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# **REALISM, TRUTHMAKERS, AND LANGUAGE**

## **A STUDY IN META-ONTOLOGY AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND METAPHYSICS**

A thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

James Timothy Matthew Miller

Department of Philosophy

University of Durham

2014

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J.T.M. Miller

## Abstract

Metaphysics has had a long history of debate over its viability, and substantivity. This thesis explores issues connected to the realism question within the domain of metaphysics, ultimately aiming to defend a realist, substantive metaphysics by responding to so-called deflationary approaches, which have become prominent, and well supported within the recent metametaphysical and metaontological literature.

To this end, I begin by examining the changing nature of the realism question. I argue that characterising realism and anti-realism through theories of truth unduly places epistemology prior to ontology, and is unwarranted in assuming a non-neutrality between theories of truth and positions within the realism debate. I therefore propose a characterisation of realism and anti-realism understood through truthmaking. This produces a suitable working characterisation of realism that will be used within the remainder of this project.

In the second section, I trace the historical influences upon current deflationary approaches to metaphysics, most prominently those of Carnap, and Putnam. I argue that Quine's supposed attack on Carnap's anti-metaphysical thought fails, and show how current deflationary thought, most prominently exhibited by Hirsch, came to focus on linguistically derived concerns over the substantivity of metaphysics.

In the third section, I outline a number of issues for the deflationist, and defend the coherency and legitimacy of the unrestricted existential quantifier. Focusing on the linguistic aspect of deflationism, I argue that the conception of language that the deflationist relies upon lacks suitable empirical and theoretical support within linguistics and other related domains. Furthermore, I suggest that linguistic analysis in fact supports the claim that the quantifier carries no inherent restrictions. This restores our ability to suitably posit the unrestricted existential quantifier, as a

quantifier wherein the domain is only restricted by metaphysically substantive restrictions. Through this, I argue that metaphysics is a substantive domain of discourse. Lastly, I sketch a positive account of how, under an empirically and theoretically justified conception of language, metaphysics can be coherently held to be a realist, substantive enterprise, contra claims that hold that the nature of language inherently prevents metaphysics being considered to be a substantive domain of discourse.

## Acknowledgements

The first thanks for any PhD thesis must go to the supervisors. Jonathan (E.J.) Lowe is the reason I am interested in metaphysics in the first place. Working with such a brilliant philosopher from my undergraduate all the way through to PhD has been an honour, and a continued source of inspiration to me. His passing shortly before submission of this thesis leaves a huge hole for all who knew him and philosophy more broadly; I only hope that he would be pleased with the thesis' final state.

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The mind of a PhD student can become very single-minded at times, so thanks must go to everyone who has endured me in this state and kept me going during difficult periods of research; and to all my friends that have put up with my endless talk of quantifiers, grammar, and metametaphysics, even during the countless, but all-important, games of darts. An acknowledgement must also go to the Tyneside Cinema, for providing so many breaks away to watch films all day when Durham began to feel a little small.

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that a cancer diagnosis need not stall or interrupt our aims in life when provided with such excellent medical care.

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# Table of Contents

|                                                                                 |           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Abstract</b>                                                                 | <b>ii</b> |
| <b>Acknowledgements</b>                                                         | <b>iv</b> |
| <b>Introduction: On the Viability of Metaphysics</b>                            | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>Section I</b>                                                                |           |
| <b>Realism and Truthmakers: An Alternative Characterisation of Realism</b>      | <b>8</b>  |
| 1.1 What is the 'Realism Question'?                                             | 11        |
| 1.11 The Historic Question: Aristotle, Idealism<br>and the Rise of Epistemology | 13        |
| 1.12 The Realism Question of Post Kant                                          | 19        |
| 1.121 Chalmers and Sider                                                        | 24        |
| 1.122 A (Non-Quantificational) Alternative                                      | 30        |
| 1.13 An Initial Characterisation                                                | 32        |
| 1.14 Returning to the Metaphysical Thesis<br>and the Epistemological Thesis     | 33        |
| 1.2 The Neutrality of Truth                                                     | 36        |
| 1.3 Deflationism                                                                | 45        |
| 1.4 Truthmakers without a Theory of Truth                                       | 48        |
| 1.41 Some History of Truthmaker Theory                                          | 49        |
| 1.42 Towards a Suitable Account of Truthmaking                                  | 51        |
| 1.43 Truthmaking and Realism                                                    | 59        |
| 1.44 Truthmakers and Correspondence                                             | 64        |
| 1.45 Truthmakers and Theories of Truth                                          | 68        |
| 1.5 Specifics of the Truthmaker Account of<br>Realism and Anti-Realism          | 74        |

## Section II

|                                                                           |           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Anti-Realism and Language: The Threat of Deflationism</b>              | <b>84</b> |
| 2.1 Deflationary Approaches to Metaphysics<br>and 'Ontological Pluralism' | 87        |
| 2.2 The Quine-Carnap Dispute                                              | 90        |
| 2.21 Carnap: Meaninglessness and Linguistic Frameworks                    | 91        |
| 2.22 Quine and the seeds of Anti-Realism (and Realism)                    | 97        |
| 2.23 Reconciling Quine and Carnap                                         | 100       |
| 2.3 A Second Major Influence: Putnam                                      | 105       |
| 2.31 The Possible 'Falseness' of the Ideal Theory                         | 106       |
| 2.32 Internal and External Perspectives                                   | 110       |
| 2.33 Rejecting underlying dichotomies                                     | 115       |
| 2.4 Contemporary Deflationism: Eli Hirsch                                 | 119       |
| 2.41 Quantifier Variance                                                  | 121       |
| 2.42 Some More on 'Verbal Disputes'                                       | 125       |
| 2.43 Deflationary Views as Anti-Realist                                   | 129       |
| 2.44 Ordinary Language and Revisionary Metaphysics                        | 136       |

## Section III

|                                                                |            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| <b>Substantive Metaphysics: Responding to the Deflationist</b> | <b>142</b> |
| 3.1 (Some) Preliminary Responses                               | 145        |
| 3.11 Truth (again)                                             | 145        |
| 3.12 The One, Ideal, and Accurate Description of Reality       | 146        |
| 3.2 The Ontologese Gambit                                      | 148        |
| 3.21 Ontologese, and the Unrestricted Quantifier               | 151        |
| 3.22 'Carving at the Joints' and other Primitives              | 156        |
| 3.3 In Favour of the Unrestricted Quantifier                   | 162        |
| 3.31 Semantic Indeterminacy and Indefinite Extendibility       | 163        |
| 3.32 Conceptions of Language                                   | 167        |

|                                                                                        |            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| 3.321 The Deflationist's Language                                                      | 170        |
| 3.322 A More Promising Alternative                                                     | 178        |
| 3.323 Universal Conception of Language, and the<br>Unrestricted Existential Quantifier | 185        |
| 3.4 The Relationship Between Metaphysics and Language                                  | 197        |
| 3.41 The Possibility Space of Language                                                 | 198        |
| 3.42 The Possibility Space of Metaphysics                                              | 202        |
| 3.43 Bringing Possibility Spaces Together                                              | 208        |
| 3.44 A Neo-Aristotelian Account?                                                       | 215        |
| <b>References</b>                                                                      | <b>218</b> |

# Introduction

## On the Viability of Metaphysics

If there is no sense in which the physical truths are objectively better than the scrambled truths, beyond the fact that they are propositions that we have happened to have expressed, then the postmodernist forces of darkness have won (Sider 2011: 65).

We should not conflate a model with what it is a model of [...] the misbegotten conviction that we must and can substitute, without significant loss, models or representations of things for the things themselves (Lowe 2006: 6).

This thesis, ultimately, is about these “postmodernist forces of darkness” and this “misbegotten conviction”; a thesis concerned with working out how we might characterise such views as in contrast with those of the realist, as different responses to the realism question (§1); what exactly (one) argument against realism, against being able to talk about objectively better truths, is (§2); and finally how it is that we might argue against such positions (§3). This work therefore is about realism, and anti-realism (or at least particular forms of anti-realism concerned with language and realism about metaphysics), and is, at its heart, a defence of metaphysical realism; proposed after clarifying the particular characterisation of realism and anti-realism that I wish to advance based on the notion of truthmaking.

The immediate reaction here might well be that I have left something out – I have left out where it is that I positively argue for realism. This reaction is completely fair and correct. It might be strange to begin a thesis by stressing what it is that I will not be doing. However, given the nature of these kinds of debates, such recognition of the limits of what will follow is, I think, of central importance. Thus, I accept that no direct positive argument to persuade someone to become a realist will be given here.

Unless the arguments against anti-realism persuade someone that such a position is inherently flawed, then no-one will at the end of this thesis be a realist if they were not one to begin with. This is ultimately due to the fact that my core argument for realism is nothing beyond what Sider has called ‘knee-jerk realism’ (cf. his 2009; 2011). Knee-jerk realism is perhaps often the underlying implicit assumption of many a metaphysician. It is simply the view that in some sense the world is ‘out-there’; that it is to a greater or lesser degree intelligible; that it has its structure, and its nature, independent of whatever we might happen to say of it; and, thus, that we as philosophers, metaphysicians, academics, and humans, should attempt to understand that world. Of course, this need not be our only exploit. Not everything we do should, or even can, be directed towards such a lofty goal of attempting to understand the nature of reality as the metaphysician professes their aim to be. That it is not our sole aim, though, says nothing in of itself about the viability of the enterprise.

Thus, the arguments *for* realism in this work can only ever be *indirect*. The arguments against metaphysics that I concern myself with here are those that claim that metaphysics cannot be what it claims to be – that no discipline, not just metaphysics, may claim to be able to live up to the requirements of knee-jerk realism. Such talk is claim to not be justified, and can never be about what it claims to be about, vis-à-vis reality.<sup>1</sup> In so far as the arguments that I give, primarily in §3, work, then we might have some *prima facie* reason for thinking that realism is a better option than anti-realism. The dialectic of the thesis is only that certain arguments *against* the substantivity of metaphysics are flawed. This does not necessarily extend into an argument that realism is not flawed also, though I admit that I would not initially be able to see what any third route, rejecting both realism and anti-realism as I conceive of them in §1 would amount to.

So that covers what this thesis is not. What remains for an introduction is to say what this thesis is, and why it is worthwhile in the first place. I begin with the

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<sup>1</sup> Though note the difference between such arguments, and those that come from a more epistemological direction. The epistemological arguments against metaphysics are akin to the view that it is too difficult to verify any metaphysical claims. We can never satisfactorily argue which of the various metaphysical views is correct, and so we should not attempt to. This is an independent claim as to whether such metaphysical talk is in *principle* impossible rather than just very difficult to prove true; for we may easily accept the latter but reject the former. Cf. §1.1.

latter. One initial reason for thinking that a thesis on the viability of metaphysics – on whether metaphysical debate is substantive or not, and on how to in the first place even characterise metaphysical realism and anti-realism – is worthwhile is the pragmatic recognition that a lot of other people seem to be interested in such debates. The field of metametaphysics has boomed in recent years. Aside from the notable collection of essays in Chalmers, Manley, and Wasserman (2009), many leading metaphysical figures have recently written directly on issues within metametaphysics and/or metaontology.<sup>2</sup> Few could argue that there is no appetite for these debates. That others are doing something, though, does not stand as a justification for doing so yourself, so something more is required. This comes from a strand that has emerged in the arguments against the substantivity of metaphysics, concerning the relationship between language and metaphysics. Such accounts of language-based forms of deflationism tend to have a general claim at their heart – namely that the nature of language is such that there are built-in non-metaphysically substantive restrictions upon our language. These inherent restrictions thus lead to the conclusion that metaphysical debate must be merely verbal, or shallow, as the debate only really concerns these non-metaphysical substantive restrictions, not the metaphysics itself.

Responses to these kinds of views of course already exist, and counter-responses too. What I aim to bring to this debate is a more direct discussion of the nature of language, one that is heavily informed by recent trends within linguistics, and other related fields. Despite the interest in language, the literature on this topic seems surprisingly light on references and discussion of the empirical and theoretical findings coming out of linguistics. This is the main claim that I can give as to the usefulness of this work. By attempting to clarify a good working characterisation of realism and anti-realism; providing an overview of the language-based deflationism currently defended by a number of figures; and lastly introducing some considerations from linguistics and analysing the effect that such findings have upon the metametaphysical debate, I hope to bring my own (small) level of originality to the larger debate. It must be stressed here then that references to metaphysics throughout are to the *discourse* that makes up metaphysics, not to the actual entities of

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<sup>2</sup> A by no means exhaustive list, in no particular order, of names would include Sider, Hirsch, Eklund, Heil, Dyke, Thomasson, Hofweber, Liggins and Daly, Lowe, Armstrong, Price, Barnes, Bennett, Chalmers, Fine, Hawthorne, Ladyman and Ross, Sidelle, Yablo, and many more.

metaphysics, of the world, itself. As I will argue in §1.1, idealism is not the current anti-realist position, and thus that we can assume in this thesis that the world does exist, and the objects (in some form) in it. The non-substantivity of metaphysics that I take as my topic concerns the discourse of metaphysics, without doubting the reality of the world, without slipping into idealism – as will be argued in detail in later sections, the question is not whether metaphysics talk is talk about the ultimate structure of the universe; the question is whether such talk is substantive.

To build towards this end, the content of this thesis is divided into three sections.

I first propose my preferred characterisation of realism. There would be little worth in a defence of a substantive, realist metaphysics if there is no clear distinction between the realist and the anti-realist. §1 is therefore devoted to providing such a characterisation. §1.1 will outline the background historical trends that have led to the current forms of anti-realism that we find in the metametaphysical literature. Understanding how the ‘realism question’ has changed is important to see the motivation and force of the current anti-realist claims. Kant is a crucial figure in this history. The rise of epistemological concerns reaches a point with Kant’s denial of any ability to discuss the nature of objects-in-themselves. Pre-Kant, the realism question was one of idealism against realism; but significantly both of these positions argue that knowledge of the fundamental nature of reality *is possible*, even if, for Berkeley and other idealists, this reality is populated by mind-dependent entities (in some sense). Post-Kant, the realism question stresses epistemological concerns, holding that talk of the nature of reality is not possible as such talk cannot be shown to be true. Whilst this clarifies the nature of anti-realism in today’s literature, it is based on a flawed characterisation of the realism/anti-realism distinction due to its reliance on theories of truth. §1.2 and §1.3 argue that this reliance on truth is unhelpful, falling foul of many issues, including a strong circularity between what theory of truth we hold and our position on the realism question. Some other method to characterise realism and anti-realism is thus needed. §1.4 and §1.5 provide this, via the notion of truthmaking. After arguing that truthmaking is not itself a theory of truth, nor reliant upon one, I argue that the truthmaking mechanism is available to realists and anti-

realists alike. This allows us to characterise the difference between such positions via the nature of the truthmakers that they posit, rather than which claims are taken to be true. As well as correctly classifying current positions within the metaphysical realism and anti-realism debate, the truthmaking characterisation has an added benefit: it corrects the flaw that makes realism and anti-realism entirely subservient to epistemology, instead placing the ontological differences between the realist and anti-realist at the heart of understanding these views. This, as I argue in §3.1, allows us to understand the flaws in some anti-realist arguments, for they have mischaracterised realism, focusing too much on the epistemological concerns, and not on the ontological claims of the realist.<sup>3</sup>

§2 narrows the wide, domain general, focus that was present in §1. Once we are clear upon a characterisation of realism and anti-realism, §2 picks out a particular strand in the anti-realist literature, one that focuses on the nature of language within metaphysical theories, and has since become associated with the term ‘deflationism’. §2.1 clarifies the term ‘deflationist’, making clear that I take this term to be one that implies the view that metaphysical debate is merely verbal, or shallow, in its nature, standing against the view that metaphysical discourse is a substantive domain. §2.2 outlines the view of perhaps the most prominent and famous figure to adopt such a view – Carnap. §2.22 and §2.23 extend this, arguing that the initial objections that Quine posed against Carnap’s philosophy leave Carnap’s anti-metaphysical thought intact. In this way, Quine, the figure often credited with restoring metaphysics to a position of legitimacy after the dominance of Kantian objections, was in fact no friend of substantive metaphysics. This in no way illegitimatises the influence that Quine undoubtedly had, and still has, upon substantive metaphysics, but will be useful to show that the Carnapian objections to metaphysics were not defeated at their source. This, in turn, leads to the work of Putnam, to whom the entirety of §2.3 is devoted. Putnam’s work built upon Carnap’s, and I will argue is a strong influence, along with Carnap himself, upon current deflationist arguments against the substantivity of metaphysics. §2.4 will outline just such contemporary deflationism through the work

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<sup>3</sup> It is worth stressing here that I do not deny epistemological concerns over metaphysics. Metaphysics, as with any domain, needs to be able to provide an account of how it can claim the knowledge that it does. But as I will argue throughout this thesis, this is not a *principled* problem for metaphysics, only a practical one.

of Hirsch, and the quantifier variance thesis. I will throughout this thesis take Hirsch to be a prime example of contemporary deflationism. §2 will thus be largely expository in nature – fewer entirely original claims (with the exception of §2.23 on the Quine-Carnap dispute, and §2.43 on Hirsch's self-ascription as a realist) are included in §2, and those already well versed in this history may find little that they are not already familiar with.

Lastly, §3 directly responds to the deflationist claims. §3.1 argues that some arguments within the deflationist literature, in particular within the work of Putnam, rely upon a flawed conception of metaphysical realism, and thus can be easily avoided through the more nuanced conception of realism via truthmaking defined in §1.5. §3.2 introduces the notion of Ontologese, arguing that this, whilst not the sole route to respond to the deflationist, is the most promising, especially in light of the notion of the unrestricted existential quantifier that Ontologese makes use of. Thus, defending the validity and coherency of the unrestricted existential quantifier, and through this the substantivity of metaphysics, is the aim of §3.3. §3.31 defends this privileged quantifier from the semantic indeterminacy and indefinite extendibility arguments; §3.32 defends this quantifier from the claim that no notion of quantification can be free from non-metaphysically substantive restrictions. §3.32, thus, in particular focuses on the work of Hirsch, though with, I believe, scope for extension into certain other forms of deflationism. §3.321 and §3.322 argue the conception of language that the deflationist arguments rely upon – in order to hold that all variations of the quantifier, and via this the meaning of the term exists, are subject to inherent non-metaphysically significant restrictions rendering metaphysical debate shallow – is empirically and theoretically flawed. Drawing upon current theories in linguistics, I argue that an alternative conception of language, based on claims within the Generative Grammar programme, is more successful in explaining the nature of language. In light of this, the deflationist is left with a theory that relies upon language, but without a suitable conception of language to support it. Further to this, in §3.323, I argue that the more promising conception of language *does* allow for the coherent positing of the unrestricted existential quantifier, thus arguing in favour of its use in defence of substantive metaphysics.

