external to it. As such, the problem is not meaningful, since any solution to the problem cannot be verified by science, since the problem is not internal to science. Moreover, most metaphysical questions, or even philosophical questions in general, can be deemed a mixing of spheres. Hence, they are a misuse of language and are not genuine problems: they are pseudoproblems.

1.4 The Quine-Carnap Debate on Existence

It seems as if Wittgenstein and Carnap have dealt metaphysics a significant blow. Reverting to pre-Wittgenstinian metaphysics seems impossible. Impossible, since what we can say is limited to what we can know by means of science. And since science cannot answer questions about itself, since that would be begging the question, it seems that metaphysics—which lies outside of science—cannot be conducted in a meaningful way. Hence, we can no longer conceive of metaphysics as something that is disconnected with science, and that is where Quine comes in.

In "On What There Is" (1948), Quine deals with the notion of ontological commitment. We will deal with this more elaborately in section 2.2, where we will propose it as a solution to Meinongian arguments. For now, it is important to highlight the key aspects for the discussion with Carnap. Quine's strategy is to look for the ontological commitments of a theory. Metaphysics, qua discipline outside of science, is done for. Rather, we should turn to ontology: what

there is. And what there is, is everything that is presupposed by scientific theory. All the posits of a theory are the things that there are according to that theory. The posits of that theory, or *conceptual scheme* as Quine would have it, have to exist in order for the theory to be true. Hence, theories have commitments. In Carnaps case, the unity of science (*Einheitswissenschaft*) has a single domain of basic entities, contained within a single sphere of autopsychological objects, even though it has various object-spheres. And it is here that we find Quine's solution: if we want to do metaphysics, we should look to the commitments of a theory. Those commitments do not lay outside of science, they are intra-theoretical. So, it follows that Quine's ontology is not esoteric, unlike the metaphysics challenged by Carnap and Wittgenstein. The key to deriving the ontological commitments of a theory is in the language use of a theory. The posits of the theory are reflected in the basic terms of the theory. This is amounts to what Quine calls *nominalism*: the key to parsimony is a parsimonious use of language. Hence, the nominalistic reduction is linguistic reduction. It proceeds by being sparse with the terminology. Of course, this leads to very complicated ways to state the claims of the theory. Hence, there is a trade-off between the parsimony and the elegance of the theory.

But Carnap strikes back. Carnap challenges the results of Quine's way of doing metaphysics as being either trivial or senseless in "Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology" (1950/1956). In order to show this, Carnap makes the distinction between *internal* and *external* questions. To understand the difference between those questions, we need to invoke Carnap's notion of *linguistic frameworks*. Carnaps *Aufbau* can be seen as the construction of a linguistic framework. Such a framework just provides the background logic or background

language—in Carnap's case, these two can be conceived as interchangeable—for a scientific theory. Within that linguistic framework, which comprises the language in which the theory is couched, you can pose existence questions such as "do numbers exist?". Those questions, i.e. the questions asked from within the linguistic framework, Carnap calls *internal*. Such internal questions are rather trivial: if you use numbers to state the claims of your theory, numbers exist. Hence, there is nothing deep or philosophical going on here. The deep air of those questions only arises when we state the question in another way, i.e. in the *external way*. When we are dealing with external questions, we do not just ask whether there are numbers posited *in the language of the theory*. Rather, we ask whether they are also *in the world* or *in reality*, i.e. whether they have existence *outside* the theory. Such questions, Carnap maintains, cannot be answered because they are senseless. The external questions do not turn on metaphysics. Rather they turn on a practical question, namely whether the adoption of the linguistic framework suits a particular purpose. Hence, whether we use a particular linguistic framework is a pragmatic question, rather than a metaphysical one. Hence, ontological commitment is not a route to doing metaphysics. From within a theory, we can judge whether something is true or false, but outside such a linguistic framework the question of truth and falsity does not make sense, according to Carnap.

Quine tends to side with this, but has a critical qualification. In "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (1951), Quine dismisses the view that there is a strict separation between the *language* within which a particular theory is couched one the onde hand, and the factual statements that are made *within* such a theory on the other. With every observation we make, we do not just have

the pragmatic question of whether we should use the linguistic framework, but also the question of whether we should accept a particular sentence as true or false. None of these questions are either purely factual or purely practical. The pivotal question is, rather, what we want to do with our entire system. This is Quine's *pragmatism*: the pragmatic question does not just apply to the use of language, but also first-order statements. There is no strict separation between matters of fact and matters of convention. Rather, both considerations come in at the same time.

Let us consider an example. Suppose I want to say what an electron is. In Carnap's picture, in order to define what an electron is we take a particular linguistic framework. That framework provides a definition of what "electron" means. After we adopt that definition of "electron", we can test the hypotheses of our theory. Our theory, for instance, says that electron's satisfy behaviour B. Now suppose that we are confronted with an experiment that proves that there is an electron, as defined by our framework, that does not satisfy B. According to Carnap, the result is simple: we need to drop our theory that electrons satisfy B. Quine disagrees. According to Quine, there is another option: we could maintain that electron's satisfy B but just change our definition of 'electron' such that our the mentioned instance of "electron" is not an instance of electron anymore. Yet another move is to criticise the result of the original experiment. All of the moves, Quine would press, are legitimate moves. The only things you need to maintain are the virtues of your theory.

There are three conclusions that I want to draw from this discussion between Carnap and Quine. Firstly, we see that, according to Quine, the ontological questions are not trivial. Rather, their resolution has to do with

maintaining the theoretical virtues of the conceptual scheme of science. Maintaining those virtues usually involves a trade-off between parsimony, elegance and consistency. The approach of nominalism championed by Quine has to do with keeping ontological commitments to a minimum without making the theory too complicated. Secondly, there is no real distinction between language and theory. In terms of the example mentioned above, the theory about electrons and the language in which talk about electrons is couched cannot be separated. This is Quine's famous *meaning holism*: the definition of a posited entity (what it is) cannot be expressed without expressing its application in the theory (how it is).

Thirdly and most importantly, Quine's stance on ontology should not be considered a victory for traditional metaphysics (cf. Eklund 2013; Price 2009; Soames 2009). Rather, Quine's take on ontology is that ontology is a handmaiden of science: ontology can only be done from within the conceptual scheme of science. The business of ontologists is to keep our intra-theoretical commitments to a bare minimum without too much loss of explanatory power. As such, I cannot see how metaphysics, done in the Quinean way, can be interpreted as a way of doing realistic traditional metaphysics. Realistic metaphysics requires that metaphysics is linked with a reality that lies outside of science, to the way things *really are*. Quine sides with Carnap with respect to questions about metaphysics: the ontological questions are practical questions about how to deal with the influx of empirical data while maintaining the virtues of our conceptual scheme. But apart from the practical nature, ontological questions have no bearing on external *reality*.

Some might argue that Quine is somehow Janus-faced, since he has such

a strong allegiance with a physicalistic basis of science. As such, we should consider Quine to be a realist philosopher and consider his ontological considerations as realistic, they might say. My reply is that even if this allegiance is so apparent, my assessment is that the only reason for his allegiance with physicalism is due to the explanatory success of physics. More than anything, Quine stresses that the prime theoretical virtue guiding the choices within a conceptual scheme is explanatory success. I think I am not going out on a limb when I say that if there would be a better basis, Quine would drop physicalism and adopt that basis. Hence, I think that Quine's allegiance to physicalism is as strong as physicalism's explanatory success.

The only way you can argue from Quine's take to a realistic metaphysics is if you employ some kind of abductive argument, similar to the one employed in arguments on structural realism. Such an argument rests on the following conditional:

> If our conceptual scheme has this much explanatory power, then
> the semantic structure of the system must be isomorphic to the
> structure of the world.

But I am unconvinced of the power of such an argument. It is exactly because the conditional raises a couple of counters. First off, when will we ever have a system of science that has enough explanatory power to warrant the antecedent of the above mentioned conditional? The argument from pessimistic meta-induction is that we thought that our system of science was explanatorily strong enough in the past. If so, what will justify our faith in the explanatory power of the system now? Another counter, which comes down to the same thing, is that there could be an alternative conceptual scheme which would

have the same or perhaps more explanatory power. If so, the conditional itself is not warranted at all. Hence, to interpret Quine's take on metaphysics as realistic would be a long shot. And if he does consider his metaphysics to be realistic, which I don't think he does, I think that the counters mentioned here will be problematic for such a realistic stance. To conclude: Quine salvages a bit of metaphysics, but the victory is very minimal if not Pyrrhic.

Chapter 2

The Riddle of Non-Being

In the first chapter, I have developed an argument to the effect that Quine's approach to existence questions should not be considered as a continuation of traditional metaphysics. Perhaps we can already see that as a good reason to refuse a Quinean way to interpret existence questions. But my opponent may still maintain that Quine's interpretation of *existence* is correct, as Van Inwagen does (1998; 2003; 2009). The goal of this chapter is to undermine intuitions that some analytic philosophers have about the meaning of *existence*. Most of these analytic philosophers believe that *existence* is just that which is captured by the existential quantifier of first-order logic representations of regimented language (Van Inwagen 1998; 2009). This take on *existence* derives from Quine and belongs to the metaphysical framework described in the previous chapter. In order to achieve this goal, I develop a dialectic between Quineans, who believe that *existence* is captured by the use of the quantifier, and Neo-Meinongians, who believe quantification is way too liberal to capture *existence*. The point of the exposition of this debate is to demonstrate that

there may be some discrepancy between an ordinary concept of existence and the received view of existence. The debate revolves around a riddle.

2.1   The Riddle

The riddle of nonbeing shows that there is an inconsistency with respect to certain premises about truth, reference and existence. Both of the parties to the debate (Meinongians and Quineans respectively) have their own way to resolve the contradiction that arises due to this inconsistency. In this section I will point to these premises and motivate them briefly.

Premise 1 In order for a sentence to be true, the names in the sentence have to refer.

Premise 1 derives from Frege (1892). The assumption behind it seems intuitively plausible: if we want to say of something, named "a", that it has a property, called "P", this requires that the expression "a" picks out an object: "a" has to have a referent (a *Bedeutung*). In order for us to assess the truth-value of "a has P", there has to be an "a" that can have or lack "P". In a sentence, names are supposed to pick out objects. Frege takes the reference of predicates to be functions from individuals to truth-values[1] .

An implicit assumption of premise 1 is what has been called *compositionality*. Compositionality is a linguistic principle. The principle is that the reference of a sentence (its truth-value) is a function over the reference of its constituent parts[2]. That means that the truth-value of a sentence is determined by the reference of its constituent parts together with the structure of

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[1]See Frege (1882).
[2]See Gamut (1986, p. 5).

the sentence. Hence, the meaningfulness of the sentence consists in the meaningfulness of its constituent names, predicates, operators and whatever other syntactic devices the sentence may involve. This assumption has had its contestants, but it will go too far to go in to that here. I just mention it, because there are other ways to conceive of semantics.

Premise 2 In order for the names in a sentence to refer, they have to pick out existents.

Premise 2 can be motivated by appealing to a realist intuition about truth. The realist about truth claims that truth is determined by reality. Hence, if a sentence is true, its reference to objects involves reference to existent objects. Note that this does not mean that reference involving existence is exclusive to realist theories of truth. Perhaps other theories of truth want to maintain that reference involves existence. However, the tie of this requirement with realism about truth seems stronger than the others.

It is exactly this premise that is challenged most often by Meinongians. Note, however, that the Meinongian that denies this premise is not automatically in defiance of a realist conception of truth or any realist theory of truth whatsoever. What I do want to maintain is that if the Meinongian wants to maintain realism, she has to come up with a convincing story about how terms can refer without their referent being an existent. I will not go in to that here, but it is something to bear in mind when adopting a Meinongian View. Let us return to the riddle. The trouble with nonbeing starts when we acknowledge that

Premise 3 There are true sentences about nonexistents.

Premise 3 is the most contested. However, the position backing premise 3 is still reasonably popular and on the rise[3]. Typical examples come from truths about fictional objects and phenomenology[4]. Let us review a typical example. Suppose we say that

1. Pegasus does not exist.

Proposition 1 is a negative existential—i.e. a denial of existence. We can express 1 as the logical expression $\neg Ep$, where E is the predicate of *existence* and p is the proper name "Pegasus". Most of us will agree that Pegasus does not exist, hence premise 3 is true. However, if premise 3 is true this means that p has to refer (by premise 1). And because p has to refer, it has to exist as well (by premise 2). Hence, the conclusion is that

2. Pegasus exists and does not exist (by 1 and premises 1, 2).

This proposition, of course, is a contradiction and is deemed by many to be untenable. Hence, we are in a predicament. To sum up the riddle: if we want to say truly "n does not exist", then the name n has to refer (premise 1). If n refers, then n picks out an existent (premise 2), resulting in a contradiction if n is supposed to refer to a nonexistent. So, we cannot coherently say of anything that it does not exist. One easy way to get out of this is to deny premise 3 and be permissive about existence. But most of us feel reluctant to do that, since that would involve an ontological explosion (i.e. it involves a very big ontology, and, hence, it is not very parsimonious). Hence, there is

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[3]Cf. Chisholm (1972), Zalta (1988), Priest (2005), and Crane (2013).

[4]Credit is due to Meinong (1960/1904) here. He was the first to point out that there may be examples of objects which are not existents. Premise 3 is typical of a truth held by the Meinong-strawmen McX and Wyman in Quine (1948). Meinong's strength is typically in taking into account that there are objects which do not fall within the scope of metaphysics, but are the objects of intentional stances.

some work to do. In order to be coherent, we should drop one of the premises mentioned. The next section will, however, present a way in which Quineans have avoided the riddle.