§3.4 stands, to a degree, apart from the negative dialectic that I engage in the rest of §3. The rest of §3 argued that the way that the deflationist's argue metaphysics and language are related is flawed; §3.4 attempts to replace this relationship with a new understanding, one that is consistent with substantive metaphysics. This is needed as it is not just enough to argue that the deflationist's or the anti-realist's arguments are flawed – the supporter of substantive realist metaphysics must also have some story as to how language and metaphysics are 'positively' related. §3.4 provides a schematic account of how this might be. Through the notion of a 'possibility space', I argue that metaphysics should be understood as the exploration of the possible ways reality might be, and that the remaining metaphysical possibilities that we are yet to rule out are a subset of the linguistic possibility space – that set of possibilities that are ruled out only in virtue of our logical laws, and the meanings of non-logical terms. This, I argue, allows us to conceive of metaphysics and language as consistent, whilst maintaining the substantivity of metaphysics, as it remains for metaphysics to delineate the domain of its own possibility space. §3.4 openly presupposes the legitimacy of metaphysics; but it is intended to only illustrate that, contra the deflationist, consideration of language need not lead to a non-substantive or anti-realist account of metaphysics.

This, in a sense, is the overall aim of this thesis: to, after clarifying the requirements to be classed as a realist, and a combination of the 'negative' dialectic against the deflationist and the 'positive' dialectic of the very last section, illustrate possible future lines of research into the relationship between language and metaphysics, especially in light of the scope for the empirical and theoretical findings of linguistics to argue for or against philosophical positions.

## Section I

### Realism and Truthmakers:

### An Alternative Characterisation of Realism

What is realism about the external world? One of the most striking aspects of the current debate is that no clear, let alone single, answer to this question shines through. In particular it is often hard to see what is supposed to be realism and what is supposed to be an argument for it (Devitt, 1991: 3).

The 'realism question' is one of the largest, unresolved, and fundamental issues in many different areas of philosophy, and indeed other branches of academia (perhaps most notably the question of scientific realism). Realism about the world is our starting point – it seems plausible that our pre-philosophical intuitions about the world are realist, though (philosophically) naïvely so. Base intuitions of course rarely, if ever, satisfy the philosopher, and so the question of realism, of its credentials as a viable and supportable philosophical position, soon developed, as part of a distinct philosophical cottage industry devoted to asking questions about realism – questions about whether the phenomena or entities posited within a field should be taken to exist independently of the theories that we use to discuss them. How though should we characterise realism, and how can we distinguish it from anti-realism? The aim of this section is to suggest a way in which we can give an answer to this question, and thus provide a heuristic through which we can categorise theories as realist or anti-realist.<sup>4</sup> This will therefore not be a definition of realism, anti-realism, or even the realism question; rather the aim is limited to a characterisation which will thus aid us in evaluating and understanding the proposals put forward on both sides of the debate. These are questions for metametaphysics, independent of any first-order

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<sup>4</sup> This does not necessarily rule out other ways in which the distinction can be explicated; only that the route to be supported here appears to be successful.

metaphysical theories that we might adhere to, and as such we must refrain from any first-order commitments that might beg the question against meta-level conclusions.

However, the realism question has not always been the same (see §1.11). The historical discussion offered here will note the rise of epistemological concerns in how we characterise the realism question. The remainder of §1.1 will build towards a first characterisation of realism, and the commitments that it requires, developed from a brief overview of some of the literature on the debate. However, it will be noted that this characterisation is far from complete, nor will this be the characterisation that I wish to support, relying as it does on an as yet unspecified notion of truth. For this reason it is necessary to also be clear on some issues concerned with theories of truth. As we will see, theories of truth and the metaphysical realism debate have a long and intertwined history, with the coherence or incoherence of a certain theory of truth often taken to decide between competing *metametaphysical* positions concerning realism and anti-realism (§1.2). I will argue that this need not be the case, arguing for neutrality between realism and theories of truth (§1.3). The recent trend to reject substantive theories of truth, as seen by the popularity of deflationary theories of truth, might leave the status of metaphysics in a strange position. Though no longer bound by theories of truth that could be easily attacked, the metaphysical realist faces problems in harnessing deflationary theories of truth in order to define their realism. Furthermore, in line with our expressed neutrality between realism and truth, there is no contradiction between holding a deflationary theory of truth and realist or anti-realist views. Deflationism, thus, cannot do the philosophical work that substantive theories of truth previously did to characterise the realism/anti-realism divide. It is for this reason that I propose that through a version of truthmaker theory (one stripped of any built in adherence to realist metaphysics)<sup>5</sup> we can re-characterise realism and anti-realism productively, and independently of any particular theory of truth (§1.4 and §1.5). The truthmaking account of how we should characterise realism and anti-realism will not only appropriately distinguish between various forms of realism and anti-realism, but also restore to prominence the ontological nature of the realism

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<sup>5</sup> In its original guise truthmaker theory was arguably a re-phrasing of correspondence theory of truth, but truthmaker theory need not be viewed in this way (cf. §1.4).

question over the epistemological nature of the realism question understood through theories of truth.

It should be noted that the ‘realism’ under consideration here is of a global kind. One way of understanding the idea of realism could be to think that someone is a realist about Fs if they take Fs to exist mind-independently and an anti-realist if they deny that Fs exist, or that the Fs that exist are not mind-independent. Consider, for example, two philosophers: ontologist A accepts in their ontology only tropes, ontologist B only universals, both of whom holding that the existence of the entities is mind-independent.<sup>6</sup> We could say that A is an anti-realist about universals, and B is an anti-realist about tropes, as both deny the mind-independent existence of one class of entities, either the class of tropes or of universals. Under this conception of realism and anti-realism, we get a very localised notion of what it is to be a realist, and most ontologists would be realists and anti-realists on this account. There is nothing inherently incorrect about this way of understanding realism, however the notion to be discussed here is a broader one where the realist will be someone who accepts that there is at least one kind of mind-independent entity (along with other demands that will be the subject matter of this section). Both the supporter of tropes, A, and universals, B, will thus be realists; an anti-realist will in some way deny the existence of *any* kinds of entities that are mind-independent. Any single class or kind of entities that satisfy the realist characterisation offered here will suffice to make those claims realist, independently of other possible denials (most likely for first-order metaphysical concerns that do not come under the scope of this work) of other classes or kinds of entities, that might otherwise, on their own, be sufficient to make a claim a realist one.

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<sup>6</sup> The notion of mind-independence will be covered in detail later in this section. The basic idea will be that the existence of Fs is mind-independent iff Fs can exist without anyone ever thinking or believing in them. Fs are mind-dependent iff the existence of Fs relies on someone thinking or believing in their existence. I am grateful for comments from Jonathan Lowe on this understanding of mind-independence.

## 1.1 What is the 'Realism Question'?

The term 'realism' has perhaps inspired more philosophical literature and discussion than any other within the field – the philosophical term that has launched a thousand theories and counter theories. Almost all, if not actually all, branches of philosophy have produced literature that revolves around their specific question of realism. With so many arguments flying around it is often unclear quite what realism is meant to be, and by extension what anti-realism is meant to be. Certainly an overall *definition* of realism appears to be extremely difficult (if it is even possible). An initial characterisation of realism could follow Devitt as the position that defends “something so apparently humdrum as the independent existence of the familiar world” (1991: vii). This *prima facie* simple idea though, as Devitt acknowledges, does little justice to the huge range and kinds of different theories and positions that all claim to be realist: Haack (1987) lists nine; Horwich (1982) and Putnam (1982) three each. I will not try to provide a definition of realism; I will limit my endeavour to a characterisation, and only a characterisation of one particular realism debate. I limit myself to the realism question in the domain of metaphysics. This is not to deny that other notions of realism (those within other domains, philosophical, scientific, or any sort) have an impact on the metaphysical debate. A *complete* characterisation of realism would of course have to bring these disparate strands together, and this aim was the focus of significant works in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Dummett for example often emphasises the similarities between forms of realism and anti-realism from different domains,<sup>7</sup> but it is not always clear how far such similarities go. Horwich, when trying to clarify what the problem of realism is, notes that:

In the philosophy of mathematics we argue about whether there really are such things as numbers; in the philosophy of science the issue concerns theoretical entities such as electrons and Chomskian I-languages; in metaphysics one wonders if there are presently any facts about what will happen in the future; and of course there is the ultimate question of realism: does the external world exist at all? (1996).

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<sup>7</sup> For an example, see especially the introduction to Dummett 1991; see also Devitt 1991.

It would be a grand and impressive achievement indeed were a satisfactory account given that could tie together such varied debates, as well as encompassing the at least equally varied forms of anti-realism that have been developed in response to the realist (whether they have either rejected specific realist arguments, or have alternatively sought to dissolve the entire debate). It may be possible to give a general theory of realism and anti-realism: I remain neutral here on whether an account can be adequately developed, and therefore I leave that work to a later date. My focus will be on the realism/anti-realism debate as it appears in the metaphysical literature, concerning the nature and existence of reality, and our epistemic access to reality. As will become clear, in this section I take as the starting point the 'ultimate question of realism' (as Horwich puts it), sketching out how this question about the existence of the external world changed into the current debate in metametaphysics where the question of realism is often taken to be about our epistemic access to reality rather than concern over its existence. The hope in this section will be that a minimal working characterisation or heuristic can be developed that will adequately sort realist and anti-realist theories into their respective position on the realism/anti-realism spectrum. Heil (1989: 65) comments that "It would be a mistake... to imagine that there is some one univocal anti-realist doctrine. Anti-realisms are at least as abundant as anti-realists. At best one can endeavour to identify anti-realist phyla." It is in the spirit of this sort of identification, across both sides of the debate, that this section will proceed, with the goal that truthmaking may provide one such route; providing phyla to distinguish realism from anti-realism.

It should be noted that even this modest aim to cover all the views that have been described as anti-realist (or perhaps more loosely as sceptical as to the *philosophical* enterprise of metaphysics) may not be achievable. Barnes, on the possible objections to metaphysics, states the anti-realist options as,

[I]f metaphysics is a robust enterprise, trying to describe the nature of objective reality, then surely its questions are better answered by physicists. If it's a more modest enterprise, trying to describe our concepts, then surely its questions are better

answered by philosophers of language and philosophers of mind. If it's a domain where multiple answers are on equally good footing and the disputes are merely verbal, then surely its questions are better left unasked. (2009)

Lowe makes similar distinctions between categories of anti-realisms, divided into relativism, scientism, neo-Kantianism, and semanticism (1998: 3). The historical origination and the eventual characterisation on offer here will focus on the latter two responses to metaphysics in Barnes' trio; the first, third and fourth in Lowe's account. How far this characterisation will cover the 'scientism' objection is an open question. Scientism is not necessarily an anti-realist position; some who call themselves realists, favour such a view.<sup>8</sup> There is certainly a sense in which scientism does not reject the questions of the metaphysicians in a way that the other objections do. The supporter of scientism thinks that metaphysical questions are valid, but that philosophers are not best placed to solve them – physicists (for example) are. Importantly the answers to metaphysical questions that the supporters of scientism propose have the characteristics that will be identified as necessary to be a realist position. I do not wish to support such a view (I agree with Lowe that such views presuppose metaphysical positions, 1998: 6); but this issue seems to be one of the preferred metaphysical methodology and the role of science in philosophy rather than about realism and anti-realism.

### **1.11 The Historic Question: Aristotle, Idealism and the Rise of Epistemology**

Aristotle gives an initial definition of metaphysics as “a science which investigates being as being and the attributes which belong to this in virtue of its own nature. Now this is not the same as any of the so-called special sciences; for none of these treats universally of being as being” (Metaphysics IV, 1003a, 21-24). Metaphysics, for Aristotle, is thus continuous with the sciences, itself being a ‘science’, one that

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<sup>8</sup> See Ladyman and Ross 2007 for a good example of this view, and further references. See also Ross, Ladyman, and Kincaid 2013 for defences of so-called ‘naturalised metaphysics’, a view similar to scientism as I have understood it here.

investigates being at the most general level. However, as we shall see, a typical understanding of the history of western philosophy is that anti-realism developed once the scepticism introduced by Descartes was rejected by Kant with the cost of rejecting metaphysical realism also. Anti-realism of this sort, stemming from the inadequacy of correspondence theories of truth (see §1.2), seems to get only a very short treatment from Aristotle despite the existence of contemporary sceptics;<sup>9</sup> realism seems to have largely been accepted by (almost) all.

Certainly it could be argued that prior to Kant the idea of anti-realism was not taken that seriously, as seems to have been Aristotle's view. The debates within the realm of what we today would call metametaphysics were not the same as in the literature today. Jack Davidson goes so far as to comment that "[m]any philosophers believe antirealism to be a relatively recent metaphysical doctrine, certainly not endorsed by any thinker prior to Kant" (1991: 147); Putnam that "It [antirealism] is a late arrival in the history of philosophy, and even today it keeps being confused with other points of view of a quite different sort. [...]The theory that truth is correspondence is certainly the natural one. Before Kant it is perhaps impossible to find any philosopher who did not have a correspondence theory of truth" (1981: 49, 56). Pre-Kant, the debate was between, on the one side, those who broadly follow the naïve realist tradition, with its foundations tracing back to Aristotle, who assumed that our perception of the world (broadly) mirrored its external structure; and, on the other side, forms of idealism, wherein all that we experience is the creation of our minds, perhaps most famously proposed by Berkeley. The dialectic has shifted from this realism/idealism divide though. Similarly, the debate between empiricists and rationalists in early modern western philosophy is not the debate that occurs within metametaphysics post-Kant. The empiricism versus rationalism debate is inherently metaphysical<sup>10</sup> in that it is concerned with the correct methodology for discussing and

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<sup>9</sup> See the first chapters of the 'Metaphysics' for Aristotle's discussion of such scepticism. Interestingly there are perhaps some similarities between the scepticism Aristotle argued against, and those that reappeared within western philosophy with Descartes. Cf. Williams 2010 for a discussion of this idea, and for a discussion of how the scepticism contemporaneous with Aristotle was of a more 'practical' kind than that which Descartes introduced, such as 'Pyrrhonian scepticism' of Sextus, aimed towards achieving peace of mind.

<sup>10</sup> See below for some caveats to this claim – the aim here is not scholastic, rather it is concerned with picking out the features that have influenced the varying thoughts and views on the nature of metaphysical investigations.

describing the structure and nature of reality; we must be careful not to read today's realism question into these claims. There is a unifying feature of both the realists and idealists, and the empiricists and the rationalists: *all four assume that they are discussing and describing the nature of reality*; there was no claim that their statements did not apply to reality (though see the caveat below). The debate was instead over what sorts of entities made up the world (independent and external entities, or mental constructs), and how it was that we came to know about the world, already assuming that we can (through experience, or a priori reasoning). Neither reality itself nor our access to it were in doubt. The appearance-reality distinction, prominent through Descartes' radical scepticism, a move that made the subject matter of philosophy, and in particular metaphysics, the given world beyond appearances was the dominant philosophical idea (and arguably in a certain form still is). The main question facing the metaphysician under this conception, therefore, is how is it that we can escape the realm of mere appearances? Descartes' scepticism re-characterised the philosophical enterprise. Aristotle's appeal to isomorphism of (certain parts) of language with reality (cf. *The Categories*), from Descartes onwards, requires a justification, an epistemological justification that was not necessarily seen as needed before.

Though Descartes, and Locke, saw themselves as natural philosophers, and thus as scientists (though as with Aristotle before, the distinction between philosophy and science was not so great), the debates were concerned with the proper way for knowledge to be acquired, knowledge of reality through scientific research. This knowledge, though, concerned reality (even if reality was such that science provided such answers).<sup>11</sup> The philosophical debate can be read as about giving the limits of knowledge, and through those limits, giving an account of the limits of reality. It should be noted that this reading may be criticised as a recreation of the history of philosophy to legitimise metaphysics, restored as a domain by Quine, by seeing

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<sup>11</sup> Indeed this reliance on science to provide answers to the nature of reality, and the relationship that such research has to a priori reasoning, suggests further metametaphysical questions vis-à-vis the methodology of metaphysics and its relationship with scientific research, a topic of enquiry we have already briefly mentioned. The connection between a priori reasoning and scientific discoveries is, along with the realism question under consideration here and issues to do with the nature of grounding and fundamentality, one of the most significant questions within the domain of metametaphysics.

metaphysical questions and answers in the work of the early modern philosophers.<sup>12</sup> That this might be the case does not falsify the larger claim being made here: that epistemology grew in importance and centrality to philosophical work, and, as we shall see, this has led to the recent neo-Kantian objections (clothed in philosophy of language) in the metametaphysical literature today. The aims of this work are not within the scope of the history of philosophy; the reading offered is significant as it is the reading of the work of the early modern philosophers that has led to the current debates in metametaphysics, and in particular the form of anti-realism that will be the focus of sections two and three, irrespective of the initial intentions of the early modern philosophers themselves.

We must also be clear about the place and claims of idealism in the history of philosophy. A first, common, attempt to describe metaphysical realism is in terms of an investigation into the deepest nature of reality. Metaphysics is thus characterised along the lines of “the systematic study of the most fundamental structure of reality” (Lowe, 1998: 2);<sup>13</sup> but note that this is what Berkeley was also doing. Berkeley’s ontology contained only mental entities rather than any appeal to ‘external reality’ – a scepticism about the existence of the external world. Berkeleyan idealism did not deny access to reality – it simply held that all that reality was, was mental – it is an ontological claim about the entities that are part of reality, with no external entities being part of reality. For the idealist, there is nothing beyond our mental constructs, and thus *a description of such constructs is a description of the fundamental structure of reality*. Berkeley’s aims were thus importantly different to mine here. Berkeley was engaging in ontology building, making first order metaphysical claims, even though idealist ones.

Idealism is not the main interest here – the importance of it comes in recognising that the anti-realist claim today is not idealism. In (what I will argue is)

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<sup>12</sup> See Hinzen 2006 for an alternative account of the history of philosophy, and the relevant references.

<sup>13</sup> Armstrong 1997, 2010; Lewis 1983 also use the notion of metaphysics as inquiry into the ‘fundamental structure of the world/reality’. Metaphysical questions may also posit or make use of non-fundamental entities, but fundamentality lies at the heart of the metaphysical enterprise. The notion is commonly used but is not enough by itself to explicate what realist metaphysics is.

anti-realist positions today,<sup>14</sup> reality is posited, but our access to it is denied. The fall of idealism, largely due to Kant, changed the metaphysical realism question. Anti-realists prominent in the literature today go to great lengths to stress that theirs is not an idealist position: “Nothing is being said here to imply the idealist view that what exists in the world depends on our linguistic or conceptual decisions” (Hirsch, 2002b, reprinted 2011: 71). Therefore we must resist an attribution of idealism-as-anti-realism as an unfair characterisation of current rejections of metaphysics. To distinguish our interests here from the historic issues, we need to add an extra feature to the ‘study of the fundamental nature of reality’ characterisation. The addition comes from the claim that we are able to discuss the structure of reality as ‘external’ to us. For the anti-realist of today any metaphysical claims are only about the structure of, say, our minds, or our language, rather than that of some mind-independent or external world. The anti-realist today in their rejection of metaphysics most often denies *access* to reality, not the *existence* of the external world. As we shall see, the rejection of a certain account of metaphysics via idealism has been replaced by a contemporary anti-realism that does not go so far as to claim an external reality does not exist; only that we can say nothing of it.

This contemporary anti-realism is one that finds its source in Kant.<sup>15</sup> Kant saved some of his most damaging and harsh criticisms for the idealist position, dismissing idealism as incoherent. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant distinguishes between the sensible world that is accessible to us (the phenomenal realm), and the noumenal realm that consists of things-in-themselves, but that is inaccessible to us. Descartes and Locke had no issue with realism in the sense that we could discuss, or find out about (perhaps through science), reality; Kant, though, through the Copernican revolution, rules out our ability to know anything about the noumenal world, and thus anything about the putative subject matter of metaphysics vis-à-vis the fundamental nature of reality. Thus Kant attempted to put the epistemological

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<sup>14</sup> A full account of why I take such positions to be anti-realist will follow, and indeed the main conclusion of this section will be a way of understanding realism and anti-realism such that this division between what is realism and anti-realism can be motivated and supported. See in particular the discussion on the inadequacy of ‘stuff-ontology’ as a realist position in §1.121.

<sup>15</sup> This is not the place for Kant exegesis, or scholarly research – what follows is only an attempt to briefly sketch the source of today’s question of realism in metaphysics, and thus I follow what seems to be the most popular interpretation of Kant.

nail in the metaphysical coffin. Descartes may have shifted the focus of philosophy onto questions concerned primarily with epistemology and the justification of our claims, but it was Kant who first projected this far enough to reject metaphysics in its entirety due to epistemological concerns. As Kant states:

Long before Locke's time, but assuredly since him, it has generally been assumed that and granted without detriment to the actual existence of external things, that many of their predicates may be said to belong not to the things in themselves, but to their appearances, and to have no proper existence outside our representation. Heat, colour, and taste, for instance, are of this kind. Now, if I go further, and for weighty reasons rank as mere appearance the remaining qualities of bodies also, which are called primary, such as extension, place, and in general space, with all that which belongs to it (impenetrability or materiality, space, etc) – no one in the least can adduce the reason of its being inadmissible... *All the properties which constitute the intuition of a body belong merely to its appearance.* (Prolegomena, § 13, Remark II)

Kant's move therefore is to place all properties that we can be aware of, including those that are the necessary conditions for thought (such as space and time), within the realm of 'appearances', within the phenomenal world. This is not a move to idealism: the phenomenal world is not all that exists, as the noumenon is real, but, contra Locke, even primary qualities of an entity are restricted to the phenomenal – our access is limited to the phenomenal, with the noumena inaccessible. Kant's noumena are the 'fundamental level', the putative subject matter for metaphysical enquiry, and hence, given their inaccessibility, Kant's own rejection of metaphysics. However, the emergent question is, granting that we accept that an external reality exists, can we say anything about it? Is there some way that we can reliably talk about

such a reality, and if we can, how can we know which statements are true and which false?<sup>16</sup>

### 1.12 The Realism Question of Post Kant

In light of Kant's claims, the realism question in metaphysics became about whether the metaphysical theories that we posit can hope to describe the objective and fundamental structure of reality, or whether such aims are in principle impossible to achieve. This position found new favour and strength from a distinction between the 'metaphysical thesis' of realism and the 'epistemological thesis' of realism, encouraged by the linguistic turn. The old metaphysical thesis of realism – the question of whether the external world exists, Horwich's 'ultimate question of realism' – was dropped. The 'epistemological thesis' of realism rose in its place, with the question concerning the way that we might be able to know about reality independent of the way that we contingently think and our means of expression. From this question, "[a]nti-realism is characteristically supported from the inside out. One begins by asking, for instance, what is required for a sentence to have a definite truth value or a thought to have a particular content. It turns out that plausible answers to such questions pose problems for a range of realist theses. Realism is, in consequence, rejected in favour of an anti-realism uncommitted to the troublesome theses" (Heil 1989: 68). Kant's work may have laid the groundwork for such anti-realisms,<sup>17</sup> but it was the (logical) positivists and then the linguistic turn that popularised them. For, if (all) philosophical questions reduce to questions about language and our linguistic choices, then realist metaphysics suffers, as answers relative to a particular language are insufficient to be included in the study of the fundamental structure of reality. The prevalent dominance of the philosophy of language in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is merely the chosen cloth over a neo-Kantian objection to the epistemic access to reality that the metaphysical realist posits. These neo-Kantian objections appeared with the re-emergence of metaphysics as a domain, something

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<sup>16</sup> It may at first glance appear that this would largely be a concern within epistemology. However, it has, since Kant, been taken to be a particular problem for the metaphysician, with the epistemological grounds for metaphysics being of particular concern and opacity.

<sup>17</sup> Devitt comments that "Kant's idea that we make the known world was dominant in the nineteenth century. In its relativistic form the idea is ubiquitous in the twentieth century. It has some claim to being the most influential bad idea in philosophy" (1991: 236).

normally accredited to Quine's seminal paper 'On What There Is?' (1948). The history of western philosophy (or more precisely the reading of the history discussed here) is relevant to explain how, following Quine's paper, a certain form of anti-realism, clothed in philosophy of language, developed – §2 will discuss this development from Quine to the present day in more detail. As such, the notion of language here is not dissimilar to the Carnapian notion of metaphysical claims being relative to a "framework" (Carnap 1950). More recent versions of these kinds of theses (cf. Hirsch 2011) have replaced that Carnapian notion with that of language-choice.<sup>18</sup>

This analysis of the history and development of the philosophical issues, as being the rise of epistemological problems, a claim that we have already mentioned here, is not without support. Rorty's analysis of the history of key questions within analytic philosophy also argues that philosophers have allowed epistemology to dominate our concerns: "The central claim of philosophy since Kant has been that the 'possibility of representing reality' was what needed explanation" (1980: 134*fn*).<sup>19</sup> Rorty follows Vaihinger in taking Locke to be the first figure to "have a clear consciousness that all metaphysical and ethical discussions must be preceded by epistemological investigations" (Vaihinger 1876: 84). Thus, "[a]fter Descartes [...], the appearance-reality distinction began to slip out of focus, and was replaced by the inner-outer distinction. The question 'How can I escape from the realm of appearance?' was replaced by the question 'How can I escape from behind the veil of ideas?'" (Rorty 1980: 160). Kant's rejection of the object as truthmaker, replacing it with the (in modern terminology, not Kant's) notion of a proposition, placed an epistemological veil in front of our experiences, making epistemology the most central aspect of philosophical investigations (or certainly at least with respect to the realism question). Kant's own solution to the epistemological veil was to place the

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<sup>18</sup> The relationship between language and metaphysical theories will be the starting point for a fuller discussion in the later sections of this work, in particular in responding to the anti-realist arguments that have been developed through a certain characterisation of the relationship. See sections two and three.

<sup>19</sup> Note that Rorty's focus is the mind-body problem rather than the realism question. However, as Rorty argues, the rise of 'philosophy-as-epistemology' covers much if not all of analytic philosophy. Note also, I do not wish to draw the same conclusions as Rorty, who famously uses this analysis to reject much analytic philosophy as based upon an unjustified distinction between the given and the non-given, and the necessary and the contingent. I reject Rorty's conclusion but agree with his account of the development of philosophy, particularly the influence of Kant upon the pre-existing Cartesian philosophy.

conditions for sensible representations within our own minds, as the principles of pure understanding (space; time). Prominent anti-realists in the literature today (who will be the focus of investigation in sections two and three) merely clothe this solution to the Kantian epistemological thesis with a linguistic covering: “the contemporary notion of philosophy of language as ‘first philosophy’ is not so much a change from the older claim that epistemology was ‘first’ as a minor variant upon it” (Rorty 1980: 134*fn*). We can therefore respond to the question ‘How can I escape from behind the veil of ideas?’ by rephrasing the question as ‘How can I escape from behind the veil of language?’, with the current sceptic about metaphysics arguing that we cannot. The epistemological problems, that Kant made the central concern of the professional philosopher, are given a negative answer, we cannot escape from behind the veil, and thus metaphysical realism is labelled as empty of content. The claims are not false, for that would imply content; rather they are meaningless qua *metaphysical* claims about reality in-itself.

Categorising the development of the realism question as an epistemological thesis in light of the linguistic turn though may gloss over its ultimate metaphysical significance. Perhaps a more useful notion would be of the transcendental nature of the anti-realism originating in Kant, and maintaining its place in the post-linguistic turn language/semantic centred anti-realism.<sup>20</sup> Crucially, the *epistemological thesis has metaphysical conclusions*. The epistemological thesis questions our access to reality – our ability to produce a sentence that has a determinate and independent truth value; thus the normal anti-realist conclusion is that metaphysical statements are empty of content. This is a metaphysical conclusion, though a negative one, placing metaphysics, as traditionally conceived, outside the realm of our possible knowledge.

However this does not characterise the difference between a realist and an anti-realist, it only sharpens the original question from being about the existence of

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<sup>20</sup> Heil (1989) interestingly traces relativism-style objections (in the Carnapian tradition through Putnam) to American roots, and the linguistic or semantic based objections to a British school (from Wittgenstein through to Dummett). I cannot go into the reasons for the different objections to develop in the differing locations here; but all have significant epistemological aspects to them, using different philosophical tools to bring out similar objections (analysis of conceptual schemes; rejection of supposed realist staples such as truth, reference, bivalence, or objectivity; theories of meaning, to name only a few).

the external world, to being about whether a metaphysical assertion has a determinate truth value. The epistemological aspect of the realism question may suggest an initial dividing line: realists say that metaphysical claims can have determinate truth values; anti-realists say that they cannot. This characterisation though does not work. Kant's phenomenal world could contain claims that have determinate truth values, such as through the necessary conditions for sensible intuitions. Conceptual necessities may exist within our minds such that certain metaphysical claims do have a determinate truth value<sup>21</sup> – it may be, for example, a *conceptual* necessity that two objects spatially and temporally distinct can combine into a further object legitimately. The way to characterise realism as distinct from anti-realism becomes no clearer, and further work is needed to show what, in addition to thinking that a sentence has a determinate truth value, characterises the divide between realists and anti-realists. Similarly, we shall see that the notions of objectivity and non-triviality cannot bear the philosophical weight to distinguish realism from anti-realism.<sup>22</sup> It is the notion of independence (from our minds, or language) of the truth value that will be significant to the initial characterisation offered in this section, in addition to the notions of objectivity, determinacy, and non-triviality. This notion of independence from our minds or our language will be detailed more clearly later, but is intended to express the idea that the truth or falsity of the claim does not rely upon some conceptual or linguistic choice that we make. A claim that has a truth value that is independent of our minds or our language has that truth value due to some fact in reality, not some feature of our concepts, linguistic choice, or the meaning of terms. Dummett stresses the import of this notion of 'independence' in the recognition that:

[T]he realist and the anti-realist may agree that it is objective matter whether, in the case of any given statement of the class, the criteria we use for judging such a statement to be true are satisfied: the difference between them lies in the fact that, for the anti-realist, the truth of the statement can only consist in the satisfaction of these criteria, whereas, for the realist, the

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<sup>21</sup> This is not intended to be Kant's own claim, rather just an open possible position to take in the debate, though perhaps a Kantian metaphysics of experience could make such claims.

<sup>22</sup> See Chalmers' lightweight realism category below.

statement can be true even though we have no means of recognising it as true (1978:147).<sup>23</sup>

Sidelle further summarises this issue well, stating that:

What I submit is that, among these packages [metaphysical theories]... there can be no fact of the matter as to which *truly* describes the material ontology and persistence of things in the world. They can only be understood as different ways of articulating, extending and making coherent the combination of our ordinary judgements and theoretical ideas. But ... I don't see what in the world can *make* one true; or equivalently, while the theories plainly *differ*, I don't see how *that with respect to which they differ* can be understood as a factual matter (2002).

Often, anti-realists thus take metaphysical discussions to be misguided with the realist failing to appreciate that metaphysical expressions have different meanings when used in competing theories. The anti-realist could employ the much discussed 'cookie-cutter' metaphor,<sup>24</sup> wherein we, in our metaphysical theories, merely decide the shape of the world that we wish to 'cut out'. The world, as described by any given theory (assuming the internal consistency of the theory) trivially fits the claims of the theory, but there is no connection with reality itself as we could equally legitimately choose a differently shaped 'cookie-cutter'. The theory is therefore true in the sense that it accurately describes the world, but only because we have decided to carve

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<sup>23</sup> Perhaps this notion of independence can be fleshed out slightly further if we contrast it with the view that truth values only depend upon criteria that we decide (coherence theories; pragmatic theories etc), with no impact from reality-as-it-in-itself. Consider Goodman's claims (1978, 1980). Goodman holds that the world is our creation "not with our hands but with minds, or rather with languages or other symbol systems. Yet when I say that worlds are made, I mean it literally" (1980). For Goodman, the world and the truth of our statements *depend* on us, and only upon us. Goodman's should be recognised as an extreme version of anti-realism – not all anti-realists would wish to state with such sureness that we *literally* 'make stars' in our use of language! But the dependence of the nature of the world, of the truth of our sentences upon our language and concepts alone, will help provide us the tools to distinguish realism and anti-realism. The import of truth on the realism question will be discussed from §1.2 onwards.

<sup>24</sup> See Eklund 2008 for a good discussion of the use of the 'cookie-cutter' metaphor.

reality in that way.<sup>25</sup> The independence of the truth value therefore becomes a crucial component in the realism/anti-realism divide. It is worth noting that the importance of truth values to understanding realism and anti-realism goes hand-in-hand with the rise of epistemological concerns in philosophy – epistemology is after all concerned with questions about how it is that we know that something is true. It is therefore not surprising that the rise of epistemology has led to the realism question in the form that has been discussed in this section. This is one of a number of issues with understanding realism through truth that will be covered from §1.2 onwards, and will lead us to a theory based around the notion of truthmakers instead.

Prior to this though, we must have a developed idea of how it is that truth is taken to provide for the difference between realism and anti-realism. This section thus far has largely talked in generalities about realism and anti-realism, without providing a clear way to delineate between realist and anti-realist positions. Objectivity, determinacy, non-triviality, and independence have all been mentioned as important to the claims of the realist. No one of these notions is enough, but we must be clear on how they fit together. In order to build towards an initial characterisation of realism, I will look at two recent accounts: from Chalmers and Sider, noting how each of these links the important notions together. The concluding characterisation of realism in this section will attempt to draw together the findings from this section's overview of the literature, towards a first attempt of a characterisation.

### **1.121 Chalmers and Sider**

Chalmers (2009) distinguishes three categories of answers to the realism question. These differences rest on whether the assertion under consideration has an objective and non-trivial truth-value.

- 1) Anti-realists will argue that there is no objective answer to ontological questions; instead there will always be many different ontological frameworks, and the ontology that we

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<sup>25</sup> See the discussion on 'stuff-ontologies' below for a caveat to this.

develop will always be relative to a specific framework. Some frameworks will be more useful than others on certain occasions, but there is no fact of the matter as to which is 'correct'.<sup>26</sup> The anti-realist thus will hold that *no ontological assertions* will have an objective, determinate, and *non-trivial* truth value. Note that even a strong anti-realist may accept that assertions such as 'There are odd perfect numbers' can be taken to be determinately ontologically false as the assertion is trivially false; but there are no non-trivial ontological truths or falsehoods. Such trivially true or false claims lack objectivity, as they are grounded in subjective language frameworks, and have their trivially determinate truth values "largely independent of ontological reasoning" (2009: 93).<sup>27</sup>

2) 'Lightweight realists' differ from anti-realists in light of objectivity. Lightweight realists hold that there are objective answers to ontological questions; however these answers are trivial, grounded in conceptual truths, and not in the nature of the external reality. Thus a statement could be objectively true, in that it is not a matter of which conceptual scheme we choose that makes the claims true, but rather is grounded in the nature of *all possible conceptual schemes*. However, the truth value would still be trivial, in that the truth of the claim follows from the nature of the concept.

3) Lastly, 'heavyweight' realists hold that ontological answers are highly non-trivial, and, if correct, are accurate descriptions of reality as the description 'carves nature at its joints'. The heavyweight realist therefore considers the entities they posit

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<sup>26</sup> This line of objection comes from Carnap most famously. See §2 for a detailed exegesis of this sort of objection; and §3 for responses to it.

<sup>27</sup> Chalmers distinguishes this anti-realism from one that denies that numbers exist: "this form of anti-realism about numbers is a form of ontological realism about numbers" (2009: 93). See the earlier discussion of idealism and the pre-Kantian question of realism for a similar claim.

to be a description of the way that reality itself is (or at the least how it could be),<sup>28</sup> holding that ontological assertions have truth values that are objectively grounded in the nature of reality as it is in itself.

Chalmers' distinctions go some way to clarifying the range of positions available on the realism/anti-realism spectrum, resting the philosophical weight of the distinction on the notions of objectivity, and triviality. Chalmers does also include determinacy in his characterisations, but each of the three positions could accept that the truth-values their position allows for are determinate, relative to a conceptual scheme, all conceptual schemes, and reality respectively.

Chalmers' distinctions though are problematic. Classifying both the heavyweight and the lightweight positions as 'realist' produces radically different notions of realism dependent on which version we accept. The heavyweight realist position is far stronger than the lightweight position to the extent that there is little in common to warrant categorising them together. It would be hard to maintain that lightweight realists aim towards the basic characterisation we gave of metaphysics earlier as the study of the fundamental structure of reality, as a level distinct from the structure of our language or conceptual scheme.<sup>29</sup> Lightweight realism's truth evaluable ontological claims are not at the *fundamental* level. Interestingly, Chalmers persists with his tripartite distinction despite noting a connection between lightweight realism and anti-realism in that there is little reason why the anti-realist cannot accept the same claims as the lightweight realist. The trivial ontological claims that the lightweight realist accepts are grounded in conceptual truths; there seems to be little reason why the anti-realist could not also accept this. As Chalmers states, the "difference between lightweight realism and ontological anti-realism is in a certain sense semantic" (2009: 99). Lightweight realism though, by only accepting those ontological claims that could be viewed as truths due to the nature of our concepts,

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<sup>28</sup> I will return to whether metaphysics seeks to describe the way the world is, or ways that it could be in §3.