2.2 Quine's Solution: Ontological Commitment

One way to deal with the riddle of non-being is Quine's way: he drops premise 3, but does so in a more parsimonious way than mentioned above. The quick way to describe Quine's position is to say that Quine, by paraphrasing truths about non-existents, avoids reference to non-existents. In "On What There Is" (1948), Quine deals with the riddle of non-being. Quine is motivated by an ontology that has parsimony as its ideal, balanced with explanatory power (as we have seen in §1.4). Our guide to what exists is science, Quine claims. Scientific theories attempt to explain reality sufficiently. The ontological implication of this is that one is committed to the entities involved in those theories. This is necessary if we want to maintain that those theories are true.

When dealing with the riddle of non-being, Quine complains about the inability to formulate negative existentials, such as we have encountered in §2.1. In order to solve this problem, Quine employs Russell's theory of descriptions. Where the previous paragraph takes "Pegasus" to be a proper name which requires reference, Quine transforms this *seeming name* (i.e. "Pegasus") into a definite description ("that which Pegasizes"). According to Quine, that we regard these seeming names as proper names is a way in which natural language fools us. We should not consider seeming names as proper names, but rather as individual concepts represented by definite descriptions. This is important

for his take on ontology, because Quine takes the quantifier ("there is") to capture the notion of existence[5]. Hence, 1 is reformulated as

3. not: there is something that pegasizes.

We can express 3 logically as $\neg \exists x \, Px$, where x is a variable and P is the predicate "pegasizes". What this sentence expresses is that our domain of quantification does not involve an entity that is such that it pegasizes: the set of pegasizers is empty. And since the quantifier expresses what exists— everything in the domain of quantification over true sentences exists—we can, with this sentence, intelligibly deny that Pegasus exists, Quine claims. And, hence, he drops premise 3. Therefore, his famous *adagium* "to be is, purely and simply, to be the value of a [bound] variable"(1948, p. 35)[6].

But even if we talk about ontological commitment in this way, we may still be committed to objects of discourse of which we would be unwilling to commit to. Quine deals with this by reducing or regimenting talk about these unwanted entities into talk about entities that are already accepted. The objective for the ontologist is to reduce all natural language to canonical language of first order logic[7]. In order to relieve yourself of unwanted ontological commitment, you need to provide paraphrases of the supposedly true sentences that involve unwanted ontological commitment in terms of less ontologically committing sentences. You have to do so without losing too much expressive power with respect to the former sentences. The paraphrases are supposed to express what you wanted to express with the former sentences, but also need to drop the

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[5]This is echoed specifically in Van Inwagen (2009, p. 492)

[6]The most prominent contemporary adherents of this position are Sider (2009) and Van Inwagen (2009).

[7]Quine elaborates on this program even more in Quine (1960, chapter 5 & 7).

talk of the unwanted entities. This is the way to avoid excessive ontology and, hence, maintain parsimony.

This Quinean approach to ontological commitment is revisionist with respect to natural language. This becomes clear once we acknowledge that natural language seems to treat non-existents as eligible for having proper names. For instance, when I talk about Sherlock Holmes—of which most of you would admit that he is a nonexistent—it seems that I am using "Sherlock Holmes" as a proper name. We have already seen this with Pegasus. The Riddle of Nonbeing starts with how natural language seems to treat "Pegasus" as a proper name. However, Quine claims that it is wrong to treat "Sherlock Holmes" and "Pegasus" as proper names in a logical setting. The motivation is that natural language use disguises the logical structure by which we can deduce ontological commitment. One can protest to Quine's move by appealing to Kripke and his treatment of names in *Naming and Necessity* (1972).

First off, in order to avoid the predicament that Quine wanted to avoid, it cannot be the case that the definite descriptions that we employ in order to formulate negative existentials involves the names of the entities to which we do not want to commit. If we allow for those definite descriptions to involve those names, we invite the riddle of nonbeing in after having disposed of it. Furthermore, we cannot have the definite descriptions to involve reference to any name of a thing that we allow ourselves to be committed to. We cannot have that, because in that case we are also committed to the entity we did not want any commitment to. For instance, if we define "God" as "the x who is worshipped by Andries", and, we say that God does not exist, that would imply that I do not worship anyone, which is false. Hence, if we want

to maintain that we can treat names as definite descriptions, then it follows that such a definite description has to be fully qualitative and be void of any proper name.

Therefore, we can only proceed with treating names as definite descriptions in order to avoid ontological commitment if those definite descriptions are fully qualitative. But proper names behave very differently than definite descriptions do. For instance, Kripke argues that names behave very differently in modal contexts than definite descriptions do. Suppose that we use the definite description "the fourty-fourth president of the United States" as the definite description for Barack Obama. Now, if that definite description is, in fact, the meaning of the name "Barack Obama", then it follows that *being the fourty-fourth president of the United States* is a necessary property of Barack Obama. But it seems that, however unlikely, John McCain could have won the 2008 presidential election. In that case, Barack Obama would not have been the fourty-fourth president of the United States. Moreover, it would be the case that John McCain was the fourty-fourth president of the United States. By substitution, it would follow that Barack Obama is not Barack Obama and that John McCain is Barack Obama. But if we take "Barack Obama" and "John McCain" to be proper names, "Barack Obama is Barack Obama" is a necessary truth and—given that John McCain differs from Barack Obama— "John McCain is Barack Obama" is a necessary falsehood.

The difference is modal behavior between names and definite descriptions is a problem that follows for any definite description that is defined qualitatively without involving the naming-relation[8]. Hence, the argument goes, taking

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[8]See Kripke (1972, pp. 74-78) for a discussion of this argument. Further arguments against the use of names as definite descriptions are in the rest of the second lecture by

names to be identical with definite descriptions is misguided.

The Quinean could respond to this objection by arguing that we are only acquainted with non-existents by means of descriptions, for instance with fictional objects by means of their description in works of fiction[9]. Hence, the meaning of the name of a non-existent is just its description. I will not pursue further whether this reply is valid. Rather, I turn to some other objections against the Quinean position.

2.3 Meinongian Counters to the Quinean

In the last paragraph we have seen that for Quine, ontological commitment is expressed by the quantifier. This implies that everything in our domain of quantification over true sentences exists. And since our domain of quantification involves reference to all the things that we can predicate truths about, this means that everything that we can talk about exists. Suppose that I say "I am writing my thesis", which I deem to be true. By the truth of this sentence it follows by existential generalization that "there is something that is writing my thesis". In the sentences involving existential generalization, it follows that I am committed to the existence of something that is writing my thesis. But not just that, since "I am writing my thesis", also involves that "there is something that I am writing". By that existential generalization, it follows that I am committed to the existence of something that I am writing. Both the thing that I am writing and the thing that writes my thesis are values of the variable bound by the quantifiers. And, since they are so bound, they

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Kripke (ibid.). A discussion of all the arguments is far beyond the scope of this thesis.

[9]One could appeal to Russell (1918) and Bach (1982) here. If so, fictional characters are considered on par with historical figures.

have to exist. While in these cases like this that may seem innocuous, there are cases in which this is much more problematic, especially if one is driven by parsimony. The Meinongian, the typical adversary of the Quinean in this particular case has to do one thing: find a true sentence that quantifies over a non-existent.

Driven by the effort to find truths about non-existents, we may try to find sentences of which we would intuitively say that they are true. Suppose we say the following about our beloved example "Pegasus"[10]:

4. Pegasus has wings.

Proposition 4 can expressed as $\exists x\,(Px \wedge \forall y\,(Py \rightarrow (x = y)) \wedge Wx)$, where W is the predicate "has wings". If we were to add to 4 that Pegasus does not exist, the Quinean is in a serious predicament, since it leads to a contradiction. The contradiction would be that the set P would be at once empty and non-empty, which is usually deemed impossible. Hence, if we were to accept 4, the Quinean position is refuted. However, the Quinean might object, we should be rather hesitant to accept 4 as true because there is no Pegasus in reality. However, we should also be hesitant to say that 4 is false, because we know about Pegasus as this winged fictional creature that was tamed by Bellerophon. We should hesitant to claim that 4 is as false as saying "Pegasus is the horse of Alexander the great" or "Pegasus is a pig". Hence, I recommend that we adopt a fictionalist strategy[11]: I recommend that we say that 4 is correct, but not strictly true. I use *correctness* here, in order to distinguish it from *strict and literal truth*. The reason is that *strict and literal truth* requires 4 to be

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[10]The examples in this section are adaptations of examples by Chisholm (1972) and Crane (2013).

[11]For a treatment of those various fictionalist strategies, see Eklund 2011.

made true by reality. But we cannot grant that, since there is no Pegasus in reality. Rather, 4 can only be made true if we specify what makes it true, which is one of Homer's myths. We can express 4 as a truth if we attach a story-operator **S** in front of it (Künne 1990). Hence, we attach "in the story it is the case that" as a prefix to 4 to express a truth. This results in the logical expression $\mathbf{S}\left(\exists x\left(Px \wedge \forall y\left(Py \rightarrow (x = y)\right) \wedge Wx\right)\right)$. This solution deems proposition 4 to be an incomplete expression and that is what might cause problems, the Quinean might argue. If so, the reformulation of proposition 4 is a revision of an expression in natural language and, hence, questionable. But if this is the objection, the Quinean will retort that proposition 4, in its original formulation, is strictly speaking false.

A worry about the story-context move is to say that it goes against Quine's own restriction of formulating truths in the canonical language of first-order predicate logic. Of course, operators are not part of first-order logic but of some kind of modal logic. Because the Quinean may resort to a story-context, the question to ask is what the introduction of a story-operator does to the ontology. One question is whether such a quantification in a story-context is ontologically committing. My expectation is that the Quinean will deny that this is the case: Pegasus exists in the story, not in reality. Within the story context, we quantify over Pegasus, but not in the reality-context. So, the *correctness* of 4 may arguably be unsuccessful to bring the Quinean to his knees. Another question is, if the Quinean is to take this strategy, what the ontological status of this context is. Does it admit of reduction? What is it about? We might, with Rosen (1990), claim that the story-operator is primitive and that it does not allow for reduction, nor does it commit us to

the existence of a 'story world' of any kind. This explanation may be a bit disappointing, as Rosen suggests, since we would like to see that a fictionalist strategy comes up with a reduction of some sort, as is required by the Quinean program. The question Rosen asks is whether we should sacrifice the intuition that story-contexts are noncommittal in order to stick to that program. The problem is that it seems that Rosen is taking a mortgage on the future here, claiming that perhaps some day we will be able to provide this reduction. My suggestion is not that providing the reduction is impossible, but my suggestion is rather that it makes the Quinean position very complicated. If the context-fixing solution is deemed too complex for the Quinean, the go to position of the Quinean is just to deny the truth of 4 all together. So, let us suppose another example:

5. Pegasus is a fictional character.

Proposition 5 already comes closer to what the Meinongian has in mind. We can construe 5 as $\exists x \left(Px \wedge \forall y \left(Py \rightarrow (x = y) \right) \wedge Fx \right)$, where F expresses the predicate 'is a fictional character'. So construed, the contradiction looms again. 5 is more plausible than 4 and I do not see why a Quinean would reject 5, since 5 is the explanation of why we would reject the existence of Pegasus in the first place. However, the same strategy is open to us. The Quinean could say that our logical reconstruction of 5 is simply wrong. The construction should be $\mathbf{S} \left(\exists x \, Px \wedge \forall y \left(Py \rightarrow (x = y) \right) \right)$, since the predicate 'is fictional' is a story-operator in disguise. Hence, 5 is strictly true, but does not involve ontological commitment, since the quantification is, again, in the story-context and not in the reality-context. The solution of the Quinean is a bit problematic, because 5 seems like a genuine subject-predicate sentence.

Even more so, 5 seems to be a statement about reality and not about the story-context. If the Quinean reformulates 5 in terms of a story-operator, he should be able to give an appropriate account of why this move is made. The answer may just be that it is a way to avoid ontological commitment. As such, it is an *ad hoc* move. I will drop this issue for now, since there are other examples to face for the Quinean. Take the following:

6. Pegasus is more famous than any existing horse

The suitable logical expression for proposition 6 is

$\exists x \, (Px \land \forall y \, (Py \to (x = y)) \land \forall z \, (Hz \land xFz))$, where H is the predicate "is a horse", and the two-place relation F expresses "is more famous than". The problem for the Quinean in this example is that even if the Quinean grants that Pegasus exists in the story-context, Pegasus also figures in truths about reality. The connection is made by what I deem to be an intentional bridge between the story and reality. To be more famous than something else is to be more well-known than something else. This familiarity can be analysed in terms of intentional states. This familiarity does not consist in a lasting mental directedness towards this object, but it does imply some kind of mental access to the object[12]. In the same way, the sentence may be paraphrased as "more people have mental access to Pegasus than to any existing horse". One problem with such a sentence is that it does not allow for an analysis in first-order predicate logic. But I do not want to argue with that, so let us waver that requirement for the time being. The deeper problem is that the access that one has to fictional objects and existing objects alike is not easy to take into

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[12]Phenomenology may be a lot more complicated than this. I hope that no one will criticise me for being a bit loose here.

account in semantics, especially if the Quinean wants to avoid commitment to all kinds of modal contexts and entities. The Quinean seems to be in a fundamental predicament. Of course, the Quinean can dismiss 6 specifically, but he cannot deny that "Sherlock Holmes is more famous than any existing detective" is true. And to regiment 6 into talk about mental content does not really work.

The option open to the Quinean is to deny that the Pegasus in 6 and the Pegasus in 4 and 5 are identical. This would be to deny that Pegasus, as it occurs in 6, is a purely mental phenomenon. This could be made plausible by affirming that Pegasus in 6 is a cultural artefact. Hence, Pegasus—qua cultural artifact—has to exist. I am inclined to think that Quine would deem this an unlovely result himself, since his quantificationalism would involve ontological commitment to cultural artifacts, which is not parsimonious at all. However, there seems to be no other option than to bite the bullet on this one.