<sup>29</sup> Note that the possibility of idealism, and thus a scepticism about, or denial of, the existence of external reality has been left to one side – lightweight realism is not idealism. Granting this, we can see how the lightweight realist does not take ontological assertions to be correctly applying to the fundamental level of reality.

does not seem to maintain the *spirit of metaphysical realism*. All that lightweight realism would produce are descriptions of the conceptual scheme that we have, to be judged by the internal consistency of such a scheme. Some metaphysicians are happy to restrict the scope of metaphysics to conceptual analysis, a 'lightweight realism' attempting to discover conceptual truths or necessities (see Jackson 2000 for defence of such a view). However, as Lowe states, "ensuring the internal consistency of a conceptual scheme is too modest an aim [to be called metaphysics], because many mutually incompatible schemes could equally possess this feature" (1998: 6). Realism, or realism worth defending, must be a more ambitious and substantive view than mere conceptual analysis allows. Thus the independence characteristic of truth values, left out of Chalmers' account, needs to be part of our characterisation of the realism/anti-realism divide. Chalmers' tripartite divide appears to cut the debate in the wrong place, precisely because it does not recognise the importance of the *independence* of the truth value of a given sentence.<sup>30</sup> The anti-realist and lightweight realist can further be taken to be close in spirit to each other as both maintain a 'deflationary' conception of metaphysics, wherein we should recognise that the metaphysical questions being asked fall short of the standard the realist sets for them. Metaphysical questions therefore are not 'real', or 'deep', or 'genuine' in some way. As already noted, this deflationism may be motivated in different ways: metaphysical questions may merely be questions about our concepts, or our language. No deflationist position though would maintain the needed substantivity of metaphysical issues that the 'heavyweight realist' maintains.

Alternatively, Sider (2001a; 2001b; 2004; 2011) draws the distinction between realism and anti-realism as between those that take that world to be a world of stuff – the anti-realist – and those that take the world to be a world of things – the realist. Thus the sceptic about ontology accepts that we can create 'thing-languages', and

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<sup>30</sup> Consider a thought experiment wherein we imagine that Martians have a radically different conceptual scheme to ourselves. Under the lightweight realists' position, the ontological truths of our scheme could be different to the Martian's scheme. This would not maintain the intuition that ontological truths should be independent of *any one conceptual scheme*. This thought may rely on the possibility of different conceptual schemes (see Davidson 1974 for a rejection of this possibility). However, even if this scenario is impossible, the inability to maintain the independence intuition seems to place lightweight realism closer to anti-realism than heavyweight realism.

those languages differ in what things they take to exist;<sup>31</sup> but this does not correspond to ontological disagreement as the world is not made of things, rather it is made of stuff, with the distinctions that we draw between entities being by fiat. A 'stuff' ontology is not idealist, as the 'stuff' exists independently, and externally to us; but a 'stuff' ontology rules out being able to say anything about reality – the 'things' posited by ontological theories are a creation of our 'thing-languages' only, leading to anti-realism. Phrasing the distinction in this way equates the anti-realist and the lightweight realist positions described by Chalmers, further supporting eroding the difference between such positions. Sider therefore presents the difference between realism and anti-realism as a conflict/no-conflict distinction – the realist believing that there is genuine ontological conflict, whilst the anti-realist believes there is none. The conflict is cashed out in terms of the existential quantifier,  $\exists$ . Sider's realism denies "that there are multiple meanings for ' $\exists$ ', all of which are, in some sense, *kinds of unrestricted quantification*... I [Sider] claim that there is only one notion of quantification; Carnap disagrees" (2001b: xx -xxi). A thing-ontology<sup>32</sup> is independent to how we talk about it, and thus the truth of such claims does not rely on any linguistic or conceptual choices we make. A stuff-ontology in contrast can accept an infinity of equally good quantifiers, hence the truth of any ontology only comes from what we chose the 'thing-language' quantifiers over, making ontology rely on language choice.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> i.e. the languages quantify over different entities or categories of entities.

<sup>32</sup> With an ontology understood, in the Quinean tradition, as composed of those entities that we quantify over.

<sup>33</sup> Sider's talk of 'stuff' here needs to be qualified. The claims made here understand 'stuff' to be something akin to Dummett's 'amorphous lump' reality (1981). Dummett's lump reality is taken to be one where there are no real metaphysical joints, and thus that reality is some kind of amorphous lump that our concepts carve up into certain shapes. Thus this view is often characterised alongside the 'cookie-cutter' imagery. All the choices of cuts within this stuff are equal, based on our psychological, conceptual, or cultural biases. This is the view that Sider intends with his discussion of stuff. This must be distinguished from Horgan's 'stuff' ontology, wherein he argues that conceptual relativism understood through their notion of truth through 'contextual semantics' is entirely compatible with metaphysical realism (cf. Horgan and Timmons 2002). This sits alongside Horgan and Potrč's (2000) defence of 'blogjectivism' – the view that reality has no parts, though does have enormous local variability and spatiotemporal structural complexity. Thus the universe is really just one concrete particular. This could be interpreted as being a commitment to a 'stuff-ontology' given that it is our concepts, made true through the thesis of contextual semantics, that make a claim true, not reality itself – "Numerous statements employing posits of common sense and science are true, even though nothing in the world answers directly to these posits" (Horgan and Potrč 2000). Cf. also Horgan and Potrč 2008. The claims made here do not touch this view, and it is not this sort of 'stuff-ontology' that I intend to discuss here.

However, contra Sider, the anti-realist may still see different ontological frameworks as in conflict. Anti-realists may still debate about which 'thing-language' we should adopt. The criterion for deciding between them would not be metaphysical eligibility or whether they 'carve at reality's joints', but instead suitability for use, charitable interpretation, or other *non-metaphysical* axioms. The weight of Sider's claim therefore falls on the claim of the 'genuine' nature of ontological conflict. Sider's way of cashing this out is through the unrestricted existential quantifier. Though metaphysically interesting and is the notion that I defend in §3, for the purposes of *characterising* realism such a route unfairly presupposes a level of metametaphysical theorising. To be a realist on Sider's terms requires us to accept that his notion of an unrestricted existential quantifier is valid. Although I will be defending such quantifiers in §3, the realism/anti-realism distinction should not *depend* on the claim of the coherency of the unrestricted existential quantifier. It should, in principle, be possible for a realist position to be able to reject Sider's unrestricted existential quantifier, whilst maintaining realism. Even if it should turn out that this is not possible (that the realist's only available option is to defend the unrestricted existential quantifier), our realism/anti-realism distinction should not decide this a priori. Sider's distinction though does make the significant point that for the realist the world that we are discussing needs to be structured, with our ontological disagreements being about that structure – a stuff-ontology is not enough to support realism. Goodman accepts the existence of a 'stuff-world' – one “without kinds or order or motion or rest or pattern” (Goodman 1978: 20). Kant also would not have issue here.<sup>34</sup> Devitt comments that the existence of an unstructured 'stuff-world' would be an “idle addition to idealism” (1991:17). We must characterise realism as distinct from anti-realism in such a way that does justice to the realists' belief that statements about ordinary objects – 'medium sized dry goods' – have truth values that do not rely on the way that we think or speak about them, *and* that we can access, describe, and theorise about those properties. This would be a realism that was worth arguing for; a mere 'stuff-ontology' realism (contra idealism) would be of little use. Thus despite the stuff-ontologist's acceptance of some 'stuff' that exists

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<sup>34</sup> Indeed Kantian 'things-in-themselves' may even allow structure to the noumenal world, though we would never be able to know if this is the case.

independently, I take this to be insufficient to characterise realism; to be realist the categories that metaphysicians make claims about must be instantiated within reality as it is in-itself. As already noted in this section, this is the source of the distinction between anti-realism as it stands today opposing the contemporary realism, and idealism as a historic form of anti-realism. Sider's distinction between 'stuff-ontologies' and 'thing-ontologies' is therefore significant, and should be held in mind throughout the remainder of this section; but we still require a method to identify the commitments of a theory that does not rely on his metaphysical notion of the unrestricted existential quantifier.

### 1.122 A (Non-Quantificational) Alternative

One further way of characterising realism (to provide at least a partial outline of the competing literature) is Fine's (2001; 2009; 2012). Fine rejects quantificational approaches to ontology that have so far been the presumption within this section. Quantificational solutions to ontological questions were introduced by Quine in his seminal paper 'On what there is?' (1948; see also his 1960). This approach to ontology takes entities that are within the domain of the existential quantifier of a theory as the existent entities within that theory: as Fine notes, "[t]he commonly accepted view... is that ontological questions are quantificational questions" (2009: 158). Fine argues that quantificational questions are of a different and disconnected kind to ontological questions, with a wide gap in our understanding about the two forms of questions.<sup>35</sup> Quantification is replaced with a predication-centred view of the realism/anti-realism divide. Ontological questions of the sort ' $\exists x(x \text{ is } \dots)$ ' are rephrased as ' $\forall x(Fx \rightarrow Ex)$ ?' with an existential predicate. The realism/anti-realism distinction is then drawn between those that believe that  $Fx$  possesses the existence predicate or not. For example, a realist that posits tropes on this view would hold that there is some  $x$  such

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<sup>35</sup> Fine: "to make clear how far removed our understanding of the ontological question is from our understanding of their quantificational counterparts. Philosophers may have learned to live with the disconnect between the two, but their tolerance of the situation should not lull us into thinking that it is tolerable" (2009: 158). Fine makes many claims against the quantificational approach to ontology which I will not go into here. Note though that the anti-realism that I will specifically be countering in sections two and three assume a quantificational approach to ontology. For this reason, and the general dominance of quantificational views, the characterisation preferred here will be quantificational.

that  $x$  is a trope and that the predicate 'exists' applies to  $x$ ; the anti-realist would deny that  $x$  falls under the 'exists' predicate.

The anti-realist may of course respond that they do accept that  $Fx$  *exists*, but rather they reject that this 'existence' implies anything about the world in-itself, only telling us something about our concepts, thoughts, language, or theory instead. This consequence is avoided through the introduction of a 'thick/thin' distinction between forms of existence, wherein the term 'real' is reserved for the thick, ontologically substantive sense of exists.<sup>36</sup> I do not wish to spend too long on the merits of this non-quantificational approach to the realism question if only for the reason that the majority of theorists on both sides of the debate presuppose a quantificational approach. Insofar as a characterisation should cover as many current views as possible, it is pragmatically preferable to maintain a quantification-based account of ontological questions.

There are, however, two further, more philosophical, reasons to be suspicious of Fine's predication account. The first is not a major issue, but it remains for Fine to persuade us to reject the Kantian arguments against viewing existence as a predicate. Not being tied to such Kantian arguments, I do not see this as a major issue; rather only an issue that would be required to be overcome for a fully fleshed out predication account. The second is more troublesome. There is a worry that the anti-realist cannot be solely rejecting the view that the 'real' predicate applies to an entity without running the risk that their view falls into idealism. If anti-realism simply is the view that the 'real' predicate applies to no entities, then this would be hard to distinguish from a traditional account of idealism. This may be Fine's intention, to show precisely that anti-realism collapses into idealism; but the explicit denial of idealism by current anti-realists would mean that a very powerful argument would be required to show how those positions do collapse.<sup>37</sup> Whether to take a

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<sup>36</sup> It is slightly odd that such thick/thin distinctions, as part of the quantificational view (thick and thin senses of the quantifier), are criticised by Fine within his work, and yet is relied upon under his predication view also. I do not intend this as a criticism as I see no issue with the distinction. However it would require a detailed elaboration in order to support such a distinction, which cannot be given here.

<sup>37</sup> The proposal that will be developed later in this section around truthmakers steers clear of this potential problem; as such I find it favourable to Fine's view despite the latter's persuasive simplicity,

predicational or a quantificational approach is not a major issue for this section, in that the initial characterisation that will be offered in the next section stands independently of the mechanisms used to formulate the details.

### 1.13 An Initial Characterisation

So far, we have seen the problems with Chalmers' account of the realism/anti-realism distinction, and Sider's reliance on metaphysically loaded notions. However the importance of objectivity, determinacy, non-triviality, and independence has been noted. With this in mind, we can give a first tentative characterisation of realism as:<sup>38</sup>

R<sub>1</sub>: A metaphysical claim, C, is realist iff it is, when literally construed, true, and has a truth value which is (i) objective, (ii) determinate, (iii) non-trivial, and (iv) independent of our mental (cognitive) capacities.

(We could also include notions such as the distinction between 'deep' and 'shallow' questions. This is a popular distinction between realism and anti-realism in the current metametaphysics literature and I am not opposed to such terms – cf. the contributions in Chalmers et al. 2009 for more on these terms. I will stay clear of them for now only in the aim to not introduce new, potentially controversial terminology.) Anti-realism is therefore characterised as rejecting the possibility of meeting the requirements of this characterisation. Since the linguistic turn this rejection is often motivated through appeals to 'mere linguistic choice', in part from the relationship between the truth value of a sentence and our language. The main issue with this initial characterisation is that it relies on an (as yet) unspecified notion of truth. The very possibility of independent and determinate truth values of sentences are ruled out a priori on some theories of truth, or assumed under others. This link between realism and theories of truth has been (implicitly and explicitly) supported and rejected in the literature, mostly focusing on substantive theories of truth. I will briefly

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whilst attempting to leave open that Fine's view may be a plausible alternative characterisation. I see no reason why multiple characterisations of the realism/anti-realism divide could be developed.

<sup>38</sup> This is not intended nor should be taken to be a finished or even valid characterisation; indeed the flaws in this characterisation will inform the remainder of this section.

outline the historically strong links between realism/anti-realism, and certain theories of truth, before arguing in favour of neutrality between realism and theories of truth, thus breaking this apparent dependence of realism on theories of truth (§1.2; §1.3). The link between realism or anti-realism, and theories of truth cannot be explicated in complete detail of course. Only a sketch of the links often drawn between the two areas can be outlined here. Neutrality, though, will require a change in the way that we characterise realism and anti-realism. This characterisation will therefore instead rely upon a specific notion of truthmakers, one stripped of truthmaker theories' original tie to realism (§1.4; §1.5). This will not of course settle the realism/anti-realism debate – it is not intended to comment on the outcome of those arguments at all. The success of this claim will be whether it can satisfactorily show the commitments of a theory that mark it to be realist or anti-realist.

#### **1.14 Returning to the Metaphysical Thesis and the Epistemological Thesis**

One concern that needs immediate comment is that, in this initial characterisation, I have merged together two distinct problems - one epistemic and one metaphysical. This issue has already been raised to an extent but will need a little further elaboration. It has been shown that the epistemological question is distinct from the old realism question, but there remains the option to reject this epistemological issue completely on the putative grounds that it misses the metaphysical heart of the realism question. The separation of these two questions concerning realism is something that many philosophers believe very strongly in. Devitt (1991) springs to mind here, with his insistence that the two issues can and must be separated and that the anti-realism positions of which I have spoken may affect the epistemic problem, but leave the metaphysical one untouched.<sup>39</sup> The anti-realism discussed here would thus be rendered null and void. The positions may have some insight in them, but, insofar as their aim is to argue against *metaphysics*, they make no contact with the metaphysicians' claims. If this view is correct, then the characterisation I have offered

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<sup>39</sup> Devitt links the epistemological with the semantic also, but this addition plays no further role here. The use of semantics within the epistemologically based rejections of metaphysics comes from the influence of philosophy of language post the linguistic turn, which, as already noted, is merely the currently favoured way of expressing objections that are in the neo-Kantian spirit.

could also be rejected – it, after all, was responding to an inherently epistemological realism question, and thus the characterisation is similarly linked to the, for Devitt, uninteresting epistemological problem. There are two responses to be made here.

First, I do not agree with a very strong separation, for reasons that in part will already be clear. The old realism/idealism divide could have been said to be a purely metaphysical question about the nature of reality; but the question of realism that most concerns the *anti-realists* today is sometimes the epistemic one: we cannot read that shift in the question as indicative of too much. It is dyed in the wool realists that think that a mistake is being made if we do not separate off these issues. This is hardly surprising. The realist thinks that *all there is to discuss is the metaphysical question of what exists*. Our epistemic access is either taken for granted or avoided – given a promissory note for a solution later on. I have argued that this was the case under the pre-Kantian conception of metaphysics, but it seems that there is a tendency to retain this assumption or avoidance tactic. The metametaphysics of the realist is such that ‘epistemic access’ issues largely are ignored. This tendency exists for many reasons, and is not wholly unwarranted. The most prominent is that it is an unduly strict requirement for a discipline to solve all the epistemological and meta-discipline issues prior to beginning. This is not a requirement that somehow specially holds for those researching metaphysics. However, it is crucial to note that this does not solve the epistemological problem; it merely leaves it alone, unanswered. The realist can separate the metaphysical problem from the epistemological problem precisely because they often assume the epistemological problem does not exist,<sup>40</sup> but this separation is artificial. Devitt is entirely correct to note that it has been possible to see “epistemology lurking in the background” (1991: 4) of contemporary arguments against realism; but this insight only confirms where the problem today lies. The anti-realism of interest does not doubt the existence of the external reality, and thus accept that the purely metaphysical question has been solved (ironically, by the Kantian noumena).<sup>41</sup> The epistemological problem for metaphysics cannot be ignored

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<sup>40</sup> This will be discussed in more detail in §3; see the section discussing the nature of metametaphysics.

<sup>41</sup> It could be objected here that Kant’s noumena could not be said to exist as existence is for Kant a second order property of concepts; however as concepts are only non-empty should they connect with sense perception, the commitment to the noumenal world remains even if Kant would not have been happy with the use of ‘exists’ here.

completely, and at some point the anti-realist, who starts with the doubts about the coherency of the metaphysical programme, must be answered. This must happen because for the anti-realist the separation of the two problems is never complete.

Consider an analogy. Imagine a flaw was found in one part of the mathematics (one equation, or formula) that underpins a theory of physics. We would not throw out all physics, but the positions that relied upon that piece of mathematics would come into doubt. If the problem was serious enough, then we would be forced to reject it. Mathematics plays the role as the epistemological ground for our physics, and so if one part of that epistemological structure is flawed, then the conclusions reliant on it are too. Analogously, it is the specific epistemology of metaphysical claims that some anti-realists today doubt. Their arguments hold that the flaws in the epistemology are sufficient to reject the metaphysical claims reliant upon that epistemology. Thus there can be no clear separation between the metaphysical and epistemological questions for the anti-realist. It is of course open for the realist to continue to deny the problem; the physicist could deny the mathematical epistemological problem and continue to use the flawed equation or formula. Realists who take this route will not find much of interest in this work, but I assume that some realists will be interested in ensuring that the epistemology that the metaphysical claims rely upon is solid (at least insofar as objections to it are met).<sup>42</sup>

However, the second response on this issue takes a different line. Although I have just claimed that the separation between the epistemological and the metaphysical variants should not be taken as strongly as Devitt argues, this is not to claim that there is *no* separation. It is the reliance on truth, as shall be seen in the following sections, which blurs the lines between epistemological and metaphysical influences on the realism question. Truth is (at least partially) a matter for epistemological concern, hence the ease with which epistemological concerns can be brought to bear upon metaphysical realism and anti-realism. This weakness of

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<sup>42</sup> I trust I am not alone in this interest as a recent resurgence in metametaphysics will testify – Barnes notes that problems that would leave metaphysics a conceptual project (as the epistemological question would) “should, and often does, worry those working in metaphysics” (2009); see Chalmers, Manley and Wasserman (eds.) 2009; the Sider-Hirsch dialogue on the legitimacy of quantifier variance and the unrestricted existential quantifier for further examples of concern over the current anti-realism.

understanding realism and anti-realism through theories of truth – that it encourages the mistake to conflate epistemological concerns with metaphysical ones – is also one reason why the truthmaking account to be developed later in this section will be preferred here as characterising realism and anti-realism through truthmaking ensures that the distinction is one of ontology not epistemology.

This is not a wholly new claim. The need to restore ontology to the core of the distinction between realism and anti-realism has been noted by a number of figures. Fine states that “we need to restore ourselves to a state of innocence in which the metaphysical claims are seen to be about the subject-matter in question – be it mathematics or morality or science – and not about our relationship to that subject-matter” (2001: 7-8); Lowe that “the proper concern of ontology is not the portraits we construct of it [reality], but reality itself” (2006: 4). This implies the same move to stress the *ontological* distinction over the *epistemic* one. Fine and Lowe, though, do not use truthmaking as the tool to reach such an ontology based conception of realism and anti-realism as I will.

## 1.2 The Neutrality of Truth

From the above discussion, we can see that theories of truth have become central to the metaphysical realism debate – Dummett states: “the dispute [between realists and anti-realists] thus concerns the notion of truth appropriate for statements of the disputed class” (1978: 146);<sup>43</sup> Leplin (1984: 1-2) lists ten characteristics he takes to be common in realist claims, almost all of which make use of theories of truth or reference. The debate is meant to be concerned with realism, but has often, implicitly or explicitly, been at the mercy of the validity of a certain theory of truth. The underlying assumption appears to be that in order to understand what a realist position is, with its epistemological concerns, we must have a fully developed and supporting theory of truth. Likewise, to take an anti-realist position would be to assume that the author has a relevant anti-realist leaning theory of truth. As Asay

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<sup>43</sup> This passage continues “and this means that it is a dispute concerning the kind of meaning which these statements have.” Dummett ties realism and anti-realism to theories of meaning, but truth still plays a central role in the claims, albeit a specific notion of truth that cannot be separated from theories of meaning.

(2011: 189) notes, historically at least, the theory of truth that was accepted often presupposed a position on the realist/anti-realist spectrum; Putnam states that “[t]hat one could have a theory of truth which is neutral with respect to epistemological questions, and even with respect to the great metaphysical issue of realism versus idealism, would have seemed preposterous to a nineteenth-century philosopher” (1978: 9). Realism and anti-realism were, in effect, *defined* through the adopted theory of truth – truth was non-neutral towards realism. From Putnam, we can also see how, when understood through theories of truth, epistemology is placed in a central position within the realism/anti-realism debates. If Putnam is correct and theories of truth cannot be epistemologically or metaphysically neutral, then it follows that our metaphysics cannot be epistemologically neutral, as our favoured theory of truth brings epistemology with it. Asay (2011: 188-198; 2012) documents how this conflation of realism and truth need not be the case through a detailed discussion of the possibility of combining various different theories of truth with both realist and anti-realist positions. I will not replicate his work here, instead only giving a broad historical overview, including briefly showing how realism and anti-realism should not be tied to certain prominent substantive theories of truth, before directly arguing for neutrality between theories of truth and realism/anti-realism. I will then consider deflationary theories of truth, arguing that a commitment to conceptual deflationism and consequently neutrality makes deflationary theories of truth unable to support the distinction between realism and anti-realism (§1.3). The aim therefore is to draw a distinction between truth and realism such that we no longer need to define realism through truth. This is not a completely new claim, nor is it a non-controversial one (see Asay 2011: 190-1). A neutral view on theories of truth and realism will act as the groundwork for arguing that a version of the truthmaker theory, suitably stripped of its own sometimes-assumed connections to realist metaphysics, can serve to explicate the realism/anti-realism distinction in metaphysics, leading ultimately to a revised version of R<sub>1</sub>.

There has arguably been a connection between metaphysical realism and the correspondence theory of truth as far back as Aristotle through to the modern day.<sup>44</sup> Correspondence is often taken to presuppose realism, for if our assertions are true due to corresponding to reality, then we must have epistemic access to reality. Indeed it has been assumed by some that not only does correspondence entail realism, but that realists must accept correspondence.<sup>45</sup> Anti-realist arguments have thus often focused on discrediting the correspondence theory of truth (Putnam's 'brain-in-a-vat' thought experiment being one notable example, 1981). On the other hand, a coherence theory of truth is taken to presuppose a form of anti-realism when applied to metaphysical discussions. Truth as coherence appears to be inconsistent with the existence of an epistemically accessible external world in the way that metaphysical realists usually require. As Putnam puts it: "'Truth'... is some sort of (idealized) rational acceptability – some sort of ideal coherence of our beliefs with each other and with our experiences as those experiences are themselves represented in our belief system" (1981: 49-50). The supposed link between a coherence theory of truth and metaphysical anti-realism is clear. As with the arguments against correspondence designed to show the fallacy of metaphysical realism, objections to coherence theories often also claim to discredit anti-realism. McGinn (2002) for example argues that basing truth in coherence of beliefs to one another leads to idealism – a position that few would want to argue for today, and thereby arguing against coherence in a way that assumes non-neutrality. Non-neutrality is held across both realism (see particularly Kitcher 2002), and anti-realism (Arthur Fine details how anti-realist often import favoured theories of truth; see his 1984a, 1984b, 1986, and see Dummett 1978, 1982 for an anti-realist non-neutrality of a different kind).

However, we can follow Horwich (1996) in rejecting any definition of truth that presupposes an account of realism.<sup>46</sup> It requires more than just acceptance of a correspondence theory of truth to be a realist – "Correspondence theories themselves

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<sup>44</sup> See *De Anima*, Book III, Ch. 7. Aristotle held that certain parts of our speech corresponded to reality in that only certain parts of our speech picked out metaphysically real entities. This can be taken as a classic formulation of the correspondence theory.

<sup>45</sup> Ellis states that "most scientific realists... see acceptance of a correspondence theory of truth as being essential to their positions" (1985: 50-1). Although Ellis' claim is about scientific realism, the thought that realism requires correspondence can be carried over to metaphysical realism also.

<sup>46</sup> Horwich, in part, does this to argue in favour of deflationism. This will be discussed below.

do not entail that certain elements of reality – the elements that are relevant to realism – exist” (Asay 2011:194). Devitt also makes this claim – “[correspondence theory of truth] is still distant from Realism, because it is silent on the existence dimension” (1991: 42), holding that we can only derive realism from correspondence if we assume a significant realist premise, namely that certain entities do in fact exist. This extra requirement shows that correspondence theory is in fact insufficient for realism. This is firstly the case as in order to derive realism, we must firstly assume that the sorts of entities that our true claims correspond to are those the realist will endorse. But with this, we “have derived Realism from a Correspondence Truth by adding half of it to a Correspondence Truth” (Devitt 1991:42). Correspondence theory must be added to realism with realism already fully formed to maintain the link between the two. Furthermore, we could plausibly accept some form of error theory about metaphysics, whilst maintaining correspondence theory. This surely should be regarded as a form of anti-realism, despite maintaining a commitment to correspondence, for the domain of metaphysics would contain no truths. An anti-realist who denies the epistemic accessibility of reality (as the putative domain of metaphysical discourse) can thus combine this rejection of metaphysics with a correspondence theory of truth if it was held that there are no truths. As we shall see in the discussion of Armstrong’s theory of truthmakers later, the reason for the link between realism and correspondence is because correspondence is taken to presuppose the existence of the truthmakers needed to make some things true. Rejecting correspondence is therefore not enough to reject realism, as correspondence is in fact neither necessary nor sufficient for realism.

Davidson also rejects this traditionally assumed connection between realism and theories of truth, stating that, “[r]ealism, with its insistence on radically nonepistemic correspondence, asks more of truth than we can understand; antirealism, with its limitation of truth to what can be ascertained, deprives truth as its role as an intersubjective standard” (1990: 309). Asay comments that Davidson’s claim is that correspondence theories were linked to realism and coherence to anti-realism in order to ward off scepticism (Asay 2011: 190). However, the problem for Davidson with this linking of truth and realism is that both correspondence and coherence theories of truth *invite* a scepticism, not warding it off. Coherence theories

reduce “reality to so much less than we believe there is”; whilst correspondence theories “deny that what is true is conceptually connected in any way to what we believe” (1990: 298-299).<sup>47</sup> Neither theory of truth satisfies Davidson’s strict demands from the concept (that it both maintain the connection to reality, and connect to our conceptual scheme) and therefore should be rejected. This is not the place to discuss whether Davidson’s conception of truth is correct (I wish to remain neutral on theories of truth); however it is worth noting that Davidson links traditional realism and anti-realism this closely to correspondence and coherence respectively. The criticism of theories of truth to be drawn out from Davidson’s work is that the theories fail precisely *because the associated metaphysical views combine with the theory of truth to lead to damaging scepticism*, and it is for this reason that Davidson rejects the ‘traditionally’ conceived notions of realism and anti-realism. For a Davidsonian, therefore, the apparent non-neutrality of theories of truth is enough to reject those theories, and thus enough to reject any characterisation of realism and anti-realism that relies on a theory of truth. (For reasons discussed in the footnote above, it is unclear how far Davidson reconstructs the realism/anti-realism debate. I leave this

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<sup>47</sup> Note that Davidson has for separate reasons rejected deflationary theories of truth, in part due to what he takes to be a misreading of Tarski at the heart of the motivation for deflationism (see his 1990). Davidson notably takes truth to be a primitive, rejecting other options available. For more general discussions on the merits of primitivism see, amongst others, Russell 1904, Frege 1956, Merricks 2007, Lowe 2007; 2009b, Wiggins 2002, and McGinn 2000. Davidson’s views are difficult to fit into the debate about realism and anti-realism. Truth for Davidson cannot be analysed further, though we can through Tarskian schemas provide a way to apply the unanalysable general concept – “all such theories [that try to define or analyse truth] either add nothing to our understanding of truth or have obvious counterexamples” (1987). Davidson in part rejects correspondence and coherence due to the metaphysical consequences of realism and anti-realism respectively (see his 1990 and 1983, especially the ‘Afterthoughts’ 1987, reprinted 2001). In places (1969, reprinted 1984) Davidson states that nothing useful and intelligible can be said to correspond to a sentence. He since retracted this idea taking it to be a mistake (1987), though still rejects correspondence as a misguided attempt to explain or analyse truth in a way that is not feasible. Coherence theories are rejected as consistency is not sufficient for truth, and due to a tendency for coherentists to take truth as a construct of thought (1990; 1987). For Davidson therefore, “truth is not an epistemic concept, neither is it wholly severed from belief (as it is in different ways by both correspondence and coherence theories)”, and “[w]hat saves truth from being ‘radically non-epistemic’ (in Putnam’s words) is not that truth is epistemic but that belief, through its ties with meaning is intrinsically veridical” (1987). Davidson’s *metaphysical* view therefore is unclear, and it is not something that he sees as a major concern. I read Davidson, cautiously, as a realist, due to the need for truth to be more than an epistemic concept and belief to be veridical, though clearly this realism would not be founded on a theory of truth and I am in agreement with Davidson on this thought. What exactly Davidson’s metaphysical commitments are is an interesting issue, but one that I will have to set aside here.

issue aside here as it does not directly bear on the issue of the non-neutrality of truth in the traditional understanding of realism and anti-realism.)

Non-neutrality, we have seen, assumes that we require a theory of truth to get from our claims of truth to reality. However, this need not be the case. Quine notably makes this move through his notion of ontological commitment, not through a theory of truth (1948; 1953). Devitt (1991: 39-50) provides many reasons why it is a mistake to hold to non-neutrality. The most significant of these, I find, is in holding too much weight to the epistemological aspects of the realism issue. Connecting realism to truth provides us with a *prima facie* simple way to solve this epistemological realism question. This has particularly been the case with the rise of the importance of the philosophy of language. Dummett, throughout a series of works (see his 1978, 1982, 1991), is a good example of non-neutrality reached through an enhanced concern with the philosophy of language. Dummett, in the paper 'Truth' (1959), semanticised the issue of metaphysical reality. We have already noted how Dummett was a key figure in the post-linguistic turn move to cash out realism in epistemology; the extension of this thesis leads Dummett to the view that realism is just the "acceptance, for statements of the given class, of the principle of bivalence", arguing that bivalence is not "sufficient for realism, but it is necessary for it" (1982: 55). The strong non-neutrality of Dummett is clear, and understandable. Once realism was framed as a question about *knowing* (as argued in §1.1), and the influence of philosophy of language recognised, then to phrase the problem in the way that Dummett does to be about truth is a clear route to take. However, not only does Dummett's take on the debate fall foul of Devitt's points that truth only connects to realism once we have added the majority of realism's own premises to truth; the focus on language misses the intended force of the realist's claims as a metaphysical (or ontological) issue, not ultimately an epistemological one.

This discussion gives us initial reasons for believing that realism and anti-realism should be taken to be neutral towards theories of truth, and vice versa. There are, though, also some general reasons why we should favour neutrality. There is an initial methodological claim in favour of neutrality, with the principle that our theories should not force us into further philosophical conclusions unless they follow

(analytically) from the premises of the original argument. If it is possible to draw the two apart then we should. Of course it may be that the two positions are inexpressibly tied together, and thus that no characterisation of realism or anti-realism is possible that does not make use of some theory of truth; but Devitt has shown how this is not the case, and that in order to reach realism we need to add significant premises to a theory of truth. The truthmaking characterisation of the realism/anti-realism distinction (§1.4 and §1.5) will further support this methodological neutrality, as it stands independent from any particular theory of truth.

The aims of this section are limited to showing that realism and truth can come apart, and I do not wish to get too bogged down in a discussion as to *why* this neutrality has been so often ignored or directly argued against. However, Lewis' discussion of this is worth mentioning. Lewis lays the blame for why truth has come to be viewed in this way – i.e. as also being a claim about realism or anti-realism – upon the move to use truth as “just an abbreviatory device” (2001a: 603-4). The so-called “grand theories of truth” are for Lewis not theories of truth, but rather theories of many things far beyond truth. Correspondence theory is taken to be “a theory of all manner of things, and not especially of truth; and what we learn about truth comes not from it but rather from the allied redundancy biconditionals” (2001b: 278). I am sympathetic to this view, and taking the claim seriously can explain Devitt's insight about needing to add realism premises to truth in order to reach realism. Lewis' and Devitt's claims together combine to show that the mistake that has been made has been to overlook those extra premises added to our abbreviatory device ‘truth’. Were theories of truth able to decide on issues of realism and anti-realism, they would, *prima facie*, need to include other notions such as ontological commitment, and reference, and do far more philosophical work than a largely semantic notion like truth should be taken to be able to do.

One further consideration is what truth is in the first place – is it actually something of a sort that could form the base for solutions to metametaphysical debates? Why should we think that truth can dictate upon our metametaphysical position concerning the realism question? As Davidson notes, “nothing in the world, no object or event would be true or false if there were not thinking creatures” (1990).

If we take this claim seriously, then we can begin to doubt whether something that relies on the existence of particular sorts of beings (i.e. humans) existing, is going to be able to carry the philosophical weight of a metaphysical thesis, especially one that, as we have seen, has an independence criterion written into its characterisation. If truth is so tied to humans, and our particular way of thinking, then it would seem to beg the question against the realist that maintains the independence criteria. Furthermore, if we follow Frege (1951; 1956), and (plausibly) Aristotle,<sup>48</sup> and take truth to be a property of sentences, then it becomes unclear what *truth alone* can tell us about the entities that the true sentences refer to. The sentence is the truth-bearer, and so a theory of truth alone only tells us something about those truth-bearers, and thus some property or feature of a sentence. Indeed, Hinzen (2007; Cf. also Hinzen and Sheehan 2013) has argued that truth must be something inherently *grammatical*, appearing only once a certain level of hierarchical complexity has been developed within the linguistic derivation. This is then taken to explain why truth is human specific, and would give predictive power as to when a sentence has a truth-value. This grammatical conception of truth though should also not be the basis for characterising the realism question. To do so would be to beg the question against the metaphysical realist by supposing that significant metaphysical facts could be read off the grammatical structure of our claims, and hence from our language.<sup>49</sup> If truth is grammatical, and truth is the central notion of our metaphysics, then our metaphysics

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<sup>48</sup> For Aristotle, non-composite expressions (“man”; “three cubits long”; “white”; “grammatical”; “double”; “in the market place”; “yesterday”; “lying”; “armed”) do not involve an “affirmation”; and thus it “is by the combination of such terms that positive or negative statements arise”. Only assertions can be true or false, “whereas expressions which are not in any way composite [...] cannot be true or false” (*Categories*: 1b25-2a10). It is clear that we could interpret these passages as holding that truth only occurs at a sentential level, given that it is reasonable to take all assertions, the only truth-valuable compositions for Aristotle, to be sentential.

<sup>49</sup> This is assuming that we maintain the standard conception of language that we have used throughout this section, namely one that maintains a distinction between language and reality. Alternatively, if we include in our conception of language some form of Davidsonian triangulation (an idea that first appears in his 1982) that incorporates an inherent link to reality, then this conclusion would not hold as *language would only be possible if there is reality*. However it would be unclear how this would give us anything more than the existence of said reality. Any *features* of reality would appear to be reliant upon the structure of language; a position that we have previously noted to be *anti-realist*, though not *idealist* (see my discussion of Sider on ‘stuff-ontology’ in §1.121), and hence supports further the conclusion that theories of truth (of any form) are not appropriate for characterising realism or anti-realism.

is to be read off our language or, more precisely, grammar.<sup>50</sup> It is sufficient here that to try to use such a theory of truth, or as this section has argued any substantive theory of truth, to characterise the realism question is to beg the question one way or the other, for or against realism. This would also be to reject even the possibility of neutrality between truth and realism, something that should not be ruled out through definitions of theories of truth. Truth must be, at least in principle, separable from the realism question, contra traditional characterisations of realism and anti-realism.