The structural problem which is at the heart of the examples 4-6 is that it seems that it seems to be the case that there are truths about nonexistent objects where the nonexistents cannot be paraphrased away. And if there are truths about these nonexistents they have to be in the domain of quantification. And since that domain is supposed to capture existence, it leads to contradictions. The next chapter will deal with the ways in which we can avoid this problem. As we have seen, it is not so straight forward to accept the Quinean view on *existence*.

Chapter 3

Solutions to the Riddle

As we have seen in the previous chapter, there are problems for the Quinean
view on *existence*. This chapter surveys ways to get around the problems
sketched in the previous chapter. One way to argue for adopting either a
Meinongian or Quinean take on existence is to argue that the other side of the
debate cannot be made consistent. The aim of this chapter is to show that both
sides can come up with a way to make their take on *existence* consistent. This
does not mean that those ways of making the respective positions consistent
are without problems. In the literature, there are six strategies to deal with the
riddle mentioned in the previous chapter. Two of those strategies are Quinean,
the other four strategies are Meinongian. Hence, settling the issue of existence
will not depend on the consistency of the respective positions, but whether
one of the sides of the debate has a legitimate claim to the notion of *existence*.

3.1 Quinean Strategies

3.1.1 Paraphrasing

The first strategy is one that already comes up in the Quinean notion of regimentation. We have not yet explored the ways in which we can paraphrase the commitment to fictional entities away. A natural way to do this is to consider whether we can paraphrase talk of fictional objects—which are nonexistent—into talk of things that do exist.

But I do not think that this option works. For one, I cannot find a contemporary philosopher who defends this view. And rightly so, because the only options that I can see is that one would paraphrase talk about fictional objects in terms of mental items, works of fiction or properties. Chisholm attributes a version of this view to Frege. Chisholm interprets Frege as being committed to the position that fearing ghosts involves fearing the *sense* of the word "ghost" (Chisholm 1972, n.21). One problem with the all options mentioned —i.e. paraphrasing into mental items, works of fiction and properties—is that some of our intentional stances are *de re*, i.e. they are directed at an object (ibid., pp. 45-46). Take, for instance, the sentence "Albert Visser fears a ghost". If this sentence is literally true, Albert Visser does not fear the idea of a ghost nor that the ghost is going to do something to him, nor does he fear a particular description of an object: he fears the object itself!

Furthermore, let us take a look at proposition[1] 6 again. I cannot see how we would avoid talk of an entity that is the sum of the properties *having wings* and *being a horse* that is more famous than bundles that only involve *being a horse*.

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[1]See §2.3 for the proposition.

A sentence construed in such a way leaves out the most important part, namely that the former bundle of properties is not co-instantiated. Furthermore, it seems strange that a bundle of properties that is not co-instantiated can have the property of *being famous*. It seems to presuppose that there is composition with respect to properties that is different from co-location (i.e. the properties being spatiotemporally close). If there is another principle of composition at play, how does it explain the unity of the properties *horseness* and *wingedness* in Pegasus? It seems even more strange when we consider that the bundle of properties that makes up Pegasus has to be real even though Pegasus is not: how can that be? There seems to be a mismatch between the ontological status of the bundle of properties that is supposed to represent Pegasus and the ontological status of Pegasus itself. To add even more fuel to the fire, Pegasus' properties are supposed to be co-located, since Pegasus itself is represented as a being that is spatiotemporally of-a-piece (i.e. all the parts of the represented Pegasus are spatiotemporally connected). If Pegasus is represented as of-a-piece, how could this be different with respect to the bundle of properties that is supposed to make up Pegasus? Of course, one can just bite the bullet and say that the properties making up Pegasus are actually scattered but could make up Pegasus. Similarly with respect to the mismatch in ontological status, we can say that the properties that make up Pegasus are real and the fact that Pegasus is not can be explained by the fact that the properties are not co-located, but they could be. However, it seems rather strange that there really is a set of properties P that is more famous than another set of properties, even though P is not co-located or of-a-piece, especially because P is only famous as co-located.

It seems that something important is lost in the paraphrase in terms of bundles. It seems that the paraphrase leaves something out that is captured in proposition 6: the new sentence does not convey its original content, as is shown with respect to co-location. The loss of content is an inherent problem for the paraphrasing strategy, but that need not be a problem for the Quinean. If we paraphrase, we lose content, but that is not problematic in itself. Rather, it is welcomed, since only by losing content we can get rid of ontological commitment. What is deemed problematic is that paraphrases drop out too much content. The question for the Quinean is whether dropping content that the properties of Pegasus are co-located, retained in proposition 6, is a sacrifice that the Quinean is willing to make in order to make the paraphrase in terms of bundles of properties work. I cannot answer that question for the Quinean, but it is a consideration that needs to be addressed. Another consideration is whether the Quinean is willing to live with the ontology sketched above, granting existence to properties and committing to the existence of all properties that make up any nonexistent that is referred to in a true sentence. For some, these two considerations give reason to dismiss this solution.

3.1.2   Bite the Bullet: Grant Existence

The second strategy to keep the quantificational view alive is to grant *existence* to fictional objects and other metaphysically contested objects. There are some authors who have suggested that fictional objects do exist but have a different *nature* than the things which we would normally call "existent": fictional entities are abstract objects (Van Inwagen 2003; Thomasson 1999). So, in a way, Sherlock Holmes, Pegasus and ghosts do exist. They have the

same ontological status as common sense objects, such as tables and chairs, or microphysical entities, such as molecules, atoms, Higgs bosons and the like. A way to make sense of this move is to say that the fictional objects are equally real, but are different in another sense. This option is not very parsimonious, but some Quineans do not consider themselves to be committed to a nominalist program. Hence, they just bite the bullet on this one and see the Quinean criterion of ontological commitment through to the end: If we cannot paraphrase away those entities that we quantify over in our language, we are committed to their existence. Lewis has employed this argument to show that possible worlds exist (Lewis 1986). Some of the authors have argued for this second strategy by saying that it sits nicely with our common sense intuitions. For instance, van Inwagen says:

> It should be noted that, at least in certain circumstances, ordinary speakers are perfectly willing to apply the word 'exist' to fictional characters. Consider: 'To hear some people talk, you would think that all Dickens's working-class characters were comic grotesques; although such characters certainly exist, there are fewer of them than than is commonly supposed'; 'Sarah just ignores those characters that don't fit her theory of fiction. She persists in writing as if Anna Karinina, Tristram Shandy, and Mrs Dalloway simply didn't exist'. (Van Inwagen 2003, p. 145)

The evidence that Van Inwagen presents here, does not prove his point though. If a sub-sentence like "although such characters certainly exist, there are fewer of them than than is commonly supposed" is true, I take it to mean that there are some people in the real world that have a striking resemblance to

the characters described in Dickens' work. And it is utterly obscure what the second sentence is supposed to prove. I think that Van Inwagen makes a weak case for the claim that people tend to say that fictional characters exist. If anything, it does not follow from what he brings to the table here. I find it utterly strange that Van Inwagen makes an appeal to intuition here. I would not be so bold to claim that common sense is on one particular side of the debate. If anything, I think that the truth of proposition[2] 1 seems to indicate that the intuition is rather on the side of those who deny existence to fictional entities than those that grant existence to them.

A bone of contention among the authors that grant existence to fictional entities is about their nature. The question is whether the new fictional entities resemble Platonic universals rather than being ontologically subjective.

Just to be sure, the distinction between ontological objectivity and ontological subjectivity derives from Searle (1995). He says that there are certain things in the world that exist independent of our mental activity, such as mountains, subatomic particles and such. There are, however, some things that depend on mental activity, and it is by means of this that Searle explains the existence of social institutions. Those institutions play the role they do because we accept that they play that role. As such, those institutions are artefacts: they are man made. In that sense, institutions are mind-dependent and, hence, ontologically subjective. However, that does not make them any less real.

Taking the former position—that fictional entities are like Platonic universals— has the strange implication that Sherlock Holmes existed before there were

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[2]See §2.2.

books about Sherlock Holmes. Pegasus was already existent, and Homer was just a prophet bringing us the gospel of Pegasus. In this sense, fictional characters are like divinities, they already exist before there was anything concrete that could speak about them. I find it strange to imagine that fictional entities have eternal existence, while us mortals have so only for the time that we are here on this earth[3]. I realise that my only real argument here is an incredulous stare, and that cannot be argued against. But an incredulous stare does not make for a very good argument either. So, let us point to another strange consequence: once we start talking about something, anything at all (since it is in our domain of discourse, we can quantify over it and if it is not reducible, it must exist), we have to commit to its eternal existence. Once we allow this move, our ontology explodes (i.e. it gives rise to a very extensive ontology). Something someone with a taste for desert landscapes[4] would readily object to. This is not a knock-down argument, but I imagine some philosophers being at odds with the consequences of the position.

The other option—that fictional entities are ontologically subjective—has found some serious opposition too. Like institutions, fictional characters exist, according to Thomasson (1999). They are man-made, but that does not make them any less real. However, they depend on our telling and retelling of the stories in which they figure, once we stop talking about them, we forget them and they stop existing. In that sense, fictional characters are like money, once we stop using those bills as money, it ceases to be money. The ontological status of currency depends on us using it as currency. Once a certain currency

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[3]I am a christian, so I believe that I have eternal existence. But that is beside the point. Even if I did have eternal existence, it seems strange that Pegasus has so too.

[4]For instance, Quine (1948).

loses its function, it ceases to be currency.

The objection to the fictionals-as-artifacts view is rather similar to the fictionals-as-universals view. If they are ontologically subjective, we are the creators of the fictional entities, i.e. we grant them their existence. Hence, once we start talking about something, it exists. There are, of course, popular ways of speaking about this: "a rumor started and after that it had become a thing in itself". However, if this account works, it means that we are like God: we can create something *ex nihilo*. To some it may seem strange to say that when we start talking about something, it exists. That seems at odds with the way in which we speak about *existence.* From a realist point of view, reality and existence are taken to be—to a certain extent—mind-independent. Hence, if our collective intentionality is creative, realist intuitions are pretty much at odds with that position. However, this is far from a knock-down argument against this position, but the consequences may be too costly to some. So, again, everyone has to decide for herself whether she would like the consequences of this position and whether it is a nice way to get around the predicament. If I were to decide between the two Quinean bite-the-bullet positions, I would go for the ontologically subjective option since it sits better with intuitions about speech acts and pragmatics. Hence, I take this position to be the respresentative of the Quinean position in what follows.

3.2 Meinongian Strategies

Other strategies are Neo-Meinongian strategies. According to the Meinongian— as well as the Neo-Meinongian—there are truths about nonexistents.The up-

shot of these strategies is that, in order for us to get out of the predicament, we either drop premise[5] 1 or 2. Most of the Meinongians have dropped premise 2. They tend to adopt Meinong's *Principle of Independence*, namely that a thing's *Sosein* (the way it is) is independent of its *Sein* (mode of being, like existence, subsistence or nonbeing) (Meinong 1960/1904).

3.2.1 Parsons: Nuclear Meinongianism

Parsons (1979) is one of those Neo-Meinongians that has dropped premise 2. In order to understand Parsons' position better, I have to give some context. Meinongians have traditionally adopted a principle of comprehension in order to individuate nonexistent objects (Nelson 2012, Section 2). This principle involves that for any set of properties, there is at least one object that satisfies that set. More precisely, for any set of properties there is a unique entity that satisfies all the properties in that set and no other property. There may be all kinds of problems with this principle, but the most important ones are the problem of inconsistent objects and the ability to define anything into existence. To see how the first problem follows, consider the round square. Since for any set properties, there is a unique object that satisfies it, there is a unique object satisfying the properties *being round* and *being square*. Now, since the property of *being round* implies the property of *not-being square*, the round square is something that is square and not-square. Hence, we allow for inconsistent objects, a most unlovely result.

The second problem follows once we admit that existence is a property, which is considered integral to the Meinongian position. Now, since the com-

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[5]Just to be sure, I am referring to those premises to be found in §2.1.

prehension principle allows that for any set of properties there is a unique entity that satisfies it, it follows that any set of properties is satisfied by an existent since when we add *existence* to the set of properties, it becomes another set. Hence, it follows that there is an entity that satisfies the properties *being a horse*, *being winged* and *being existent*. Hence, we have existent flying horses. But there are no existent flying horses, so the Meinongian is in a predicament.

And this is where Parsons comes in. Parsons introduces the distinction between *nuclear* and *extranuclear* properties (see 1979, pp. 101-102). The nuclear properties are the ones that are allowed to fall under the comprehension principle and the extranuclear ones do not. Extranuclear properties involve *ontological* (properties indicating the ontological status of the object, such as *being existent*), *intentional* (like *is admired by Albert Visser*), *modal* (like *is possible*) and *technical* (like *is complete*) properties. These extranuclear properties are the ones that have caused the trouble for the comprehension principle in combination with Meinongianism.

Parsons' solution to the first problem is that the conditional *roundness* $\Rightarrow$ $\neg squareness$ does not hold, since the not-having of a property is extranuclear. The solution to the second problem is that we cannot define anything into existence anymore, since existence is not a nuclear property and, hence, does not fall under the new comprehension principle.

One trouble with this move, however, is that it seems quite *ad hoc*. The distinction between extranuclear and nuclear properties seems to be motivated purely by its ability to solve the problems with the comprehension principle. Apart from that, Parsons defines the distinction between extranuclear and nuclear properties by means of examples rather than by stipulating the differ-

ence. If the only difference between nuclear and extranuclear properties is that nuclear properties are the properties that do not lead to trouble with respect to the comprehension principle, then the distinction seems ad hoc[6].

Another, more serious trouble is the way it deals with propositions[7] like proposition 4. According to Parsons, proposition 4 is as true as the proposition "I am writing my thesis". I am not convinced that these two propositions are equally true. It seems very plausible to me, hence, that Pegasus is winged in a different way in which Go Ahead Eagles Deventer's mascot Harley (an eagle) has wings. And this is where Zalta (1988) comes in.