I do not wish to get sidetracked here into a discussion of whether truth is grammatical or not – this would be to get into a full discussion between theories of truth, something beyond the scope of this work. The aim here is only to try to push the intuition, the same one as Devitt's, that truth is actually something quite unsuitable to provide a basis for realism. As we have already seen, to get realism from a theory of truth requires additional and substantive premises; anti-realism is most often defined negatively as the rejection of realism or the theory of truth that realism is supposedly tied to accepting; thus truth cannot do the philosophical work to characterise realism for us.

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<sup>50</sup> A rejection of reading metaphysics from language (see Heil 2003, and Dyke 2007 for discussions of this) will be discussed directly later in this thesis when discussing the relationship between language and metaphysics directly.

### 1.3 Deflationism

Thus far our focus has been on substantive theories of truth, and indicating how they are insufficient to provide the base for the realism/anti-realism distinction. However, we could hold that the fact that no substantive theory of truth can settle the realism question for us is not relevant as we should (independently) reject substantive theories of truth in the first place. Deflationary theories of truth could thus be independently motivated, and still provide a way to characterise realism and anti-realism. The question therefore is whether non-substantive theories of truth can help to characterise the realism/anti-realism debate. I will argue that they cannot, thus I claim that the failure of truth to help characterise realism is not only limited to substantive theories of truth; it applies to deflationary views also.

As with many other philosophical positions, deflationism is probably best understood as a family resemblance of notions, rather than being a single definable position.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps the overriding characteristic for deflationism is the rejection of a ‘substantive’ or ‘robust’ property of truth, or, often by its critics, simply as a rejection of a property (as distinct from a predicate) of truth at all. Such characterisations are of course overly simplistic. I wish to follow Bar-On and Simmons (2007) and take deflationism to consist of three theses (though of course not all ‘deflationisms’ must ascribe to all of these or the offered characterisations of the theses): *metaphysical*, *linguistic*, and *conceptual* deflationism. Metaphysical deflationism is the denial of a substantive property of truth – as Bar-On and Simmons put it: “If metaphysical deflationism is right, then [...] we cannot explain our understanding of ‘true’ as consisting in the apprehension of this property” (2007: 61).<sup>52</sup> Linguistic deflationism denies that the truth predicate adds any significant propositional or cognitive content above the content already present in a sentence. ‘is true’ therefore only performs

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<sup>51</sup> David 1994 provides a good general discussion and critique of deflationary positions; see also Asay 2011: 121-130 for an overview of some of the most prominent different ‘deflationisms’. ‘Classic’ accounts of what have at times been taken to be deflationary positions, though perhaps under other terminological titles such as redundancy and disquotationalism, include Ramsey 1927, Strawson 1949, Leeds 1978, Horwich 1990 and Field 1994.

<sup>52</sup> Note that this is distinct from deflationary metaphysics. Metaphysical deflationism as discussed here only applies to the property of truth whilst deflationary metaphysics is a form of metaphysical anti-realism, most often stemming from work by Quine and Carnap, and will be discussed in detail in §2.

logical functions. Neither metaphysical nor linguistic deflationism are of import to this work, as they have greater bearing on debates between competing theories of truth. Insofar as either has any relevance for the question of neutrality, it is via any connection to conceptual deflationism, and as such I leave them to one side here

Conceptual deflationism, though, is central to the claims of neutrality. The thesis holds that truth is not an explanatory concept, and that it cannot serve to help us understand any other philosophical concepts (such as belief, meaning, and, as I claim, realism). Conceptual deflationists therefore think that there is no need to appeal to other philosophical notions to understand truth, and thus, reciprocally, no need to appeal to truth to understand those philosophical notions. Hence Williams states that:

[T]he function of truth talk is *wholly* expressive, and thus *never* explanatory. As a device for semantic assent, the truth predicate allows us to endorse or reject sentences (or propositions) that we cannot simply assert, adding significantly to the expressive resources of our language. Thus the truth predicate adds no content to a sentence such as “‘Grass is green’ is true”, and only occurs in situations where, for pragmatic or contextual reasons, we cannot simply assert ‘Grass is green’. Of course, proponents of traditional theories of truth do not deny any of this. What makes deflationary views deflationary is their insistence that the importance of truth talk is *exhausted* by its expressive function (1999: 547).

Truth is not taken to be explanatory, and therefore cannot help to characterise realism or anti-realism. Conceptual deflationism is clearly of interest to the aims here, and it has already been argued that *conceptual* deflationism specifically applied to metaphysical realism is open to those that uphold *substantive* theories of truth. The previous section showed how the claims of realism and theories of truth come apart, and need not be taken to rely upon each other: a claim in line with conceptual

deflationism. The neutrality that has been argued for between truth and realism *could* (though need not) be taken to be one part of a larger claim of conceptual deflationism, which applies to other philosophical notions beyond our limited interest here in realism. This does not imply that those who argue for neutrality must accept the full conceptual deflationism thesis, but it does allow us to accept this specific part of conceptual deflationism without being bound to metaphysical and linguistic deflationism. Horwich (1996) takes the neutrality of deflationism to be a particular strength that speaks in its favour, agreeing with the earlier assessment that formulations of realism and anti-realism have often made use of some notion of truth, but that this is unnecessary. The deflationists' conception of truth, which relies on the "generalizing function of the truth-predicate" (1996: 196), leaves us with no requirement towards either realism or anti-realism. But our discussion has found that this strength of the deflationist position, possible through conceptual deflationism, can be held by some substantive theories of truth also. I leave open whether the other tenants of deflationism, the metaphysical and linguistic theses, should be accepted – a (limited) appeal to conceptual deflationism is all that is required to motivate the neutrality that I require in order to build towards an alternative characterisation of realism and anti-realism that does not rely on *any* theory of truth.

These two sections have argued that notions of truth are not useful for characterising metaphysical realism and anti-realism. Our discussion of certain substantive theories of truth has indicated that we do not need to understand those theories as implying any particular position on the realism/anti-realism debate. Instead we should accept neutrality between our favoured theory of truth (whatever that may be; I leave that as an open question) and the realism debate. It has then been argued that deflationist theories also can be neutral about truth and realism, and indeed that some notable deflationists take this to be a strong argument in favour of deflationary theories. This leaves us with a problem though. Remember that our current working characterisation of realism from §1.1 was:

R<sub>1</sub>: A metaphysical claim, C, is realist iff it is, when literally construed, true, and has a truth value which is (i) objective, (ii)

determinate, (iii) non-trivial, and (iv) independent of our mental (cognitive) capacities.

As already noted, this relies on truth values; truth is ultimately doing the philosophical work here to distinguish between realism and anti-realism. However, if we accept the conclusions of the last two sections, then it is clear that this characterisation cannot be retained. Neutrality between realism and anti-realism directly rules out  $R_1$ . The problems with this characterisation motivate the remainder of this section, towards an alternative characterisation of realism and anti-realism founded upon a specific conception of truthmaker theory that has no built in reliance on, and thus a neutrality towards, theories of truth.

A caveat: nothing in the last two sections has intended to show that non-neutrality *must* be rejected. It is of course very much open and possible for realists and anti-realists to import a particular theory of truth into their theorising. Indeed, the supposed connection between correspondence theory of truth and realism, and between pragmatic or epistemic-based theories of truth and anti-realism, will most likely remain the standard view (at least for those who are less concerned with metametaphysics). Instead, this section argued that there are significant problems with taking this route towards characterising realism and anti-realism. This, combined with the alternative characterisation that will be offered in §1.4 and §1.5, are intended to provide reasons for us to reject characterising realism and anti-realism via theories of truth, in favour of the alternative account offered here.

### **1.4 Truthmakers without a Theory of Truth**

From the previous three sections, an initial characterisation of realism was offered, and subsequently rejected due to its reliance on theories of truth, something that has been argued cannot do the necessary philosophical work to characterise realism for us. We therefore are left with no working characterisation of realism. The remainder of this section will attempt to rectify this, through stripping the notion of truth from  $R_1$  and replacing it with a notion of truthmaking, itself having been shown to need not be taken as relying on theories of truth and being a notion open to realists and anti-

realists. A fair amount of initial work on making truthmaker theory appropriate will be needed here: §1.41 will give a brief overview of the history of truthmaking;<sup>53</sup> §1.42 will provide an overview of the truthmaker principle (TMP) supported here, detailing how the TMP should be understood in this work; §1.43 will discuss truthmaking and realism directly, arguing that the two theses are not inherently linked; §1.44 will strip truthmaking of its supposed connections to first correspondence, and then to any other theory of truth (§1.45). In §1.5 we will then be able to give a characterisation of the realism/anti-realism distinction in terms of truthmakers.

### 1.41 Some History of Truthmaker Theory

It is a well-documented and oft repeated claim that truthmaker theory can trace its origins back as far as Aristotle, and after a long time of neglect, came back into the philosophical consciousness by two routes, independently of each other, though with the very same notion and name. Aristotle is taken to discuss truthmakers in a section devoted to explaining the different notions of priority that can exist, wherein a ‘cause’ can be prior to some ‘effect’. He states:

The fact of the being of a man carries with it the truth of the proposition that he is [...] for if a man is, the proposition wherein we allege that he is is true, and conversely, if the proposition wherein we allege that he is is true, then he is. The true proposition, however, is in no way the cause of the being of the man, but the fact if the man’s being does seem somehow to be the cause of the truth of the proposition, for the truth or falsity of the proposition depends on the fact of the man’s being or not being. (Categories, 14b: 14-22)

Interpretation of Aristotle is a complex project, fraught with many dangers, and will not be attempted here. It is enough that sections such as these seem to imply (and have been taken to imply), that Aristotle made a move very akin to the modern day theory of truthmaking. The truth of the proposition holds due to the fact of some

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<sup>53</sup> Those already well versed in the literature may benefit from skipping this section.

entity being. Importantly, Aristotle also seems to predict and respond to one clear initial objection to the truthmaking claim, namely the problem that truthmaking may seem to be holding that a proposition being true *makes* the world be a certain way. Truthmaking though is not reciprocal in this way. The fact of an entity's being *makes* the proposition true (true 'in virtue of'), but not vice versa. Truthmaking, even in Aristotle's conception of it, therefore avoids any potential claim of some form of linguistic idealism wherein our words make the world be a certain way, or bring metaphysically existent entities into existence.

Armstrong (2004: 4-5) also takes the notion of truthmaking to be present in Russell's thought (1940, 1948, 1959), though under the terminology of verifier, used to mean 'made true by'. More recently, the re-emergence of the notion of truthmakers is normally given two independent sources. The first is C. B. Martin, who is notable for publishing little of his work (see his 1996, 2000 and 2008: 24-37 for some of Martin's published ideas on truthmaking), but is accepted to have inspired the popularity of truthmaking amongst Australian metaphysicians and beyond (Armstrong 2004: 5). The second is from a paper by Mulligan, Simons, and Smith (1984). Mulligan et al. also make reference to the influence of Russell,<sup>54</sup> as well as Husserl in the *Logische Untersuchungen* and Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*. Unlike other figures concerned with truth (Bolzano, Frege, and Moore are offered as examples), Russell, Husserl, and Wittgenstein's interest in truth is taken to have gone beyond the truth-bearers in order to explain truth into discussions of what entities those truth-bearers are true *in virtue of*.

The phrase 'in virtue of' speaks to the heart of the claims of truthmaker theory and to all variants of the 'truthmaker principle', related to the notion that truthmakers 'make' the truths true. Armstrong, in his account of learning of truthmaking from Martin, links the development of truthmaker theory to a response to phenomenals and Rylean behaviourism. Phenomenalism holds that physical objects are no more than the sense-data or sense-impressions that we have of them. As such, the view has a clear problem accounting for physical objects or events that happen without being

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<sup>54</sup> Notably, Russell: "When I speak of a fact [...] I mean the kind of thing that makes a proposition true or false" (1972: 36).

perceived. Counterfactuals are supposed to be able to solve this problem: we find them in ordinary language, and, *prima facie* at least, they can be true and false. Unperceived objects and events can therefore be accounted for in terms of the sense-data that would have been perceived had a suitable perceiver been present. The truthmaker theory, though, questions this response, by asking “[w]hat is there in the world in virtue of which these truths are true?” (Armstrong 2004: 3). Truthmaker theory is centred on this question – should no answer be available, then the claims that are made are left to “hang on air” (2004: 3). Likewise, Ryle’s appeal to dispositions to explain mental states (1949) are taken by Armstrong to be undercut by the truthmaker question, as the position relies on an ontology larger than that stipulated in the account – Ryle’s dispositions are also meant to be left to “hang on air”. There remains, of course, a need to flesh this notion of truthmaking out further for it to be of theoretical use here.

#### 1.42 Towards a Suitable Account of Truthmaking

The truthmaker principle, at its most basic, holds that for some truthbearer to be true it must be true in virtue of some entity (to be understood neutrally throughout unless otherwise specified) – there is something that is such that the proposition is true because it is that way. Truthmaking therefore is ultimately a metaphysical enterprise (though note this does not presuppose realism, as will be elaborated), as it seeks the ontological grounds for truths. We can state the truthmaker principle in its most basic form, and the one that is needed here, as:

TMP: For all  $x$  and  $y$ ,  $x$  is a truthmaker for  $y$  if and only if  $y$  is true in virtue of  $x$ .

This basic principle is most commonly in the literature further elaborated into either strong (S-TMP) or weak (W-TMP) formulations (these taken from Daly 2005: 95):<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Daly himself, drawing upon Fox 1987: 189, Bigelow 1998: 126-132, and Dodd 2002: 73. As with standard practice, ‘the proposition that  $p$ ’ will be formalised as  $\langle p \rangle$ .

S-TMP: “Necessarily, if  $\langle p \rangle$  is true, there exists at least one entity  $\alpha$  such that  $\langle \alpha \text{ exists} \rangle$  entails  $\langle \langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ .”

W-TMP: “Necessarily, if  $\langle p \rangle$  is true, it would be impossible for  $\langle p \rangle$  to be false unless at least one entity which does not exist were to exist, or at least one entity which exists were not to exist”

W-TMP therefore gains its force from the intuition that for something that is true, to instead be false, then there must be some difference in what exists. Truth is taken to supervene upon being such that a difference in truth can only occur with a difference in what exists. S-TMP, which is the same as Armstrong’s account of truthmaking cannot be used here, as will be discussed directly below (though this will, in part, be due to what Armstrong takes to be the only candidate of truthmaker, namely states of affairs). I take TMP to be a representation of the basic underlying intuition of the truthmaking principle – the work here therefore will only proceed from the starting point of TMP. W-TMP is closer in its minimal commitment to TMP, and as such if anyone finds TMP too sparse a formulation, W-TMP can be replaced for it without any theoretical cost to the aims in this work.<sup>56</sup>

We can therefore say that the truthbearer,  $y$ , is true due to being ‘grounded’ or made true in some way by  $x$ .<sup>57</sup> Importantly, this basic formulation of the truthmaking principle does not presuppose anything about realism or anti-realism as it does not specify any restrictions upon the notion of ‘existence’ in that it does not specify any characteristics of those entities that we can take to ‘exist’. Put simply, we have not assumed anything at this point about the nature of the truthmaker  $y$ . This neutrality is not always assumed – indeed as will be discussed, the truthmaking principle is often

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<sup>56</sup> Note that Daly *does* reject W-TMP as well as S-TMP (2005: 97-98). This is due to his concerns over the notion of supervenience, where supervenience is introduced in order to perform some explanatory role, but would appear to need to be explained itself. I share these concerns, however, nothing of note in this work falls upon the notion of supervenience as the concern is not over the nature of the truthmaking relation itself, but rather the nature of the truthmakers. See Blackburn 1984; Schiffer 1987; and Kim 1993b for arguments against supervenience being able to play this role in our theories.

<sup>57</sup> I do not wish to go further into the debate of how to cash out the notion of grounding. This is a debate connected to those over how to fully flesh out the characteristics of the truthmaking relation, see below for some few further comments on this debate.

taken to be inherently realist precisely due to what kinds of entities are taken to be capable of being a truthmaker. The truthmaking account of realism and anti-realism therefore revolves around what the nature of the ontological grounds are taken to be, relying only on the idea that truthmaking makes truth rely on what exists. It will therefore be the aim here to defend only TMP, and to characterise realism and anti-realism with this tool. Thus the positive proposal for truthmakers on offer here will strive to be as metaphysically neutral as possible, and as neutral about the nature of truthbearers, and the truthmaking relation as possible.

Truthmaking is understood to be motivated by the idea that *a truth is the explanandum, not the explanans*. This links into the already discussed failings of truth to characterise the realism/anti-realism distinction. If truth were the explanans, then truth surely would be able to do the needed philosophical work to characterise that distinction. Rather a true proposition is to be understood as being true *in virtue of* something in the world<sup>58</sup> - for something to be true, it is true in virtue of some entity (again, understood neutrally) existing. Asay refers to truthmaking as being concerned with “the threefold project of giving accounts of (i) what the relation is that holds between a truth and its truthmaker(s), (ii) which truths have truthmakers, and (iii) what truthmakers there are” (2012: 2-3). Here though, the scope of truthmaking will be limited to only the third aim of what truthmakers there are. As will be argued in §1.5, this aim, reworked to include the *nature* of the truthmakers that there are, will be sufficient to characterise realism and anti-realism. Project (i) on Asay’s account will be left to one side as how it is that a truthmaker relates to a truth concerns issues such as whether a truthmaker necessitates their truths.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, project (ii) will also be left

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<sup>58</sup> ‘World’ is used here to differentiate from discussions of ‘reality’. Reality has already been taken in this work to refer to entities that are at least in some sense mind-independent, hence the idea of realism as being the view that such entities in *reality* are accessible, whilst anti-realism denies that accessibility. ‘World’ is used to refer to entities that do not necessarily have that property of being mind-independent and thus is intended to pick out a larger set of entities than ‘reality’, as including both mind-dependent and mind-independent entities.