3.2.2 Zalta: Dual Copula Meinongianism

Zalta makes the distinction between *abstract* objects and *ordinary* objects, whereas only the latter have existence. All and only ordinary objects *exemplify* all their properties and all and only abstract objects *encode* some of their properties. This strategy is also called the *dual copula strategy*, since it employs the copulas *encoding* and *exemplification*. The difference in the copulas sits well with intuitions that one might have (as I have) about the difference between the way in which fictional objects have their properties and the way in which ordinary objects have them. By means of this difference, Zalta is even able to incorporate inconsistent objects. However, those objects can never be ordinary ones, since it is impossible for them to exist and the properties mentioned can never be exemplified together.

However, Zalta has been charged with ad hocness by Berto (2013, §6.2.3)[8].

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[6]see Berto (2013, §6.1.4) for a discussion of this problem and other problems for the Nuclear Meinongian View.

[7]See §2.3.

[8]Like with Nuclear Meinongianism, Berto (ibid., §6.2.3) contains a discussion of some

The charge rests on the difference between *encoding* and *exemplifying*. It does not seem clear where to draw the line between properties that can and cannot be exemplified. I am not so sure about this objection, since I think that the difference between encoding and exemplification is intuitively quite clear from the example mentioned above. Nonetheless, it seems that we also have a property that is encoded in Pegasus, namely wingedness, and which Go Ahead Eagles Deventer mascot Harley exemplifies. Bueno and Zalta (MS) seem to say as much when they appeal to other authors making similar distinctions (See MS, §3). Furthermore, they aim to defend their view from the charge that the difference between exemplication and encoding is not primitive. They do so by showing ways in which encoding is formalized, by providing examples where properties are encoded but are not exemplified, as we have with representations. Representations of people have properties in a certain sense, but not in the way in which concrete objects have those properties (MS, §4). However, I think that there is a more serious objection to make.

My objection comes from the fact that Zalta is presupposing a nominalist ontology. I consider him nominalist, but not in the traditional sense as claiming that there are no nonexistents. Rather, I take him to a nominalist because he equates *nonexistent* with *abstract*. This nominalist position seems to appeal Zalta, since it is an allowable position from a Meinongian point of view and it is very parsimonious. Another advantage to adopting this stance on ontology is that Zalta can make an intuitively clear distinction between the two copulas. But can we be so fast to presuppose that basis? It seems that one is committed to a nominalist ontology once one adopts the dual copula strategy, a price that

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problems for the Dual Copula Meinongian View.

some would find too high to pay.

I think the objection can be avoided once Zalta does not make the equation between non-existence and abstractness. But if he makes that move, the distinction between encoding and exemplifying faces the charge of adhocness even worse. In the division between abstract (nonexistent) and concrete objects, the line between encoding and exemplification could perhaps be drawn by experience. On another division between existent and nonexistent objects, discerning the difference between encoding and exemplification may be a lot harder to flesh out. If so, the force of Berto's adhocness objection is even stronger.

3.2.3   Priest: Modal Meinongianism

A totally different strategy to deal with all the problems is the modal Meinongianist approach championed by Priest (2005). The idea behind Priest's project is to couch talk about fictional entities and intentionality in terms of possible world semantics. So, when we talk about a particular fiction, we talk about a world in which that fiction is realized. Similarly, when we talk about peoples hopes, dreams, fears and other intentional stances, we talk about world in which those hopes, dreams and fears are realized. In the first chapter of *Towards Non-Being* (2005), Priest introduces a possible worlds semantics that is supposed to capture these particular phenomena. The apparatus captures the fact that people do not tend to be perfect logicians by invoking impossible worlds[9]. It also captures the fact that fictions sometimes do not tend to give

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[9]Worlds in which one proposition is at once true and false or a world that is not closed under logical consequence.

full descriptions by means of open worlds[10].

This approach has the same strengths as the other accounts by Zalta and Parsons, since it also able to give a nice distinction between the difference between the truth of proposition 4 on the one hand and propositions 5 and 6 on the other. We have said that proposition 4 is correct, but not strictly true. That difference can be traced back to the fact that proposition 4 is true in some world, namely the world of the fiction of Pegasus. Hence, proposition 4 is correct because it holds on that particular world. The strict and literally true propositions 5 and 6 are strictly and literally true since they can be evaluated from the actual world. The connection between the actual world and the world where Pegasus exists is made by means of intentional operators and intentional predicates. Hence, if I claim that proposition 5 is true—i.e. that Pegasus is fictional, the property of *being fictional* belongs to Pegasus because Pegasus exists in some world and the quantification over objects ranges over all worlds. Hence, "Pegasus", uttered in the actual world, refers to Pegasus, which exists in Homer world. In the case of proposition 6, what I claim is that more people know, or are familiar with, Pegasus than any horse in the actual world. And since familiarity involves an intentional predicate—to be more precise, it is a two-place predicate—that makes the connection between an object in the actual world and an object the world where Pegasus exists, the truth is evaluated in the actual world: strict and literal truths are truths that hold on the actual world. Correct claims are claims that are about a particular possible/fictional world. Similarly with other claims like "I fear the ghost in my closet". In this sentence, the verb *fear* serves as an intentional

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[10]Where some propositions do not have a truth-value.

two-place predicate connecting the I with the world in which there actually is a ghost, i.e. with the world where my fear is realized.

So, what of "existence" on this account? Well, existence is captured by an existence predicate (first-order) ranging over the objects of the actual world. All the other things that occur in true sentences (like "Pegasus" in propositions 4, 5, and 6) have being in a sense, not necessarily in the actual world but in some possible/fictional world. For those worlds, there is also an existence predicate. Hence, we say that in those worlds where Sherlock Holmes is Sherlock Holmes also exists. However, Holmes does not have existence, since he does not exist in the actual world.

This leaves the question about how this account fares better than its predecessors, especially about how we are supposed to individuate existents from non-existents. And it is here where the difference between intentional predicates and normal predicates plays its part. Whereas the intentional predicates occur in verb-phrases which do not entail the existence of the intentional relatum (i.e. in the case of "I fear a ghost", the existence of the ghost is not entailed), some of the normal predicates are existence-entailing: we have existence entailing properties. But how do we single out which properties are existence-entailing from the ones that do not entail the existence of the object characterized by it? Priest mentions logical properties as not being existence-entailing: from the fact that $\alpha = \alpha$ we cannot infer that α exists (see Priest 2005, p. 60). Note that Priest also subsumes modal attributions under these logical properties (see ibid., p. 139). Hence, modal qualifications of entities are not existence-entailing. Priest designates properties to be existence-entailing if the having of those properties entails having causal powers for those objects: if

an object has causal powers, the object has to exist (Priest 2005, p. 136). But the property of having causal powers, as defined above, may not be exhaustive for existence-entailment. Priest also mentions that *being in the doorway* is an existence-entailing property (see ibid., pp. 112, 114). But perhaps Priest has in mind that when an object o is in the doorway that already entails that o has causal powers.

However, even the property of having causal powers, as defined above, may be problematic. Is it not the case that Sherlock Holmes can enter into causal relations in Arthur Conan Doyle World? Doesn't Sherlock Holmes' research *cause* Moriarty to react in Arthur Conan Doyle world? Causality is not restricted to the actual world. Causality *in the actual world* is, however. But such a criterion for existence-entailment is rather vacuous, since any non-intentional property added with the addendum *in the actual world* is existence-entailing. But the vacuity of the criterion might disappear when we index the property of causality to worlds, because by the Sherlock Holmes example above, Sherlock Holmes does in fact exist in Arthur Conan Doyle World.

Another putative problem with Priest's criterion of existence-entailment is that it seems to presuppose a naturalist metaphysics. Note that when I define naturalism here, it means that the following holds: an object o exists if and only if o is eligible to enter into causal relations. That definition seems to be too parochial to certain metaphysical theories, since it involves that causally inert objects do not exist by definition. Hence, there goes the entire Platonism about numbers, realism about universals, substrate theory and all metaphysics that involves the existence of objects that cannot enter into causal relations. The definition is too parochial because the Platonist and

realist alike can come up with different criteria of existence-entailment that suit their particular metaphysical agenda: why choose this particular criterion of existence entailment? However, the problem with this notion of existence entailment is less problematic than the problems with the former Meinongian views, since this take on existence-entailment is not integral to the view. We can reformulate a criterion for existence-entailment any way we like, without altering the rest of the modal Meinongian approach.

3.2.4   Crane: Deny Reference

Yet another strategy is the one proposed by Crane in *The Objects of Thought* (2013). Crane discusses Priest's notion of existence-entailment. Even for a naturalist, such as Crane (2013), the criterion of existence-entailment may be too strong. According to Crane, existing objects have natures (see the discussion in ibid., §3.3-3.4). As such, existent objects really have their characterizing properties, whereas non-existent objects just have representation-dependent properties, such as *being mythical*. According to Crane, it is not strictly and literally true that Sherlock Holmes lived on 221B Baker Street. Sherlock Holmes is *represented* in Conan Doyle's stories as having such a property, but doesn't actually *have* that property. Sherlock Holmes does *have the property of being represented* as living on 221B Baker Street.

Priest's strategy may be problematic, for it leaves in the air what the ontological status of the possible worlds used in his semantics is. Crane does not commit himself to a modal reading of intentionality, he is able to deny the existence or reality of these other worlds all together. However, this still leaves him with other problems. The most pervasive one, I think, is the problem with

truthmaking. Priest can appeal to the different possible worlds as the ground for the truths about non-existents. Crane has to look for a different solution.

For this reason, Crane says that the names of non-existents do not refer but have *aboutness* (see Crane 2013, p. 7). Crane says that, because he wants reference and existence to stay intimately connected (ibid., p. 9). Hence, he drops premise 1 and savours premise 2. He says that our understanding of how we can think about nonexistents is the key to understanding thought (ibid., p. 4). He opts for the reduction of nonexistents to mental content, but not in the sense of linguistic reduction. The sentences about nonexistents are irreducible, but that does not mean that nonexistents somehow exist. Rather, nonexistent objects reduce to mental states. That is why he insists on saying that nonexistents have aboutness rather than reference. This aboutness is such that thoughts about not existents are strictly that, they are *about* nonexistents: the thoughts are *de re*.

But there are some unclarities about aboutness. Is aboutness able to fulfil the same linguistic role that reference has? If so, it is not at all clear what distinguishes it from reference apart from not entailing the existence of the object. But saying that aboutness is the same as reference but that the terms in it just do not refer is an *ad hoc* move. It is *ad hoc*, because it just avoids commitment without providing a plausible basis for the difference between aboutness and reference. As such, it seems that he is making the same moves as fictionalists, but is just not willing to admit that he is just as committed to the correctness-but-not-truth of those sentences about nonexistents: that is a cheating move. If we can only establish the correctness of the sentences about non-existence, this does not get us what we want: i.e. strict and literal truth

about nonexistents.

But Crane tries to give some kind of plausible basis. He does not propose a linguistic reduction of nonexistents, but he does propose an explanatory reduction. Crane defines reductive explanations as "an explanation of why truths of a certain kind are true, where this explanation need not appeal to the entities apparently invoked by the truths explained" (ibid., p. 124). Hence, the facts about nonexistent objects are explained the facts about their representation. Therefore, facts about fictional objects are reduced to facts about the works of fiction in which they figure. And since the works of fiction are a part of reality, truths about fictional objects are explained by reality.

But that still leaves us with the issue of reference and the semantic value of the names of nonexistents. If the names of nonexistents do not refer according to Crane, the principle of semantic compositionality (mentioned in §2.1) cannot be maintained in Crane's theory. The principle cannot be maintained, since the reference of sentences in which the names of nonexistents occur are not functions over the reference of their constituent parts anymore. The sentential function has a defective argument in the argument place of the name. So, if Crane wants to maintain that nonexistents do not refer, he has to give up compositionality. For many semantic approaches, this may be too high a price to pay.

All things considered, I consider the Modal Meinongian theory to be the least objectionable of the Meinongian theories. I consider it to be the least problematic because it does not introduce an *ad hoc* distinction between properties, because it is not necessarily parochial to concrete objects—unlike dual copula meinongianism—and it does not play a trick with language by substi-

tuting reference for aboutness. The only problem that we fostered for Modal Meinongianism was its choice for existence-entailing properties, which can be modified without altering the rest of the theory. Hence, I take Modal Meinongianism to be the representative of Meinongianism from now on.

3.3 Where to go from here?

In this chapter, I have discussed different ways to solve the Riddle of Nonbeing. All of these positions have their virtues, but none of them are beyond reproach. Whereas the Quinean has a way in which we can spell out existence and provides a method by which we can do ontology, the Meinongian take on existence does not provide such a method. This may be perceived as a virtue of the Meinongian position, since it is neutral with respect to any method of doing metaphysics except the Quinean method. However, the problem is that it gives us nothing in return, except perhaps for the method of making out which properties are existence-entailing.

I do not cherish a lot of hope for this approach to metaphysics. The problem I see with this approach is that any answer that we come up with with respect to settling the question "which properties are existence entailing?" will be parochial to one of the metaphysical theories. Suppose, for instance, that I am a materialist. If so, I will say that all and only those properties that, if had by entity E, entail that E is a material being are existence entailing properties. We can do the same with all other metaphysical theories. For any metaphysical theory T that claims that only P-entities exist it follows that: all and only those properties, such that if had by E entail that E is a P-entity,

are existence-entailing properties.

In my opinion, the big problem with this whole debate is that if we want to settle whether we should adopt the Meinongian or Quinean take on existence, we do not just have to look to whether their respective positions can be made consistent. Whether these positions can be made consistent does certainly count in their favour and can help to develop a sustainable metaphysics. The real question is whether we can settle this issue with respect to an appeal to what *existence* means. If there is no way to settle what *existence* is without an appeal to any of these two theories, it seems that we are in a predicament. The next chapter will be dedicated to this issue.