<sup>59</sup> For example, Armstrong (2004) thinks truthmakers do necessitate their truths; Lowe (2007, 2009b) argues for a relation of essential dependence; Schaffer (2010) for one of grounding. Rodriguez-Pereyra (2005) perhaps comes closest to answering project (i) in such a way as it could be included here. However whilst his principle of ‘For all x and y, x is a truthmaker for y if and only if y is true in virtue of the existence of x’ is largely accepted by all, and is of the sort that will be proposed in this work, the underlying primitivism of Rodriguez-Pereyra’s account of the truthmaking relation is not something that will be argued for or against here, and should not be read into this account.

as an open issue as that project concerns characteristics such as truthmaker maximalism. I do not wish to take a position on whether every truth requires a truthmaker.<sup>60</sup> The difference between realism and anti-realism will therefore come through project (iii) of truthmaking, wherein we inquire as to the nature of the truthmaker that the theorist intends to posit to make the statement true, as will be detailed further in §1.5.

Although, overall, I wish to remain neutral on what additional characteristics the truthmaking relation possesses, there is one aspect that does need to be discussed. I have throughout, and will continue to do so, followed the tradition of phrasing the truthmaking relation as one where truths are true ‘in virtue of’ the truthmakers, or that the truthmakers ‘make’ the truths they are truthmakers for, where ‘make’ and ‘in virtue of’ seem to be playing the same role. However, it should be stressed, following Martin, that ‘make’ “is not meant to suggest that things in the world actually make truths as fire makes heat; it is not the ‘make’ of the sort in which they (in and of themselves) cause things called ‘truths’ to come into existence. A world in which there were no representations (i.e. no truth bearers) would be a world in which there were no truths” (Martin 2008: 24-25)”. ‘Make’ and ‘in virtue of’ are thus not meant in an *explanatory* sense, as it is not the case that truthmakers bring the truths into existence, or indeed explain the existence of those truths. *Truthbearers* exist in light of humans, and languages – due to the representations that we take to be in some way representative of reality, and the truthmakers therein. Without humans, there would not be truths or truthbearers, but there *may* still be truthmakers. I take the first part of this claim to be uncontroversial; whether we agree with the latter half of that claim will be central to whether, according to the characterisation supported here, we are realist or anti-realist. That the ‘in virtue of’, or ‘make’ of truthmaking is not *explanatory* is therefore important for the legitimacy of the thesis of truthmaking, especially for the thesis herein. If the notions were explanatory, then the truthmakers explain why there were truths which would indicate that there would be no truthmakers without the truths also, and that truthmakers would have had some role in bringing about, *in explaining*, the existence of the truths. This should not be part of our truthmaking thesis, whether we wish to be realist or anti-realist. The characterisation of realism

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<sup>60</sup> See Milne (2005) for an objection to this position; Rodriguez-Pereyra (2006) for a defence.

and anti-realism on offer here, based on the *nature* of the truthmakers that a theorist accepts into their ontology to account for the truths they wish to accept would not follow were it necessary that the truths exist if the truthmakers did, lest the anti-realist be forced into idealism if they wished to say that no truths are true in virtue of substantive metaphysically ‘real’ entities – i.e. to hold that such entities are not the truthmakers for ontological statements. In so far as it is assumed that idealism is not a viable position in this thesis,<sup>61</sup> anti-realism must be a viable option, and thus must not be characterised as to decompose into idealism. ‘in virtue of’ and ‘make’ thus should not be understood in their explanatory semantic sense.

A further useful, somewhat connected, distinction between the disparate aims of a truthmaking project is discussed by Cameron. Cameron argues that the acceptance of truthmakers is not enough by itself to damage the positions of phenomenalism and Rylean behaviourism, arguments to which Armstrong, as we have seen, links the origin of truthmaking to (2004: 3). The objection to each position ran such that the theories accepted truths “without accepting the corresponding parts of ontology that would make that truth true; the objection is to having truths without truthmakers” (Cameron 2008: 114). The truthmaking principle alone, however, does not justify this objection: the truthmaking principle merely requires that the theory take some sentences to be ontologically committing, without saying anything about the entities that the theorist is then serious *about*. Thus, phenomenalism can be saved through the positing of any entity that could then serve as the truthmaker; Rylean behaviourism likewise – they could simply believe in the fact that *p* whenever *<p>* is true. Thus for Cameron, a further principle needs to be added to the truthmaking principle in order to argue against these positions, one that restricts what ontological commitments there can be (2008: 115), which I will term the Ontological Commitment Principle (OCP). Of course, any theory will have an ontology,<sup>62</sup> and thus will contain

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<sup>61</sup> Though see later for some interesting conclusions as to the nature of idealist positions should this truthmaking account of realism and anti-realism be accepted.

<sup>62</sup> Or, in the case of Quantum Mechanics, any theory with a suitable interpretation. I take this understanding, of course, from Quine (1948): a theories’ ontology therefore is just the entities that must exist for that theory were it to be true. Entities that only appear in a theories *ideology* will not be relevant in this work, and my focus will be restricted to a theory’s ontology only. It could be claimed that, under this reading, all theories are realist. This would only be a trivial realism such that a theory is only realist over the entities that it allows into its ontology. What is of course at issue here is which

such a principle that limits what can be posited by a theory. Combined with the truthmaking, this allows the objection that the two positions discussed are, for Cameron, “dubious ontologies” (2008: 115) not because “they believe in some unacceptable things, but that they don’t believe in enough things – their ontology is not rich enough to account for the truth of the propositions they believe in” (2008: 115). If correct, then this is most certainly a damaging objection to these positions. The moral that I wish to draw from this though is that the relevant principle is not the truthmaking principle; this principle cannot alone decide or delineate between positions as it is neutral to further claims. Rather is the additional principle, OCP – similar to Asay’s project (iii), concerning what are ‘acceptable’ entities – that is relevant. This distinction from Cameron can be applied more broadly to the realism/anti-realism distinction across the ‘general metaphysics’ that is of interest in this work. The difference between the positions comes not from an acceptance of the truthmaking principle (contra Armstrong, cf. §1.42), but from the nature of the entities, and thus their ‘acceptability’ or ‘unacceptability’, which are taken to *be* the truthmakers, from the OCP. One alternative way to understand this claim is through whether truthmaking is taken to be cross-categorical, linking entities of two sorts: the first a proposition; the second some part of mind-independent reality. The Armstrongian account, as shall be seen below, assumes that truthmaking must be between a proposition and some part of reality, and hence the relation must be cross-categorical. However, there is nothing in TMP that insists upon being cross-categorical. Instead, the truthmakers could be further propositions, linguistic facts or choices, or concepts. None of these would uphold truthmaking to be cross-categorical, whilst still maintaining TMP.

It should be remembered here that one motivating worry for this work are theories that appear as though they should be anti-realist, but yet can accept all the claims of a given metaphysical theory as true due to only the internal consistency of that theory. If metaphysical debates are ‘purely verbal’, then the claims of a given theory can be accepted as correct should we accept that style of speech, or think that metaphysical truths are conceptual truths. The link between the realism question and

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theories can be thought of as *metaphysically realist*, and this, it is argued, will come down to the nature of the truthmakers that the theory allows into its ontology.

theories of truth has been argued to be unnecessary, and, as such, the commitment of such anti-realist views to a particular theory of truth is not sufficient to explain why such views are metaphysically anti-realist. The truthmaking account will account for the anti-realism of such views, without appealing to anything more than what such views are already committed to *within their own ontologies*. A further example of why this should be how we understand realism, anti-realism, and truthmaking comes from Daly (2005). Daly notes that, as a matter of philosophical illuminations, we can understand the ‘classic’ interpretation of Meinong<sup>63</sup> as a theory which accepts and posits non-existent truthmakers for the class of truths about fictions, and abstracta. I, nor Daly, make no claim here as to whether Meinong would have accepted this interpretation – Meinong of course most certainly did not talk in terms of truthmakers; but we can see from it that the notion of truthmaker as we have been suggesting it can work across positions in the realism/anti-realism debates. This shows that what Daly calls the “logical space” (2005: 86) of truthmakers is as wide as the entities theories posit, and this understanding of truthmaking as neutral towards the realism question will be the notion supported throughout the remainder of this section.

One further reason, which will be noted more fully later in this section, but should be mentioned briefly now, is that these kinds of distinctions reinforce the idea that the realism/anti-realism distinction is to be understood as a *metaphysical* distinction, not an *epistemological* one. The stress placed here has been on the nature of the entities that are posited to be the truthmakers for some truths that we wish to accept. Truthmaking is about ontology, about the *entities themselves* and *their nature and characteristics*, not our epistemological access to them. The tendency discussed in §1.1 to characterise the realism/anti-realism distinction as epistemological therefore misses the larger, in my view more interesting, problems and distinction to be discussed and hence why those earlier conceptions of the distinction were rejected. This benefit of a truthmaking account of the realism/anti-realism distinction is one

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<sup>63</sup> I take Meinong’s position here to be one of positing a very abundant ontology, including a realism towards non-existent and abstract entities. I am not concerned here whether this is the correct understanding of Meinong. See Routley 1980, for a discussion of ‘Meinong’s Jungle’; and Jacquette 1996:18-19 for a suggestion that this might not be the correct way to interpret Meinong’s work.

major reason why it should be favoured over those that rely on theories of truth, a notion that has inbuilt epistemological concerns.

Therefore, although much of the literature on truthmaking is concerned with additional features of truthmaker theory – such as the already noted truthmaker maximalism, or necessitarianism, or whether truthmaking presupposes a commitment to some class of entities, or concerns over what can be truthbearers<sup>64</sup> – I wish to stand clear of all of these debates. Any of the positions around these debates could be incorporated into what I propose here should they be wanted for some theoretical virtue, but only if the additional features can be shown to be consistent with the truthmaking offered here – i.e. only if consistent with a notion of truthmaking that can be accepted by both realists and anti-realists in that it does not presuppose the existence of a controversial class of entities that one side of the debate will deny, and is consistent with a notion of truthmaking that does not presuppose, or itself become, a theory of truth. Whether any of the characteristics that concern the current literature on truthmaking can fulfil these rules, I leave as an open question.

Likewise, a truthmaking account of realism and anti-realism based around the nature of the truthmakers that a theorist posits does not need to take any position on the debate about the nature of truthbearers. I will talk as though propositions are the sole bearers of truth, but no theoretical work will rest upon this choice of language. All that is relevant is that it can be assumed the propositions are expressed by some sentence that we wish to take to be truth-evaluable. Similarly, this talk of propositions is not intended to commit us at all to any way that propositions might themselves be – functions from possible worlds to truth values; primitive representational entities; or the like. It is not the truthbearer side of the truthmaking relation that will be of interest here. It will be assumed that the truthmaking relation holds between a proposition and its truthmaker(s), but we will focus solely on the truthmaker. I will therefore talk of *the truthmaker for a proposition* in such a way that should not be understood as making any claims about the proposition as the truthbearer, nor about whether there is one or more truthmaker for truths involved in a given example of the truthmaking relation. This therefore gives a first understanding of what is a suitable

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<sup>64</sup> i.e. projects (i) and (ii) on Asay's breaking apart of the larger truthmaking project.

account of truthmaking here, illustrating that the focus will be on the nature of the truthmakers rather than other debates surrounding truthmaking. The remainder of §1.4 is intended to clarify this further, in part by distancing how I understand truthmaking from other accounts, in particular in order to show that truthmaking does not itself imply realism, nor is itself a theory of truth.

### 1.43 Truthmaking and Realism

Using truthmaking to characterise realism is not new, though often, contra the aims and intentions here, a commitment to truthmaking is taken to imply a realist position. Bigelow states:

I have sometimes tried to stop believing in the Truthmaker axiom. Yet I have never really succeeded. Without some such axiom, I find I have no adequate anchor to hold me from drifting onto the shoals of some sort of pragmatism or idealism. And that is altogether uncongenial to me; I am a congenital realist about almost everything (1988: 123).

Heil, like Armstrong, takes the idea that there must be something about the world that makes statements true, the central claim of truthmaking, to be a “central tenet of realism” (2003: 61). Certainly this link between realism and truthmaking is natural. It is not hard to imbue the notion of existence in TMP with metaphysical significance – to take the entities that are in the world that make something true in an ontologically serious way. Rodriguez-Pereyra does just that when he states that: “if a proposition is made true by something, it is made true by *some* thing, but my argument will leave it open what kind of thing that thing is: it could be a fact or state of affairs, a trope, or any other sort of entity” (2005: 17). Rodriguez-Pereyra’s aims are to discuss whether all truths have to be grounded, something I wish to make no comment on; the assumption that I do not want to agree to here is that the only entities that *could* ground truths are of a sort that presupposes realism, such as facts, states of affairs, or tropes. I intend the term ‘entity’ to have no such commitment. Truthmaking understood as Rodriguez-Pereyra, Armstrong, and Bigelow (amongst others) do, does

not prove realism, but instead presupposes it through thinking that a truthmaker must be some part of *reality*, seemingly understood in some robust metaphysical way. This notion of truthmaking would mean that the putative truthmaking account of realism and anti-realism is dead in the water before we even started as the ontological nature of truthmakers are not the kinds of entities that an anti-realist will accept.<sup>65</sup> Instead we will follow Pendlebury in rejecting the assumption that truthmaker theory is tied inherently to realism, towards a “broader conception of truth-making [that] makes room for the possibility of objective truths without realistic truth-makers, [and] does not assume that this possibility is realized” (2010: 145). ‘Realistic’ here is best understood as being synonymous with the sorts of entities that (to speak very generally) realists normally posit, and anti-realists deny, where the truthmakers are assumed to be mind-independent entities. As Pendlebury argues, this allows truthmaking to be a more useful philosophical tool, available to realists and anti-realists alike, and hence suitable to characterise those positions through truthmaking.

Daly (2005) adds further support to this claim, arguing that this conjunction of realism and truthmakers is neither necessary, nor sufficient for realism. Daly argues that many, if not all, positions, realist, anti-realist, idealist, pragmatic etc. can adopt the mantra of truthmaking, though they will naturally take the truthmakers for their claims to be different entities. Daly argues against Bigelow, in a similar line as above, that the truthmaker principle is available for a wide range of theoretical positions to use:

The principle is compatible with idealism. An idealist might consistently claim that every truth has a truthmaker, where a truthmaker is an (actual or possible) experience or collection of experiences. Likewise, the principle is compatible with pragmatism. A pragmatist might consistently claim that every

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<sup>65</sup> For a further case where it is assumed that the ontological nature of truthmakers see Beebe and Dodd 2005: 9-10 (writing in the introduction of the collection that Rodriguez-Pereyra 2005 is taken from) where the debate about the ontological nature of truthmakers is taken to be between those that take them to be states of affairs (Armstrong 1997: 113-119) and those that take them to be tropes (Mulligan, Simons, and Smith 1984). It is interesting to note that both of these are taken to be key founding texts of truthmaking. The assumption that truthmakers are entities that are of the sort that are normally posited in realist theories seems to go back to the (re-)birth of truthmaking theories.

truth has a truthmaker, where a truthmaker is what would be believed by everyone at the end of all rational inquiry [...] Bigelow seems to be assimilating the principle that for every truth, there is an entity which is its truthmaker, with some other principle which claims the realism holds for at least some entity. But those principles are logically independent, and it is only the latter principle that is necessary and sufficient for Bigelow's rejection of idealism and pragmatism. (2005: 95-96)

Daly has shown that accepting the truthmaking principle is not sufficient to make us realists – a further principle is needed that ensures that the sort of entity that is the truthmaker is of a sort that a realist will posit, not say, “an (actual or possible) experience or collection of experiences”. Daly therefore shows how a corollary of the above discussed OCP taken from Cameron is that truthmaking is not sufficient for realism.

Nor, though, Daly argues, should we think of truthmakers as necessary for realism.<sup>66</sup> Daly holds that to be a realist, at its most basic level, is to hold that “there is a world that exists independently of our thoughts and statements” (2005: 96). For this claim to be true there is no requirement for any appeal to truthmaking. Daly's aim is to show how truthmaking is a redundant notion, however, contra Daly, I have already argued that such a conception of realism is not satisfactory, only standing against idealism, and with this definition being one which many views that we would want to class as anti-realist can agree to. The addition of a truthmaking principle to the above claim, formalised by Daly as the claim that “this world [that exists

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<sup>66</sup> Daly's does this in order to help show how truthmaking as understood by Armstrong and Bigelow plays no explanatory role, leading Daly to ultimately reject the notion entirely (2005:94-103). I am sympathetic to his argument (though I cannot discuss it in detail here). Truthmakers for Armstrong and Bigelow do seem to themselves *require* explanation rather than *providing* explanatory force, connecting to Daly's previously mentioned concerns about the notion of supervenience. However, it is worth stressing that no such explanatory role is being granted to truthmaking on my account here. Truthmaking will not so much *explain* what it is to be a realist or an anti-realist, as *describe* those positions towards a better *categorisation*. Truthmaking as supported here is thus not explaining anything about the world, but is a metametaphysical tool in delineating and characterising the various options available in answering the realism question.

independently of our thoughts and statements] makes our thoughts and statements true or false" (2005:96), is what leads to the supposed link between realism and truthmaking. And it is the truthmaker principle offered by Daly that is wrong, so long as, with Daly himself, we think that truthmaking has no inherent commitment to entities in the "world that exists independently of our thoughts and statements" as the truthmakers. Truthmaking understood in the minimal form supported in this work is only necessary for realism in so far as truthmaking is a relation between a truth and a truthmaker of whatever kind is accepted into that given theories' ontology. A necessary connection between realism and truthmaking is there, but it carries no philosophical weight. Daly's account of how truthmaking is not sufficient for realism is correct, but the alternative understanding of truthmaking can be seen as necessary to any theory that thinks there are any true statements, and thus to realism and anti-realism alike.