Chapter 4

Against Deflationism

In the previous chapters, we have seen that there are different conceptions of existence at play in the debate between Meinongians and Quineans. The Meinongian has a radically different application of *existence* than the Quinean has. Whereas the former usually applies "existence" to objects that have causal powers[1], the latter uses "existence" to apply to the values of the bound variables that cannot be eliminated from the first-order logic representation of true sentences. Let us call the former $existence_M$ and the latter $existence_Q$. It might very well be that in the future $existence_M$ and $existence_Q$ will be co-referential, with the dismissal of folk theories and the explaining away of hard sentences such as "Albert Visser admires Sherlock Holmes for his wit". But until that happens, Quineans are still committed to the existence of those objects to which Meinongians deny existence, as we have seen with the exposi-

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[1]Just to be sure, Meinong himself—and many others in his wake—have used the distinction in modes of being between *existence* and *subsistence*. The former applies to concrete and fully determined objects in time and space, the latter applies to *abstracta* which are also fully determined and non-contradictory (cf. Marek 2013, §4.3). However, in this section and onward I will only discuss the monist Meinongian position—i.e. the position that only considers *existence*. For the difference between Meinongian modes of being, see Marek (ibid., §4).

tion of the positions of Van Inwagen (2003) and Thomasson (1999). But even if $existence_M$ and $existence_Q$ are co-referential—i.e. have the same extension—the suggestion is that there are two different notions of *existence* at play in the debate. The question is whether there are good reasons to settle the use of "existence" one way or the other. The aim of this chapter is to discredit the Neo-Carnapian answer to that question, which is "no".

4.1   Carnap Returns: Ontological Deflationism

To deny that there are good reasons to settle the notion of *existence* one way or another is to adopt a deflationary stance to ontology (Putnam 1987; Hirsch 2002; Hirsch 2009; Thomasson 2009a; Thomasson 2009b). This deflationism is the position that in many ontological debates the issue is at bottom verbal and not substantial. I will call the position of the philosophers that base their contempt for existence questions on the conviction that ontological debates are merely verbal *Carnapian* or *Neo-Carnapian.* Just to be sure, the difference between Neo-Carnapians and Carnapians is that Neo-Carnapians usually frame their arguments in terms of conceptual schemes, rather than linguistic frameworks. They make this move in order to avoid criticism on the analytic-synthetic distinction, following Quine (1951). In what follows, I will largely mention only the Neo-Carnapian position.

Most commonly, the Neo-Carnapian attitude is that existence questions are either confused or remarkably trivial. The Neo-Carnapian attitude taps into the intuition had by some people that ontological questions are much ado about nothing. Answers to certain existence questions or other metaphysical

questions simply do not matter for our daily business, so it is said. Moreover, how we resolve the questions of ontology is not something deep. Rather, it is just a matter of settling the convention. Let us look at how that works in a specific example. Putnam's favourite example is the debate between mereological nihilists and mereological universalists. The table below is an adaptation of Putnam's table in *The Many Faces of Realism* (1987, p. 18):

α	β	γ

Table 4.1: Carnap's World

In Carnap's world there are three individuals: α, β and γ. The question asked is a derivative of the *Special Composition Question*[2]: how many things are there in Carnap's World? Mereological Nihilists believe that the only things that exist are individuals, i.e. only individuals are things. So, according to the mereological nihilist, the inventory of Carnap's World only consists of the individuals α, β and γ. Hence, the mereological nihilist's answer to the special composition question is "three". Mereological universalists, however, believe that the sum of two things is a thing too. So, according to the mereological universalist, the inventory of Carnap's World consists of the individuals α, β, and γ, the sum of α and β, the sum of β and γ, the sum of α and γ, and the sum of α and β and γ. Hence, the mereological universalist's answer to the special composition question is "seven"[3]. Hence, the two positions give contrary answers to the special composition question: there is a contradiction. However, the matter is about how to apply "thing" here. Such a matter is not

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[2]Under what circumstances which conditions do things fuse into another object 'over and above' its parts? Or, to frame it into an existence question: under what circumstances does the mereological fusion exist?

[3]Arguably, mereological universalists may consider the empty sum to be an object as well. If so, the answer is "eight".

substantial, rather it is about the use of language, according to Putnam:

> And it is no accident that metaphysical realism cannot really recognize the phenomenon of conceptual relativity—for that phenomenon turns on the fact that **the logical primitives themselves, and in particular the notions of object and existence, have a multitude of different uses rather than one absolute 'meaning'.** (Putnam 1987, p. 19, his bold text and emphasis.)

But this is just to make an observation about the way in which ontological debates *can* be viewed. It does not, as of yet, provide us with a reason to suppose that there is no reason to privilege one use of "existence" or "thing" over the other. It is here that the Neo-Carnapian says that there is no fact of the matter whether we should adopt one use of language over the other.

In order to see where this stance comes from, we look at some distinctions—already mentioned in §1.4—made by Carnap:

> And now we must distinguish two kinds of questions of existence: first, questions of existence of certain entities of the new kind *within the framework*; we call them *internal questions;* and second questions concerning the existence or reality *of the system of entities as a whole*, called *external questions.* The concepts of reality occurring in these internal questions is an empirical, scientific, non-metaphysical concept. To recognize something as a real thing or event means to succeed in incorporating it into the system of things [...] according to the rules of the framework. (Carnap 1950/1956, pp. 206-207)

The internal questions with respect to existence can be answered, according to Carnap. Whether or not something exists follows from the use of a certain convention for *existence*. But when we try to answer the question whether something *really* exists, rather than just that its existence follows from the way we use "existence" in a particular linguistic framework, we ask an external question. These external questions are different from internal questions all together:

> From these questions we must distinguish the external question of the reality of the thing world itself. [...] And [the external question] cannot be solved because it is framed in the wrong way. To be real in the scientific sense means to be an element of the system; hence this concept cannot be meaningfully applied to the system itself. (ibid., p. 207)

Hence, there is no theoretical way in which we can solve the external question. There is no fact about which language we should adopt. Rather the issue should be put differently:

> [When we ask an external question, we have in mind] a practical question, a matter of practical decision concerning the structure of our language. We have to make the choice whether or not to accept and use the forms of expression in the framework in question. (ibid., p. 207)

Usually, traditional ontologists consider existence questions as external and substantive, not as pragmatic[4]. To say that the solution of the external ques-

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[4]In fact, Hofweber—a Neo-Carnapian—argues that we can do ontology by answering external questions by looking at the use of the quantifier (2005; 2009).

tion is subject to practical considerations is to say that we have to define the language within which we couch our theory along the lines of the goal of that theory. Apart from that, there is no reason to privilege one use over the other. Hirsch (2002) diverges from this line only slightly. He says that in the cases where there is a clear ordinary language use, we should adopt that use:

> In his discussion of mereology Putnam implies that the proper remedy for the hyper-theoreticalness of "metaphysical realism" is Carnapian tolerance. I am suggesting that another remedy is "ordinary language philosophy" or an appeal to common sense. [...] Carnapian tolerance is appropriate where an existential sentence being disputed by philosophers is actually vague or ambiguous in plain English [...], and each disputant has in effect become attached to one permissible interpretation of the sentence. [...] But there are other cases—and I think the case of mereology is an example—in which the disputed sentence admits of only one relevant meaning in plain English, and one of the disputants is saying something that— interpreted in plain English—is trivially absurd. (ibid., pp. 61-62)

Hirsch adopts a conservatism about language: if there is no need to revise ordinary language, we should not revise it. And since there is no fact of the matter about many debates in ontology, we should just stick to ordinary language as much as possible. Where such an ordinary language use is not available we should just be tolerant of other people using "existence" differently.

4.2 Applications of
the Neo-Carnapian Attitude

The upshot of the Carnapian position, outlined above, is that ontological debates—such as the debate about the special composition question—are shallow and should be easily resolvable once we settle the language. These debates can only be shallow if we also concede that it does not matter very much whether we choose one language over the other. Just to be sure, I am not saying that the approaches following below are in fact based on a Neo-Carnapian take on language. In fact, they are just mentioned in order to demonstrate some of the consequences that a Neo-Carnapian take on language could have with respect to ontological debates.

4.2.1 Williamson and the Existence Principle

One of the applications of the Neo-Carnapian attitude is by Williamson (1988). He is very much aware that in some debates there is equivocation of "existence". The proposal that Williamson has in mind is to use "existence" in such a way that it satisfies particular operations, just as the negation sign does in the debate between adherents of classical logic and intuitionists. If we use "existence" in a univocal way, we are able to spell out substantive ontological disputes and we can assure ourselves that the debates are not merely verbal:

> In brief, for its proponents EP grounds a common understanding
> of 'existence' and permits genuine disagreement about what exists,
> just as Leibniz's Law (with Reflexivity) grounds a common un-

> derstanding of 'identity' and permits genuine disagreement about
> what is identical with what. (Williamson 1988, p. 117)

What Williamson calls EP here is the "Existence Principle": if a term t satisfies a predicate, then t exists. The idea that Williamson tries to advocate is that we need to formulate ontological disputes in such a way that the dispute is intelligible for both parties. Since the antagonist of EP is not able to spell out the position held by the protagonist of EP in terms of a distinctive and intelligible language, we should conform to EP, Williamson argues:

> Roughly speaking, there is only one sense of 'exists' in which it
> obeys EP, but many in which it does not. Thus agreement to use
> 'exists' in a sense obedient to EP, unlike agreement to use it in
> a sense disobedient to EP, provides a background against which
> parties to the agreement can go on to discuss their disagreements on
> fundamental issues of ontology without threat of equivocation on
> the word 'exists'. The latter agreement cannot defuse the threat
> of equivocation constituted by such fundamental disagreements.
> (ibid., pp. 122-123)

Williamson's argument for the use of EP is pragmatic, because the argument for EP is solely in terms of its usefulness in spelling out existence questions without equivocation. So, Williamson disregards the question whether EP is actually faithful to the way in which we understand existence questions. Williamson claims that, in order for the debate to be conducted properly, we need a notion of existence we can work with: A notion of existence that satisfies certain operations. Though, he also criticizes it immediately as well

by saying "The trouble with this method is that, to the extent that it rules out the possibility of equivocation, it does so by limiting the room for ontological disagreement" (ibid., p. 123). The strange thing is that he does, however, continue to 'solve' metaphysical disputes in this way. Even though Williamson is aware of the weakness of his own approach, he proceeds anyway: it's business as usual. That approach seems rather self-undermining.

Williamson is on to something here with respect to the criticism of his own position. The most salient question that he poses himself, he does not answer. He asks "what is the most metaphysically interesting sense of 'exists'?" (ibid., p. 123). In that sense, the execution of the paper is rather disappointing. On the upside, though, the question asked does inspire my criticism of the Neo-Carnapian approach.

4.2.2 Lewis and Quantifier-Restriction

Another way to heed the Neo-Carnapian approach is to adopt a strategy by Lewis (1990). He is engaged in a debate with Meinongians. Lewis is a typical adherent of the Quinean view on existence. He charges Routley, a Meinongian, with *quantifier restriction*. Now, we use quantifier restriction in daily life all the time, because it is required in a context. For instance, when I ask my roommate whether there is anything in the fridge, we usually restrict the quantifier to middle size objects, such as bread, pizza or whatever kind of edible or drinkable commodity. Usually when I ask whether there is anything in the fridge, I do not care about whether there are hydrogen atoms in the fridge. In some situations, a quantification over atoms is required, but not in the context where I ask my roommate whether there is anything in the

fridge. Lewis' charge of Routley is that Routley restricts quantifiers without cause. Routley restricts the quantifiers to only those things that have certain qualities:

> But when Routley 'loads' his quantifiers, he restricts them to the entities which, he says, 'exist'. And then we do not understand, because we ourselves make no such distinction among the entities. [...] It is just that he calls it the distincton between what 'exists' and what does not; whereas we call it the distinction between present, actual, particular, spatiotemporal things and all the rest. [...] For does he not say that it is exactly the present, actual, . . . things that 'exist'? He does. (Lewis 1990, p. 30)

From this observation, we can construct a translation from Meinongian language to Quinean language and *vice versa*. This results in the Translation-Table[5] below. Just to be sure, I use $L_{Meinong}$ for the Meinongian language supposedly used by Routley and I use L_{Quine} for the Quinean language used by Lewis.

$L_{Meinong}$	Existent	Non-existent/Subsistent
L_{Quine}	Concrete (Present, Actual, etc.) etc.	Abstract

Table 4.2: Translation Table

Lewis points to a couple of difficulties in the Meinongian language:

> In short: we dispense with existence but heed what this means and what it does not. Of course we do not dispense with the word 'exist' as one of our pronunciations for the quantifier. Neither

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[5]The translation table is an adaptation of a table in Priest (2005, p. 153).

do we dispense with a trivially universal predicate of existence,
automatically satisfied by absolutely everything. But if 'existence'
is understood so that it can be a substantive thesis that only some
of the things there are exist—or, for that matter, so that it can be
a substantive thesis that everything exists—we will have none of
it. (ibid., p. 31)

The upshot of Lewis' charge is that Routley makes a distinction that is un-
warranted and not required. Lewis asks why Routley makes this distinction
between things that exist and things that do not, while it is so obvious and
unproblematic to say that everything exists. Even more so, within Lewis' con-
strual we do not even have to talk about *existence*. Hence, Lewis is justified
to ask why we make the distinction between existents and nonexistents since
we can avoid so many problems by not making this distinction. Lewis has a
pragmatic angle here: we should just stick with the orthodoxy of Quineanism
and reject the distinction made by Meinongians in order to avoid problems.
As such, Lewis also disregards the question whether his Quinean notion of
existence is faithful to the way in which we understand existence questions.

The problem with this Lewisian angle is that it does not do justice to the
ordinary language intuitions put forward by Meinongians, as we have seen
in the previous chapter. The way out that Lewis proposes just seems too
easy and disregards entirely the intuitive support provided by Meinongians,
who claim that it is quite common to talk about some objects as nonexistent.
Lewis seems to disregard the fact that there are truths about nonexistents that
cannot be paraphrased away. He disregards it because he can avoid all kinds
of problems. Another problem is that it seems to make all kinds of existence

questions rather trivial, as is claimed by the Neo-Carnapian. Unrestricted quantification as capturing "existence" makes ontology utterly uninteresting. Moreover, it does not seem to do justice to what we are looking for when we ask the question about God's existence, for instance. When we talk about whether God exists, we do not care whether He exists as an abstract object nor whether He is an object of discourse. A die-hard Quinean like Lewis should wonder whether unrestricted quantification gives us a notion of *existence* worth investigating. Moreover, the Quinean should consider whether the Quinean notion of *existence* is suitable to characterize existence questions about God.

4.3   Criticism of the Neo-Carnapian Stance

From the problems of approaches mentioned in the previous paragraph we can develop some criticisms of the Neo-Carnapian stance. What we have seen in the previous paragraph is that the choice of language by which we do metaphysics may not be as innocent as a Neo-Carnapian position might suggest.

4.3.1   Another way of Putting
the 'Neo' in Neo-Carnapianism

The treatment of the solutions mentioned by Williamson and Lewis points out a particular problem. The problem with the Neo-Carnapian approach is that it characterizes the question about the use of "existence" as a merely verbal dispute. I agree that some of these debates are largely determined by verbal considerations, but that does not mean that the status of these debates is somehow lower or less in value than the supposedly "substantial questions",

as is suggested by the adverb "merely". And even though the use of words can depend on the practical uses we have for that language, that does not mean that any language goes. Rather, there are facts about the practical applications of language. Furthermore, it is important to investigate what language is the most useful when we do metaphysics. When we pose existence questions, there are some uses that are metaphysically salient and others that are not. For instance, in the debate about the existence of God, the Quinean notion of *existence* does not do a good job in discerning theism from atheism. Any atheist might readily agree that there are truths about God, but that is not the sense of *existence* that the parties to the debate use when asking that existence question. Hence, there is a way in which we can settle the matter about the use of "existence", but that is by settling what the goal of the metaphysical enquiry in question is. Once we settle that goal, there is a fact about what the best use of "existence" is in order to attain that goal. Therefore, once we settle the goal of the enquiry, there is a fact of the matter about which use of "existence" we should privilege. Carnap himself would agree:

> The purposes for which the language is intended to be used [...] will determine which factors are relevant for the decision. [...] And the questions concerning these dualities are indeed of a theoretical nature. (1950/1956, p. 208)

In the light of what Carnap says here, I take the ontological deflationist position not to be Carnapian at all[6]. This is another reason why we should call it Neo-Carnapian. It is also why Carnap's take is preferable to the Neo-Carnapian.

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[6]Eklund (2009) shares this assessment.

4.3.2 Dorr's Criticism:

Towards an Ontologically Salient Language

Dorr (2005) intends to defend the way in which ontologists conceive of ontology against the deflationary Neo-Carnapian attitude presented above. Whereas the Neo-Carnapian is typically taken to conceive of ontological debates as deceptions of language, Dorr intends to show that there is a single ontological language within which ontology is conducted. If the contemporary ontologist can show that there is a sufficiently restrictive language of ontology, then ontology is saved as a discipline concerned with substantial debates. Hence, the job that Dorr sets out for himself is to show that there is a use of existence that is ontologically salient and which is used by contemporary ontologists:

> The task faced by the ontologist is to initiate the sceptic into the practice of foundational ontology, by articulating, in terms even the sceptic will understand, a criterion by which the language of ontology can be distinguished from all the many other candidate languages which one might be tempted to interpret ontologists as speaking. To win at this game, we will need to convince the sceptic that the criterion we articulate fulfils certain desiderata. (ibid., p. 251)

Those desiderata are:

(i) It should be satisfied by some language [...] that is a candidate to be the language of ontology.

(ii) It should be discriminating. Ideally, it should be satisfied by exactly one of the candidate languages; but if it is satisfied

by more than one, they should at least agree as regards the
answers to general ontological questions. [...]

(iii) It should be faithful to the practice of foundational ontology.
[...] Failing that [agreement on the language of ontology], we
should be able to make it plausible that foundational ontolo-
gists are implicitly committed to accepting this criterion [...].
(ibid., p. 251)

Dorr's commitment to desideratum (iii) is what drives him to dismiss a Car-
napian take on ontological debates. Within the project that Dorr is committed
to, i.e. a defense of the contemporary ontology, I can see why he adheres to (iii).
If he wants to show that ontologists are doing sensible and honest work, the
language of ontology should be that language which is faithful to the practice
of ontologists. Dorr is right when he claims that the contemporary ontologist
can defend herself from the claims that Neo-Carnapians are making.

However, some may not be concerned with trying to procure a place for
contemporary ontology in philosophy. In similar regard, I do not consider
myself committed to desideratum (iii). My goal is not to find the language
that ontologists *are using*, but rather to find the language that ontologists
should be using to conduct ontological debates. In order to understand what
we are talking about when we discuss existence questions, we should interpret
existence questions correctly. In order to do that, we have to find the intended
use of "existence". That use may not conform to the way in which existence
questions have been understood by contemporary ontologists. In fact, I take it
to be the case that most contemporary ontologists do not understand existence
questions properly. As we have seen in Chapter 2, there is a long standing way

of using "existence" to which most of contemporary ontology adheres. That use is the Quinean use. However, as we have also seen, there might be good reasons to think that this notion of *existence* does not do. The objection levelled against Quine's criterion of ontological commitment is that it does not provide us with a metaphysically salient use of "existence" or that the Quinean use of "existence" mischaracterizes certain existence questions, such as the debate on theism.

I sympathise with Dorr's intuition that we should look out for a privileged sense of *existence*. How he goes about settling that notion of *existence* is less successful. Dorr's approach, and especially his commitment to (iii) is what made contemporary ontology so objectionable in the first place. The objectionability lies in the fact that the approach does not question the way in which contemporary ontology conducts its business. As such, it will never get to the root of the problem put forward by Meinongians. And the problem, as far as the Meinongian is concerned, is that contemporary ontology has used an objectionable notion of *existence* all along. Such an objectionable notion infects existence debates, as we have seen with Williamson and Lewis. The language within which ontological business is conducted is important. It is important because the language determines whether the results we generate from existence questions are metaphysically salient.

Chapter 5

Ontological Pluralism and Nonexistence

In the previous chapter, we have seen that a Neo-Carnapian approach to existence questions does not work. We cannot just settle the use of "existence" any way we like, since that misinterprets certain existence questions. For instance, it does not seem to be the case that an atheist will consider herself defeated if she finds out that we quantify over God in true sentences. If she does commit to a Quinean notion of *existence*, that means that if "Andries worships God"—which quantifies over *God*—is true, then that truth already warrants that theism is true. However, I do not think that the atheist is won over so easily. The treatment of existence in the previous chapters leaves open whether there are reasons to settle the use of "existence" in favour of the Meinongian. At this point of the argument, it could still be maintained that the proper meaning of "existence" is the Meinongian one.

However, I will not argue for that position. Rather, I will pursue an ontolog-

ical pluralist line of argument for the time being. From that line of argument and a pluralist conception of *existence*, I will develop my interpretation of existence questions as contrastive questions: "Does object o exist in way W rather than W^*?". However, I will argue for a monist account of *existence*, because all those contrastive questions have the same notion in the contrast position—i.e. the same W^* occurs in all contrastive existence questions. What is important to mention beforehand is that the only uses of "existence" that we have mentioned are all *positive*—i.e. they affirm a certain characteristic of objects. What is not ruled out is that the proper meaning of "existence" is *negative*—i.e. that to say that an object exists is to deny that it has a certain characteristic. What I will do in the end of this chapter is, in fact, show that the proper meaning of existence is negative. That is why, when I treat of ontological pluralism, I will call "a use of 'existence'" that which an ontological pluralist calls "a sense of existence".

5.1 Different Questions

Ontological pluralism has contemporary defenders in McDaniel (2009) and Turner (2010). They claim that *to exist* means something different for different entities. Hence, there are different *senses* of *existence*, according to ontological pluralists. Both McDaniel and Turner claim that *existence* is best accounted for logically by different quantifiers rather than by predicates. Furthermore, they claim that reality is structured by different domains and to exist within one domain is not the same as to exist in another. In this section, I will not go into the issue of whether the quantifier is the most apt logical

device to characterize existence. Turner and McDaniel typically defend onto-
logical pluralism by appealing to the intuition that adopting multiple modes
of being *cuts nature at its joints*, hence they take it to be a natural distinction.
I don't take a stance on that argument here either. Rather, I make a differ-
ent argument for ontological pluralism by extending ontological pluralism to
existence questions.

Ontological pluralism entails that different existence questions are charac-
terized by different uses of "existence". For the ontological pluralist, proving
that there is no unique positive use of "existence" suitable to characterize all
existence questions is quite simple. The only thing the ontological pluralist
needs to do is to take two or more existence questions and show that we use a
different positive interpretation of *existence* for different existence questions.

Suppose we take the question about the existence of God. As we said
before, the truth of "Andries worships God"—which quantifies over God—
does not seem to rule out atheism. Truths about God do not rule out atheism,
because there is another use of "existence" at play in that debate on theism.
Arguably, we may say that for the question of theism we are looking for whether
there is a superbeing that is causally active in the world. In that sense, it seems
that a Meinongian use of "existence"—i.e. the having of causal powers—is
suitable for the existence debate on theism.

Now, it does not seem to be the case that the Meinongian use of "existence"
applies to all existence questions. Suppose we ask the question about the
existence of numbers. Asking whether numbers can enter into causal relations
seems moot, since it is characteristic of mathematical objects that they are

causally inert[1]. If so, the debate on the existence of numbers is decided, quite trivially, in favour of the antirealists about numbers. Hence, I do not think that Platonists about mathematical objects have that use of "existence" in mind when they claim that numbers exist. Arguably, a Quinean use of "existence"—i.e whether we are committed to quantifying over mathematical entities in order to maintain the explanatory power of our conceptual scheme— seems more suitable for the debate on Platonism about mathematical objects.

Existence questions become even more diverse when we ask about the existence of characters in books. Suppose that I am ignorant about the fact that Arthur Conan Doyle wrote fiction. And suppose that, within that context— my ignorance, I ask whether Sherlock Holmes, Watson and Moriarty existed. It seems that in this context, I am asking whether the characters are real *as opposed to being merely fictional*. If so, it does not seem to be right to stick to a Quinean use of "existence", as so many authors have done. Merely fictional entities exist according to the Quinean use of "existence". But that is not the sense that we are after in this existence question. Rather, I seem to be asking whether the characters of the novels *have spatiotemporal location* or *have causal powers* in our world, such that we can interact with them. Hence, a Meinongian use of "existence" seems more suitable for this existence question.

The lesson to be learned from these examples is that in order to find the most suitable sense of *existence* for every existence question, we have to look at the *conversational context*. When asking existence questions, we need to take into account what the person who is asking the existence question already

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[1]Please take note that I am still discussing Meinongian monism here, as was mentioned in footnote 1 of chapter 4. A Meinongian pluralist could account for existence questions about *abstracta* by invoking the notion of *subsistence*. But invoking a distinction like that already implies ontological pluralism.

knows. Of course, Platonists about numbers know that numbers do not have causal powers and, hence, it does not seem plausible to suppose that they are asking whether numbers have causal powers when they ask existence questions about numbers. Similarly with atheists who ask about the existence of God. Atheists know that there are truths about God, but it seems unlikely that they are asking whether we quantify over God in true sentences when they ask the existence question about God.

5.2 A Privileged sense of Existence?

A monist might object that the fact that we can mean different things in different conversational contexts when we use "existence" in existence questions does not mean that every use of "existence" can function as a basis for *metaphysical* existence questions. There may be reasons for privileging one distinct use of "existence" over the others as specifically being the *metaphysical* use of "existence".

In §1.4 we have seen an argument for why we should use the Quinean use of "existence". Supposedly, the Quinean use of "existence" is the only sensible use of "existence" that we can work with. However, that argument rests on the conviction that science is at least one step removed from reality. Moreover, Quine claims that the only reality that we can deal with is the reality *within the conceptual scheme*, rather than with *transcendental reality*— i.e. reality as it *really is*. What we are dealing with when we are talking about ontological commitment are the commitments of a conceptual scheme rather than the commitments of transcendental reality. Transcendental reality, on this

conviction, is perhaps something fully beyond our grasp. Hence, the argument for privileging the Quinean use of "existence" rests on the conviction that we are not able to judge whether something *really has causal powers* or *really has spatiotemporal location*. The argument rests on our supposed lack of epistemic access to transcendental reality. But if so, the Quinean use of "existence" is not a metaphysical use of "existence". Rather, it is a way of discerning features of our conceptual scheme, not necessarily the features of transcendental reality. If we suppose that metaphysics is concerned with transcendental reality, we have to—in order to do metaphysics—be of the conviction that our metaphysical claims are in fact about transcendental reality. It seems to be that the only way to do that is to be of the conviction that we have epistemic access to reality. If we are of the conviction that we have epistemic access to reality, then there seems to be no objection to taking on other uses of "existence" such as *having spatiotemporal location* or *having causal powers*. Hence, we can have multiple metaphysical uses of "existence" that we can work with. But even if we suppose that Quine is right and that, perhaps, transcendental reality is fully beyond our grasp, then the notions of *having spatiotemporal location* and *having causal powers* can still be defined within that system and, hence, can function equally well as uses of "existence".

In a similar fashion, the Meinongian might argue that the use of "existence" as *the having of causal powers* should be privileged. If the Meinongian wants to make that argument, she has to show why that use of "existence" is to be privileged. As things stand now, the Meinongian use of "existence" is still somewhat parochial to concrete objects. The advantage of this parochial use is that it gives us a very parsimonious ontology, because the Meinongian

ontology only involves concrete actual objects. But if so, a story has to be told about how we can talk about those objects that are considered nonexistents. If *abstracta* and fictional objects have existence some watered down use of "existence", like the Quinean use, this already invites talk about multiple metaphysical uses of "existence".

We have already seen that there are at least two positive uses of "existence" at play in the debate between Quine and Meinong. The Quinean use is *being the value of a bound variable* and the Meinongian use is *the ability to enter into causal relationships*. Apart from that, we could, in principle, define different parochial uses of "existence" for all ontological theories. For instance, a materialist use of "existence" could be *being material* and the empiricist use is *to be given in experience*. All of these parochial uses of "existence" define existence as a substantive first-order property instead of a second order property. If we do so, there is no end to what uses of "existence" we could define. But are these senses still faithful to what we mean by *existence*? If we are to give an answer to that question, we should have a clear sense of what *existence* means. But the entire problem that this thesis revolves around is exactly that we seem unable to figure out what *existence* means. Perhaps we can have explanations of existence like "an object *o* exists if and only if *o* is *real*" or "an object *o* exists if and only if *o* is *part of the basic furniture of the world*". I think everyone would defer to these explanations, but these explanations explain very little. Rather, they explain *obscurum per obscurius*. Notions like *being real* or *being part of the basic furniture of the world* are equally mysterious as *existence* as long as we do not find their complement. At this point in the argument, there is no principled argument against defining parochial uses of "existence". But

the fact that we can define uses of "existence" at will is worrisome for the sustainability of existence questions for metaphysics. Hence, perhaps we need to reform metaphysics in order to encompass a multiplicity of uses of "existence".

5.3 Comparative Metaphysics Approach

With the option of a single metaphysically privileged positive use of "existence" gone, we will have to look for alternative ways in which we can construe existence questions. In this section, I survey a candidate.

5.3.1 Existence Questions as Comparisons

One approach that encompasses different uses of "existence" is championed by Voltolini (2012). He distinguishes three ways in which existence can be characterized. The first way is a formal second-order property, such as the Fregean notion of *existence as property instantiation* or the Russell/Quine notion of *existence as quantification*. The second way is a substantive first-order property, such as the Meinongian notion of *existence as having causal powers* or *existence as having spatiotemporal location*. Of course, we could define all kinds of other substantive first-order properties, such as *being material* or *given in experience* or whatever parochial use of "existence" expressed in a substantive first-order property we may come up with. But apart from those two ways of characterizing existence, we also need a third way: a first-order formal property *being identical with something* ($\lambda x\,(\exists y:\,x=y)$).

Voltolini argues that if we want to reconstruct an ontological debate at all, we need all of these three ways in which existence is characterized (2012,

pp. 368-369). Suppose that there two parties to a debate about whether there are only Fs. The protagonist of the expression "there are only Fs" is claiming that the extension the universal quantifier is identical with the extension of F. The antagonist denies that claim. More precisely, the antagonist claims that F is not a universal property and that there is a formal first-order property $\lambda x(\exists y : x = y)$ whose extension is not identical to the extension of F. Against this background, we can also understand the dispute between Quineans and Meinongians (2012, pp. 370-372). Whereas Quineans claim that *existence* is universal, the Meinongians deny that. The Meinongian claims that whereas all things have existence in the first-order formal sense ($\forall x \exists y : x = y$), there are things that lack existence in the substantive sense.

One advantage that I want to draw your attention to is the second advantage of the Meinongian approach that Voltolini mentions. The Meinongian approach to existence questions allows us to define a substantive first-order property to be the proper use of "existence" in a particular context. The nice thing about this approach is that we can compare objects with respect to particular uses of "existence" (2012, p. 374). We can say things like "Sherlock Holmes does not exist in the way that Barack Obama exists". Comparing entities with respect to particular uses of "existence" could be a new avenue for metaphysical enquiry. As such, we are able to make our existence questions more explicit. For instance, a theist may say that God does not exist like we do because He does not have spatiotemporal location, but he does exist like we do in the sense that He has causal powers. Likewise, a Platonist may say that numbers do not exist like human beings do because they do not have causal powers, but they do have existence in the sense that they possess

the formal first-order property of *being identical with something*. In that sense, metaphysical enquiries into *existence* can consist in making these comparisons.

5.3.2 An Objection

The problem for this approach is that it does not give a fully adequate account of existence questions. Existence questions are dichotomous, given their conversational context: either something exists or it does not. A question like "Does object o exist?" is a yes-or-no question. Hence, when we ask an existence question, it does not seem that we are looking for an answer like "object o exists in way W but not in W^*". Furthermore, when we ask existence questions, we do not make comparisons. If I ask whether o exists, I do not ask whether o exists in W exists like p does.

Since everything exists according to the watered down formal first-order use of "existence", we may wonder whether existence questions can be couched in terms of comparisons. The only way in which we can capture the dichotomy of existence questions is when we ask whether o exists$_1$ rather than exists$_2$. Hence, we are posing a *contrastive question* when we ask about which use of "existence" o fulfills.

However, other problems loom when we ask how we can conceive of the question of Platonism about numbers. It does not seem that we can pose a contrastive question—about what use of "existence" numbers fulfill rather than another use—that is faithful to the question of Platonism. There seems to be no more watered down use of "existence" that numbers fulfill, rather than the one that Platonists claim that numbers fulfill. This seems to put numbers right on par with fictional objects qua ontological status, because

both fulfill the most watered down use of "existence". However, if we answered the existence question about numbers positively, we would say that numbers exist. But the same would not go for fictional objects. That seems like an absurd consequence.

5.4   Modes of Being Approach: Existence as a Negative Property

This section is meant to reconcile the difficulties encountered in the previous section. If we want to give a proper account of existence questions, we will have to find a way to formulate contrastive questions that is faithful to the way we understand existence questions. Those contrastive questions encompass different senses of *existence*, the ontological pluralist would say. However, I will also argue in this section that there is one supposed use of "existence" which we do not consider to be existence at all. For that reason, I will speak of different modes of *being* from now on. My application of "being" as different from "existence" may seem a bit gerrymandered, but it is the only way in which I can make my notion of *nonexistence* clear. With this new terminology in place, my view is that *there is a mode of being that is nonexistence*. In what follows, we will use different senses of being such that for any *o* (anything in the unrestricted domain of quantification over true sentences) falls under one of the modes and none of the others. Hence, what we are looking for are different modes of being that partition the domain of objects. If so, we can categorize objects with respect to these modes. In this section, I conceive of existence questions as contrastive questions between different modes of being:

i.e. an existence question is such that it is characterized as "Does an object o exist in mode M rather than M^*?".

5.4.1 Existence Questions and Modes of Being

Perhaps there are many partitions possible, but I will treat one: a treatise of ontology by Ingarden (1947/1964)[2], because it gives us an account of how we can give an sense of existence questions in terms of different modes of being and because it one of the modes that he distinguishes is what I consider to be *nonexistence.* Ingarden distinguishes four modes of being, of which I will deal in turn.

[A] *Absolute Timeless Being* (Johansson 2013, §4.1). [A] is reserved for objects that do not divide themselves, are uncreated and are eternally persistent. That does not mean that the entities that are in [A] are outside of time. On the contrary, they are in time, but never cease to be. [A] is supposed to be typical for deities.

[B] *Extratemporal/Ideal Being* (ibid., §4.2). [B] is reserved for objects that are outside of time and space, are completely determined and uncreated. [B] is supposedly typical for *abstracta* such as mathematical entities and universals.

[C] *Temporal/Real Being* (ibid., §4.3). [C] is reserved for ordinary concrete objects, processes and events. All of these are in time and have a finite duration: As opposed to [A] and [B], the realm of [C] is in flux. As with [A] and [B], things in [C] are fully determined. One issue remains standing, namely what of eternalism and presentism? In some sense, Ingarden was a eternalist, things in the past and future have being in [C], though not as strong as present things

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[2]My analysis of Ingarden derives entirely from Johansson (2013).

have being. In a certain sense, things in [C] go in and out of being. Things in [C] that were in the past or will be in the future may not be in the present.

[D] *Purely Intentional Being* (ibid., §4.4). [D] is normally reserved for fictional entities and objects of thought. According to Ingarden, objects in [D] are created. That separates [D] from [B]. Moreover, objects in [D] are created by means of intentional actions. Objects in [D] are different from those in [A] and [C] because they have no position in our spacetime. A way in which objects in [D] are different from [A], [B] and [C] is that they lack determinacy in their properties. For instance, there may be no fact of the matter what the colour of Snow White's socks is, because that was not specified by the author.

According to Ingarden, all of the objects belong to at most one of these modes of being. That is not to say that every object has at least one of these modes of being. If so, we can conceive of existence debates as questions whether o belongs to one of these modes or none of them. But that does not work, since when we ask that question, we already conceive[3] of that object. Conceiving of that object is already an intentional stance towards that object. Hence, once we ask whether o exists and make a judgment about o's existence, o is already in [D].

Perhaps we can conceive of existence questions as making comparisons and asking contrastive questions about whether o belongs to one of the modes rather than one of the others. However, I do not think that it is very likely that there is any doubt as to whether mathematical objects belong to [A] rather than [B] or to [B] rather than [C]. It is pretty clear that if we have to choose between whether mathematical objects belong to either [A], [B] or [C],

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[3]In a very weak sense of conceiving, i.e. putting the description of the object before our eyes or looking at a supposed name of an object.

mathematical objects belong to [B]. Numbers are simply not in time and space, and, hence, do not qualify for either [A] or [C]. The same goes for supposed *concreta*. When we ask whether *concreta* exist, we do not ask whether *concreta* are in [C] rather than [A] or whether they are in [C] rather than [B].

The only contrastive question suitable to characterize the question of platonism about numbers is whether mathematical objects belong to [B] rather than [D]. In that case, the question about the existence of mathematical objects transforms into the question whether mathematical objects are man-made by means of acts of intentionality or have some independent mode of being. Something similar happens when we ask about the existence of supposed *concreta*: we ask whether the supposed *concreta* are in [C] rather than [D]. And because [D] is the common denominator between these existence questions, it seems reasonable to suggest that [D] is the intended meaning of *nonexistence* in existence questions. And if *existence* is the complement of *nonexistence*, it follows that *existence* is not-[D]. But what it means for *o* to not be in [D] can imply very different things for different categories of objects.

I contend that most people do not consider [D] to be a form of *existence* at all. It seems a truism to say that if something is purely intentional—just thought up by us, then it does not exist. Arguably, when people ask existence questions, they usually contrast *existence-in-reality*—which fits with modes [A], [B] and [C]—with *existence-just-in-imagination*–which fits [D]. In that case, we can consider "Does *o* exist?" as a way of asking whether *o* belongs to [D] or to one of the other modes. If *o* belongs to [D], then *o* does not exist. If *o* belongs to either [A], [B], or [C], then *o* exists. If so, the question of theism asks whether God belongs to [A] rather than [D]. The question of

Platonism about numbers is whether numbers belong to [B] rather than [D]. And when someone asks whether Sherlock Holmes exists, she asks whether Sherlock Holmes belongs to [C] rather than [D].

Now, let us see how my account differs from other accounts of existence. In table 5.1, you see the prominent aforementioned ways of characterizing existence. Across all tables, the grey columns express *nonexistence*. White columns express *existence*. The left-to-right dichotomy is subjection to flux: whereas *concreta* and intentional objects are subject to changes in ontological status over time, deities and *abstracta* are not subjected to that flux. The top-to-bottom dichotomy is *having a definite place in our spacetime*, whereas intentional objects and *abstracta* are not in space and time, deities and *concreta* are.

[C]	[A]
[D]	[B]

(a) Me

[C]	[A]
[D]	[B]

(b) Quine

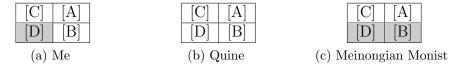| [C]	[A]
[D]	[B]

(c) Meinongian Monist

Table 5.1: Notions of Existence

What I have said above should suffice to read table 5.1 (a): I take purely intentional being ([D]) to be *nonexistence*. All the objects in either [A], [B] and [C] exist. Table 5.1 (b) needs some qualification. Of course, Quine took it to be the case that all objects such that we can paraphrase them away do not exist or, rather, we are not committed to their existence. But insofar as we cannot paraphrase them away, all the objects within modes [A], [B], [C] and [D] exist. The Quinean notion of *existence* does not leave room for the possibility that certain things do not exist. Table 5.1 (c) shows us clearly that if *existence* is *having causal powers*, that does not leave us the conceptual

possibility that *abstracta* exist. Rather, qua ontological status, *abstracta* are on par with fictional objects. The advantage of my view is that it leaves open the conceptual possibility that *abstracta* exist and that we can sensibly talk about objects of which we would say that they do not exist.

To see where my account differs from the ontological pluralist, see table 5.2 below. The ontological pluralist's suggestion is that *existence* means different things for different kinds of entities. Now, if we leave out the contrast term [D], that *existence* means different things seems quite natural. After all, deities, *abstracta*, and *concreta* are very different things and their respective existence implies something different from the other's existence. However, it seems that we find that the implications of their respective existences derive from them not being *purely intentional.* In that sense, we can still adopt ontological pluralism for methodological reasons. Ontological pluralism hands us methods to discern whether different kinds of objects exist. However, we should not mistake the different uses of "existence" that ontological pluralism hands us as being the *meanings* of existence, but they are *criteria* for existence.

[D]	[A]		[D]	[B]		[D]	[C]
(a) About Deities			(b) About Abstracta			(c) About Concreta	

Table 5.2: Kinds of Existence Questions

Taking the sense of *nonexistence* to be univocal and to simply take the sense of *existence* to be the complement of *nonexistence* makes my notion of existence ontologically monist again. "So, why adopt the different modes of being, then?", one might ask me. To this question, I reply that the existence of different categories of objects have different consequences. That is what gave rise to supposedly different senses of existence. Let us draw a couple of

distinctions: for an *o* that is a candidate—we have not decided on its existence yet—to be in category A, if *o* would exist, it would immediately follow that *o* would have causal powers in the world where we live in. Now, to take *o*'s having causal powers as the *meaning* of existence would be a mistake. Rather, *o*'s having causal powers is a criterion for *o*'s existence, since *o*'s having causal powers is a direct consequence of *o*'s not being purely intentional. Similarly for an object *p* that is a candidate for [C], but with the added caveat that *p* also needs to have spatiotemporal location, be fully determined and meet all the other constraints mentioned under [C]. Again, the combination of those constraints are the necessary and sufficient condition for *p*'s existence, i.e. *p*'s not being purely intentional. That does not mean that those constraints are *what existence means*. Finding a criterion for an object *q*, candidate for [B], may be a lot harder to spell out. I am unsure what would count as a criterion for *q*'s not being purely intentional. Perhaps, if we follow Ingarden, *q*'s not being created can be a criterion as well as its being fully determined.

Let us round up the discussion with McDaniel and Turner. In table 5.2 we can see that we can partition existence questions, if we follow Ingarden's categorization into modes of being. In that sense, we can conceive of three kinds of existence questions rather just one and, accordingly, can conceive of three domains rather than just one. However, that does not justify adopting three senses of *existence*, since all three kinds of existence questions have the same contrast mode of being. But we can still adopt the different domains proposed by McDaniel and Turner for methodological reasons. Perhaps it's useful to partition existence questions in order to make clear that candidates for different modes of being require different arguments in order to show that

they exist.

5.4.2 Objections and Replies:

Existence as a Negative Property

A putative anomaly with my conception of existence questions is questions surrounding the existence of time(s). Time functions as a dimension by which we can differentiate the different modes of being. Whereas [A] and [C] are reserved for objects whose being is very much related to time, [B] and [D] are reserved for objects whose being does not engage with time very much. The reason why the existence questions about the past and the future are so hard to answer, is because on my conception of existence—being in either [A], [B], or [C] rather than [D]—time is a way in which we can judge whether something exists—i.e whether something is in [A] or [C]. In that sense, it seems nonsense to say that time is in time, nor does it make sense to say that the past or the future are in time. Hence, time nor times can be in [A] or [C]. Neither does it make sense to say that time is outside time, nor that the past or the future are outside of time. So, time nor times can be in [B]. But somehow we are also reluctant to say that time is something man made or would cease to exist outside our thoughts nor that it was created by intentional acts. Hence, [D] does not seem an option either. Hence, within these modes of being, existence questions about time(s) seem incomprehensible.

However, to the defence of the modes-of-being account of existence questions, existence questions about time(s) are not intelligible at all. It is fundamentally mysterious what kind of supposed property or characteristic we are looking for when we ask whether time, the past, or the future exists. For

as long as we are unclear about what it means for time(s) to exist, the existence questions about time(s) are unintelligible and unanswerable. Perhaps the questions about the existence of time, the past, and the future are *pseudo* questions. If so, then they should not be a part of metaphysics. Moreover, they cannot serve as a counterexample to the Modes-of-Being approach sketched in this section. The only way in which we may be able to answer those questions is to ask what it would mean for time(s) to be *not purely intentional*.

Another anomaly may be existence questions surrounding *possibilia*. For instance, does a counterpart-me exist that has already won the Nobel prize? Do non-actual possible worlds exist? I think that the only way to pose these questions intelligibly is to ask whether non-actual possible worlds are in [D] or not. But whether we accept the existence of possible worlds changes the entire way in which we conceive of our modes-of-being approach to existence questions. If we accept that possible worlds exist, then that means that there are possible *concreta* that inhabit those possible worlds with which we cannot have causal interaction: they do not have causal powers *in our spacetime*, because those possible *concreta* are not *in our spacetime*. In that case, we need to extend the modes-of-being system in such a way that it encompasses those objects as existent. Therefore, we have to extend the criteria for [C], such that they encompass possibilia.

Another objection may be looming. The antagonist of my view may reason thus: If to exist means *not to be purely intentional*, then all the things lacking that mode of being have to exist. If so, that means that once Sherlock Holmes is not *purely intentional*, Sherlock Holmes exist. Hence, if Sherlock Holmes loses his *intentional being*, he exists. So, the antagonist might argue that once

we stop thinking about Sherlock Holmes, he exists. However, that is not what I mean. Rather, in my view, enquiring into existence questions is to survey whether o has being in a way different than [D]. Moreover, pure intentional being is the only being that Sherlock Holmes has. So, once we stop thinking about Sherlock Holmes, Sherlock Holmes *is* not anymore at all.

Another line of criticism may be that institutions serve as a counterexample. Does money exist? Do elections exist? Do governments? I would like to say that they do. If so, they may form a counterexample, because they are grounded in intentionality, according to my opponent, making an appeal to Searle (1995) to back up his claim. However, that does not mean that institutions have *purely intentional being*. Elections, money and governments do not just exist in our thoughts, even though they depend on intentionality. Elections, money and governments are not just grounded in intentionality, but are also grounded in concrete objects. Elections are typically grounded in marked pieces of paper, electoral committees and procedures, all of which have spatiotemporal location. Money is typically grounded in marked bills or electronic currency which, in turn, is grounded in servers and satellites issued for the world wide web. All of these things have spatiotemporal location. Governments are typically grounded in people. Hence, to serve up social ontology as a counterexample to my view does not work.

Epilogue: Settling the Rules

In this thesis, I have tried to show what is wrong with the metaphysical game of existence questions. The game we were playing in the Quinean paradigm is rigged. A Quinean notion of *existence* is not suitable for the debate between theists and atheists. Hence, in order for the game between theism and atheism to be fair again, we need to change the rules in such a way that captures the distinction between theists and atheists: we need a different notion of *existence*.

To exist can imply very different things, but not to exist means just one thing: to be purely intentional. That is why fictional objects form such a nice counterexample to the Quinean view: they are the values of bound variables in true sentences, but we are positive that they do not exist. They do not exist, because they have purely intentional being. They do not have any *real* being, like regular objects in space and time have. Existence questions about deities and *abstracta* may be hard to solve, but it seems plausible that we acknowledge their existence once we acknowledge that they have being apart from our intentional activity: that they are 'out there'. As such, *existence* is tied to *realism*. Existence only makes sense if we posit an external world, where *real* things are. Hence, to exist means 'to be out there'. Such an explanation is *obscurum per obscurius*, but becomes rather intelligible if we interpret 'out

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there' as *not merely in our heads.* It comes back to the reason why we use words like *real* and *existent* in the first place, i.e. to distinguish it from the delusions, fantasies and other figments of our imagination. Moreover, those words distinguish between what is purely subjective and that what has at least some objectivity to it.

Now, my conclusion surrounding the proper interpretation of nonexistence may be a bit speculative. It builds on an intuitive appeal to the way we use "existence" in ordinary language. It builds on the plausibility of the claim that we formulate existence questions in terms of the contrast that we make between existence and non-existence. It seems that trying to figure out what existence means is very hard, but we seem to have a rather clear understanding of what it means not to exist. We seem pretty sure that Pegasus, Sherlock Holmes and ghosts do not exist. We may be unsure as to whether God or numbers do not exist, but that is because we are unsure about whether they are purely intentional or not. As long as we are unworried about the veracity of our perception, we are pretty sure that ordinary objects exist, because we believe that our perception connects with *the world out there*—which exists outside the mind.

Let us take stock of what is done in this thesis. Below, we find the master argument over chapters 2 and 3. It develops the implications of Meinongianism and Quineanism respectively. Both of the positions can be made consistent, but may have some strange ramifications.

1. If the Quinean View is correct, then there are no truths about nonexistents [premise, argued for in Chapter 2]

2. There are truths about fictional objects [premise, shown in Chapter 2]

3. The Quinean View is correct [assumption of §3.1]

4. Fictional objects do not exist [assumption]

5. There are truths about nonexistents [$I \to$, 2,4]

6. The Quinean View is not correct [modus tollens 1,5]

7. It is not the case that fictional objects do not exist [$I\neg$ 3,4,6]

8. Fictional objects exist [elimination of double negation, 7]

9. If the Quinean view is correct, then fictional objects exist [$I \to$, 3, 8]

10. If the Meinongian view is correct, then fictional objects do not exist [premise, shown in chapter 2]

11. The Meinongian View is correct [assumption of §3.2]

12. If a sentence is true, then the names in that sentence have to refer and if names refer implies then the referents exist [assumption, Riddle of Non-Being §2.1]

13. If a sentence is true, then the names in that sentence refer [$G\wedge$, 12]

14. If the names refer, then their referents exist [$G\wedge$, 12]

15. If a sentence is true, then the names in that sentence have referents which exist [$G \to$, 13, 14]

16. Fictional objects exist [$G \to$, 2, 15]

17. It is not the case that if a sentence is true, then the names in that sentence refer and if names refer, then their referents exist [$I\neg$, 11,12,16]

18. Either it is not the case that if a sentence is true then the names in that sentence refer, or is not the case that if names refer then their referents exist [$\vee$-conversion, 17]

19. If the Meinongian View is correct, then either it is not the case that if a sentence is true then the names in that sentence refer, or is not the case that if names refer then their referents exist [$I \to$ 11,18]

Hence, at this point in the argument, we have two workable notions of *existence* that could serve as the basis of existence questions. Working out what the upshot is of supporting a Quinean View is what is done in §3.1. Working out the disjuncts of step 18—the consequences of the Meinongian View—is what is done in §3.2. At this point of the argument, the Question is whether we should settle it one way or the other. That is where we turn to deflationism, attacked in chapter 4.

20. Any use of "existence" that mischaracterizes existence questions is not fine [premise, implicit throughout thesis]

21. Williamson/Lewis's use of "existence" mischaracterizes certain existence questions [premise, argued for in §4.2]

22. If Deflationism is correct, existence questions are merely verbal [premise, shown in Chapter 4]

23. If existence questions are merely verbal, then there is no fact of the matter which way we should settle "existence" [premise, shown in Chapter 4]

24. If there is no fact of the matter which way we should settle "existence", then any use is fine [premise, shown in Chapter 4]

25. If Deflationism is correct, then any use of "existence" is fine [$I \rightarrow$, 22,23,24]

26. Williamson/Lewis' use of "existence" is not fine [$G \rightarrow$20, 21]

27. Deflationism is correct [assumption]

28. Any use of "existence" is fine [$G \rightarrow$, 25, 27]

29. Williamson/Lewis' use of "existence" is fine [$G\forall$, 28]

30. Deflationism is incorrect [$I\neg$, 26,27,29]

If deflationism is incorrect, we should look out for a use of "existence" that characterizes existence questions correctly. That is what I argue for in chapter 5. So, we extend the master argument to chapter 5:

31. If and only if there is no single use of existence that is fine for all existence questions, then ontological pluralism is correct [premise, argued for in Chapter 5]

32. The Quinean use of "existence" mischaracterizes some existence questions [premise, argued for in §5.1]

33. The Quinean use is not fine for some existence questions [$G \rightarrow$, 20, 32]

34. The Meinongian use of "existence" mischaracterizes some existence questions [premise, argued for in §5.1]

35. The Quinean use is not fine for some existence questions [$G \rightarrow$, 20, 34]

36. Any single "use" of existence mischaracterizes some existence questions [conjecture, based on induction over 33 and 35]

37. Ontological pluralism is correct [$G \rightarrow$, 31,36 barring counterexamples]

38. A single use—u—of nonexistence is correct [premise, argued for in §5.4.]

39. If a single use of nonexistence—u—is correct, then its complement—$\neg u$—is the single correct use of existence [premise, argued for in §5.4]

40. $\neg u$ is the single correct use of existence $[G \rightarrow, 38, 39]$

41. Ontological pluralism is incorrect $[G \rightarrow, 31, 40]$

Hence, existence can imply a lot of things. Apart from concrete objects, we can also have abstract objects and incorporeal objects. According to my analysis of nonexistence, the question as to their existence hinges on whether those non-concrete objects are purely intentional or have some kind of being outside our minds. The argument that I make for my account of *existence* as the complement of *being purely intentional* is mostly on the basis of intuitive plausibility. I cannot see any way to prove it, except to appeal to the understanding of the general nature of existence questions. Since I make an appeal to the pragmatics of existence questions in order to disarm certain positive interpretations of *existence*, I will concede that the use of "existence" and "nonexistence" are subject to pragmatics. Pragmatics turns on the use of expressions and the use of those expressions is subject to change. If so, the nature of existence questions will change accordingly. However, until that happens, my analysis holds.

Let us return to the game aspect. In order for the games—or debates—to be fair to all the parties involved, we have to properly understand what is at stake. The only way in which we can determine what constitutes a good argument in existence debates, is if we figure out what *existence* or *nonexistence* is. The job at hand is to formulate rules that are faithful the newly found notion of *nonexistence*. We have to figure out what proofs we can generate for things to not be purely intentional. In the case of concrete objects, that can be quite simple. If an object has spatiotemporal location and has causal powers, it exists. As such, a Meinongian use of "existence" is a nice criterion to figure

out whether a candidate *concretum* exists. For candidate deities, it becomes much harder to pin down whether they exist, since they are supposed to be incorporeal though they are supposed to have causal powers. But how do you pin down whether a certain effect is caused by an incorporeal being? Perhaps that is the reason why miracles—perhaps considered as violations of the laws of nature—are considered sufficient to prove that a deity exists. To determine whether candidate *abstracta* exist may be even harder, since they are causally inert and are not spatiotemporally located. Discerning criteria that would be sufficient to determine whether candidate *abstracta* exist or do not exist is of the utmost importance. At this point, I am unsure about what it would involve for *abstracta* to be *not purely intentional*. Therefore, before we can go on to discuss the question of Platonism about numbers yet again, we have to establish a criterion for the existence of numbers. Untill we have found that criterion, I am unsure whether the game of Platonism about numbers can played at all.

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