An account of realism and anti-realism understood through truthmakers maintains the truthmaking intuition that  $x$  makes  $y$  true. We have to remember, though, that this means that  $x$  and  $y$  *are entities of some sort*. We have already assumed that  $y$  is a proposition (though it could be some other entity capable of being a truthbearer and nothing rests on this). What sort of entity is  $x$  though? There is nothing within TMP that stipulates what sort of entity  $x$  is. This is the content of project (iii) for Asay, and the Ontological Commitment Principle that I have drawn from Cameron. McGrath (2003) recognises this point also, when discussing what the second occurrence of 'snow is white' (in his reconstruction of the truthmaking claim: "What makes the proposition that snow is white is true *is that snow is white*", 2003: 669, original emphasis) picks out in a putative account of the truthmaker principle suitable for deflationists.<sup>67</sup> McGrath notes that the second occurrence could be taken to pick out a proposition, which could lead to some form of coherentism or anti-realism where propositions are mind-dependent entities picking out conceptual

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<sup>67</sup> McGrath produces his version of the truthmaker claim in response to the fact that the truth equivalency cannot itself serve as the truthmaker and so his intensions here are different to mine, however his insight about the nature of the truthmaker itself still holds. Note further that Horwich seems to accept that the truth equivalency is compatible with truthmaking, but cannot be themselves the truthmaker when he states that "we [deflationists] can be perfectly comfortable with the idea that truths are made true by elements of reality" (1998: 105). A more detailed discussion of McGrath is below.

truths; or it may be taken to pick out something other than a proposition, perhaps some fact or state of affairs (2003: 670). As will become clearer throughout the remainder of this section, *this* is at the heart of the truthmaking account of realism and anti-realism. Truthmaking can serve as the neutral tool through which we can decide whether a theory is realist or anti-realist precisely because truthmaking is a notion that asks what the ontological commitments of a theory are. From that answer, realism or anti-realism follows. This inherent neutrality towards what sorts of entities serve as a truthmaker can perhaps be best described by an example. Take a standard question of mereology within metaphysics (chosen as the seemingly default example within the metametaphysical literature): Does the Eiffel Tower and Socrates' nose together combine to form some further object? Let us first assume that the answer given is yes; unrestricted mereological composition is correct, and those parts together make a further object despite their spatio-temporal distance from each other. What could serve as the truthmaker for the claim that such an object exists? The claim here is that many different things could be plausibly posited as being such a truthmaker. It could be the object itself – i.e. that the mind-independent reality is populated by such an object. This object would presumably be some state of affairs, fact, or some other part of a chosen realist first-order metaphysics. Alternatively, the truthmaker for the claim could be that our conceptual scheme allows us to combine such things within our imagination including such an object in our conceptual framework, or it could be that linguistically we can introduce an object (let's call it the 'Socraffel Tower') into our chosen language. We thus have three different suggested truthmakers for the claim that an object exists that has as its parts the Eiffel Tower and Socrates' nose; the first truthmaker is mind-independent, the latter two are mind-dependent, and thus the first will be amenable to realists, the latter two to anti-realists. All three, though, satisfy the demands of the truthmaking principle, which, as already argued, contains no inherent preference for the sorts of entities that can serve as a truthmaker for a claim. From this, I argue, we can conclude that truthmaking is inherently neutral as to the question of realism.

Though we have dismissed the inherent link between realism and truthmaking, this is not enough to show that truthmaking can help delineate between realism and anti-realism. We must consider how truthmaking relates to theories of

truth. We have already seen how truth cannot play a role in characterising the realism/anti-realism distinction. As such, for truthmaker theory to provide the characterisation that I claim it can, it must be suitably shown that it need not also rely on, or indeed itself be, a theory of truth.

#### 1.44 Truthmakers and Correspondence

Perhaps the largest task involved with truthmaking and theories of truth is to show how truthmaker theory is not a variant of the correspondence theory of truth. This will therefore be covered first before going on to broader more general arguments that aim to show that the truthmaker principle is not a theory of truth of any sort.

Armstrong's initial characterisation of the truthmaker principle can be summed up as the conjunction of three claims:

1. "A truthmaker for a particular truth, then, is just some existent, some portion of reality, in virtue of which that truth is true"
2. "To demand truthmakers for particular truths is to accept a realist theory for these truths."
3. "It is in virtue of [...] independent reality that the proposition [as truth-bearer] is true" (2004: 5).

It is clear why Armstrong links truthmaking and realism. If truthmakers are to be understood as 'portions' of 'mind-independent' reality, then wherever there are truthmakers then there is also a commitment to realism. Armstrong's account of truthmaking has been standardly taken to be a variant upon correspondence theories of truth – a re-working of the old Aristotelian idea more suited to modern day philosophy. This commitment to correspondence then has the consequence that if we accept truthmakers, then we must also be a realist. Truthmaking can be thus used to define realism (as 2. shows). Anti-realism is therefore just to deny that there are any truthmakers, as truthmakers carry realism with them.

As Asay (2012: 5) points out, this characterisation of the realism/anti-realism distinction leaves very few options for the anti-realist as to *how* they are anti-realists, how to flesh out their anti-realism. Given that Armstrong is also committed to truthmaker maximalism (that every truth has a truthmaker, and every falsehood a falsemaker), the anti-realist can only be an anti-realist towards metaphysical discussions through denying that the entire domain of discourse has *any truths or falsehoods*. Falsemakers, under Armstrong's account, are no different to truthmakers in that falsemakers are also 'some portion of reality', much as the negation of the falsehood would have truthmakers. An anti-realism that wishes to argue that metaphysical statements are all false, a global anti-realism, is not possible under Armstrong's account. The only global anti-realism available is a metaphysical variant upon Ayer's moral non-cognitivism (1952) that denies that metaphysical statements have any truth value. Furthermore, any form of error theory about metaphysics (see Field 1980) comes out on this account as realist though it is typically accepted to be anti-realist. The error theorist thinks that claims in the domain of discourse are systematically false; but commitment to falsehoods, as already noted, for Armstrong commits you to falsemakers which in turn leads to realism. Error theorists would thus be realists. Armstrong's account therefore does not allow for the variations that exist within the anti-realist positions.

Pinpointing the reason why this account of truthmaking fails in this project is not difficult – indeed we have already mentioned it, namely that it is a variant upon correspondence theory of truth. We have already seen how correspondence fails to satisfyingly characterise realism, and so it is not surprising that this account of truthmaking also fails. Moreover, as with our discussion of correspondence theory, Armstrongian truthmaking assumes realism as realism has been premised in. Claim 1 and 3 combine to take truthmakers to be "portions of reality", and that those "portions of reality" are "mind-independent". This is merely a standard definition of realism, and thus Armstrongian truthmaking cannot define realism because it presupposes it. Under Armstrong's account, Chalmers' 'lightweight realism', and those that take metaphysical truths to exist but to be conceptual such that metaphysics is a verbal domain of dispute, are not even possible positions. Such positions would not want to accept Armstrong's truthmakers, but want to maintain

talk of truth. The extra ‘correspondence principle’ Armstrong introduces – namely that the truthmaker is some corresponding ‘portion of reality’ – rules out such views a priori.

It remains for us though to show how truthmaking can be conceived of without this connection to correspondence. On Armstrong’s account of truthmaking, we seem to have simply replaced the old notion of ‘correspondents’ with ‘truthmakers’,<sup>68</sup> Although I have argued that Armstrong’s account cannot characterise realism appropriately, it is still necessary here to show how the correspondence that Armstrong builds into truthmaking is unnecessary. If we do not, then the criticisms we gave to our original working conception of realism for being too closely connected to notions of truth, can be repurposed to criticise the account we will give here.

McGrath (2003) provides one argument for why we should separate truthmaking and correspondence. He distinguishes between two kinds of truthmaking that have been conflated in the literature thus far. Non-existential truthmaking is when the truth of a proposition is ‘accounted’ for by something, which McGrath takes to be propositions – the further propositions are the non-existential truthmakers; and existential truthmaking where the true proposition is true in virtue of the existence of something in the world. The two formulations can be stated as (2003: 683):

(**ABOUT**) If a proposition is true, then there is something  
*about* the world that makes it true.

(**IN**) If a proposition is true, then there is something *in*  
the world makes it true.

The distinction here therefore is that **ABOUT** is a descriptive form of the truthmaking principle, most likely fulfilled by further propositions; whilst **IN** is a metaphysically committing notion. McGrath takes **ABOUT** to account for all of our initial intuitions about truthmaking; whilst **IN** has led philosophers down the wrong conclusion of

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<sup>68</sup> Armstrong states that: “Anyone who is attracted to the Correspondence theory of truth should be drawn to the truthmaker. Correspondence demands a correspondent, and a correspondent for a truth is a truthmaker” (1997:14).

drawing metaphysical conclusions (i.e. correspondence) from the truthmaking claim. Given therefore that **IN** is an unnecessary addition to our original stock of truthmaking intuitions, we should drop **IN**, leaving us only with **ABOUT**, which is not connected to correspondence at all.<sup>69</sup>

Asay (2011: 83-87) criticises McGrath's account for introducing **ABOUT**, which he takes to be an empty notion, explaining why the distinction had not been noticed thus far. **ABOUT** ignores the ontological basis that truthmaking was motivated by, the thought that truths needed to be grounded *in* something – “**IN** makes that connection explicit. **ABOUT** speaks to it not at all” (2011: 85). Whilst I am sympathetic to Asay's objections, the notion of ‘about’ that McGrath uses, as McGrath himself admits, is not fully developed, Asay's criticisms overlook McGrath's own aims. McGrath is concerned about the possible regress should propositions be taken to be truthmakers (a worry he traces back to Fumerton 1995), and the transitivity of truthmaking with direct and indirect truthmakers. The latter worry, I am not concerned to establish a position on. There would *prima facie* seem to be no problem with chains of truthmakers down to some basic truthmaker. My concern here throughout has been with basic truthmakers, however they are conceived, and I leave how basic truthmakers relate to further higher level truthmakers to a later work.

On the former concern, I see no danger of regress. Chalmers' lightweight realist could argue that the propositions bottom out with some conceptual truth and thus no regress appears in the first place. This also undercuts Fumerton's move to link truthmaking to correspondence as a way of preventing that regress by way of grounding the line of inference in reality. McGrath's motivation for introducing the **ABOUT** notion of truthmaking is undercut as under his account it explains why such a regress could occur without being damaging. If no regress occurs, then we have provided a way in which even the anti-realist (on my account due to their truthmakers being conceptual) can avoid an infinite regress. Without the fear of regress, the lightweight realist can endorse the full **IN** notion of truthmaking, just so long as, as already discussed, we do not take the phrase ‘in the world’ to presuppose entities only of a sort that realists would accept, and thus could include entities such

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<sup>69</sup> And indeed, by way of a secondary benefit for McGrath, is perfectly consistent with deflationism.

as propositions. Propositions do of course exist in the world, and they can be taken by the lightweight realist to only represent conceptual truths rather than entities such as facts or states of affairs. McGrath's distinction therefore does not sever the link between truthmaking and correspondence as the link that he draws between **IN** and correspondence is not clear. The move to include **ABOUT** plays no additional role in showing how the two come apart either, as it would appear to be an empty move, the motivation for which can be undercut once we accept that the supposed regress of propositions as truthmakers is nothing to be worried about. However, McGrath's intuition that the nature of the entities that make something true lies at the heart of truthmaking is correct. All that is required though to undercut the link between truthmaking and correspondence is to allow that truthmaking is ontologically neutral as to what may serve as its truthmakers – the move that has already removed the inherent connection between truthmaking and realism. The introduction of **ABOUT** to deal with propositions as truthmakers is, we have shown, not necessary, and as such we can retain a broader, more ontologically neutral, understanding of the original TMP.

### 1.45 Truthmakers and Theories of Truth

At this point, it will be claimed by some that although this move may have severed the link between truthmaking and correspondence theory of truth, this is only one specific theory of truth. More work is therefore needed to show firstly that truthmaking is not itself a competing theory of truth, and then respond to the subsequent complaint that truthmaking still *relies* on some antecedently supposed, though perhaps never specified, theory of truth that will end up doing the philosophical work in our account of realism and anti-realism under the cover of the language of truthmaking.

Lewis takes this connection between truthmaking and *any* theory of truth as his subject matter, in a pair of papers (2001a, 2001b) discussing what it is to be a genuine theory of truth, arguing that neither correspondence theory, nor truthmaker theory count as theories of truth. Only the later idea is relevant here. Lewis first dismisses the idea that truthmaking is a version of correspondence in the same way as

done here above. He asks: “How does having a truthmaker come to the same thing as corresponding to a fact? Presumably because it is expected that the truthmakers will be facts. Tractarian facts, presumably; because the facts that are just true propositions are well-nigh useless as truthmakers” (2001b: 278). Of course, whether there are Tractarian facts is a debatable point; but, leaving that aside, there *are*, as Lewis argues, things that are not Tractarian facts, and each of those non-facts will be a truthmaker for the truth that there exists at least one non-fact. Thus, in line with the recurring idea in this section, truthmaking for Lewis is distinguished from correspondence because the correspondence relation always involves a Tractarian fact, whilst no such restraint needs to exist on truthmaking.

Lewis’ argument that truthmaking is not a theory of truth flows from his insight that the traditional theories of truth, or so-called ‘grand theories of truth’, are not just that, theories of truth; rather they are theories of everything. Lewis first grants that deflationary theories are genuine theories of truth. Deflationism allows for all instances of the truth schema, and the conjunction of those instances is what a theory of truth is – a theory of what is true, and nothing more.<sup>70</sup> Thus truth is exhausted by the T-schema:

T<sub>1</sub>: The proposition that *p* is true if and only if *p*.

The ‘grand theories’, and including truthmaking amongst them, must be consistent with this T-schema, wherein for each theory, we take T<sub>1</sub> to be modified into:

T<sub>2</sub>: ‘*p*’ is true if and only if ‘*p*’ satisfies X.

Once we add “corresponds with the facts”, “coheres with the best belief system”, “has a truthmaker”, depending on the preferred theory, to replace X, Lewis concludes that “the deflationary conception and the grand theories coexist peacefully. But by taking them together, we find that the grand theory was not after all a theory about *truth*” (2001a: 603). That the grand theories and deflationism, which is a theory of truth for

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<sup>70</sup> This is in line with Horwich’s contention that our a priori acceptance of the propositional T-schema and all of its instances exhaust our understanding of truth.

Lewis, can co-exist, leads to the conclusion that the grand theories cannot actually be theories of truth, else a contradiction would occur through their 'peaceful coexistence'. Truthmaking therefore is for Lewis, *not* a theory of truth, just like the other 'grand theories'.

While I am in broad agreement with Lewis' discussion of the general nature of theories of truth, and the conclusion that they are about far more than just truth; there remains the issue that Lewis' account may rule out all potential theories of truth that we wish to posit. David (2004: 46, see also Asay 2011: 87-91) argues that even deflationary theories under Lewis' account are not theories of truth. From T<sub>2</sub> we can derive something like the following for deflationary theories of truth:

O: 'Owen likes marmite' is true if and only if Owen likes marmite.

Combining this with T<sub>2</sub> we (are told that we) get:

O': Owen likes marmite if and only if Owen likes marmite.

David and Asay both argue that the deflationary theory of truth leads to axioms such as O', which they take not to concern truth. Deflationism, and by extension any theory of truth that we may wish to offer in the future, are then supposedly shown to also not be theories of truth under Lewis' account, as "supposing minimally that any future theory is consistent with the T-sentences... the truth schema will lie in waiting, able to transform our intended theory of truth into a theory of everything else besides" (Asay 2011: 90). However, there seems to be something wrong here. All that David and Asay have shown is that under Lewis account deflationism is consistent with deflationism – hardly a surprising conclusion. Lewis' papers intend to show how the grand theories of truth overstep the (strict) boundary of what it is to be a theory of truth – namely the T-schema of deflationism. O' only shows that applying the demands to deflationism does not try to go *beyond* what was already given in 'p', in the way that the 'grand theories' do, which add premises in that stipulate what 'satisfies X'. By not doing this, deflationism can still hold as being a theory only

concerned with what is *true*. We might well criticise Lewis here for building a case wherein the *only* theory of truth can be deflationism, but that is not of relevance here. Lewis argument that truthmaking is not a theory of truth therefore holds.

Merricks (2007: 14-15) produces a similar argument to Lewis for the conclusion that truthmaking is not a theory of truth through the idea that the truthmaking principle does not have the necessary conditions that we should expect from a theory of truth: “[the] Truthmaker [principle] says that every claim has ontological commitments of a certain sort. And Truthmaker catches cheaters who fail to meet those ontological commitments. But none of these claims about ontological commitments amount to – or even look remotely like – a theory about the nature of truth” (2007: 15). For Merricks, a theory of truth must provide an analysis of ‘being true’; truthmaking not only does not do this, but furthermore it cannot as to analyse ‘being true’ in terms of ‘making true’ would be viciously circular. There are problems with Merricks account, indeed insofar as Merricks argument parallels Lewis’, the possible criticisms also parallel each other. The criticism of Lewis was that he set the standard of truth in a way that only the deflationist might meet it; Merricks sets the standard as one of ‘analysability’, something that would a priori rule out putative theories of truth such as primitivism (Asay 2011: 92). However, again, this is not a problem that we must deal with here – our interest here is on *truthmaking*, not on providing an account of *truth* itself. Merricks and Lewis both go far enough to give us *prima facie* reasons for thinking that truthmaking is not a theory of truth – this is sufficient for the aims here.

We can summarise therefore that the central point of the argument proposed here as follows: We have characterised truthmaking as a principle concerned with *ontology not truth*. This has appeared repeatedly as the idea that truthmaking brings out the *ontological commitments* of a theory. Indeed this feature of truthmaking, in part, motivated the idea that truthmaking could be a good tool to characterise the realism question, itself an *ontological* (or at least metaphysical) question. Truth, however, is a semantic notion,<sup>71</sup> about the property of certain sentences or propositions to be ‘true’.

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<sup>71</sup> There is a suggestion from Hinzen and Sheehan (2013) that has been discussed (see §1.2) that truth may have a grammatical foundation rather than a semantic one; if this is right, then my use of

To think otherwise leads to the problems raised by Lewis, and to a degree Merricks, wherein we expect our theories of truth to be doing philosophical work that goes beyond their remit – they turn into theories not of truth, but of everything. This is of course why, as argued in §1.2 and §1.3, theories of truth cannot be used in satisfactory characterisations of realism and anti-realism. Truthmaking, as a theory concerned with ontology, and indeed being within the realm of metametaphysics, is therefore not a theory of truth, and is far better placed to provide a way to characterise realism and the various forms of anti-realism.

However, let us consider the response that we have merely played a linguistic trick, only linguistically classifying truthmaking as an ontological theory rather than as a theory of truth, and that at the heart of the truthmaking claim lies some, though perhaps unspecified, theory of truth. We after all still need some theory of truth to know which sentences to accept as true, irrespective of the truthmakers claim, that that will come from a theory of truth. Asay responds to this argument saying that truthmaker theory is not a theory of truth because of the idea that truthmaking presupposes a theory of truth (2011: 93-103). I find myself in agreement with the spirit of Asay's point, but have some issues with the details. We must remember that a theory of truth is about just that – the *truth* of the truthbearer. Truthmaker theory says nothing, at least under the conception I offer here (which is explicitly not the truthmaking theory on offer from others that discuss and support it), about what it is in virtue of which the truthbearer is true. The truthmaker for a claim could be objects (in the sense of objects taken metaphysically seriously); they could be the coherence relation between the concepts that we have; they could be the concepts themselves; they could be the pragmatically agreed rules or conventions; they could be linguistic, or language choices. In short, the truthmakers could be entities of any sort that the theorist is willing to posit into their ontology. Let us not forget that all theories have an ontology; the differences between them lies in the nature of the entities posited in those ontologies. The insight here therefore is that at its heart truthmaker theory should be understood as a claim about ontology, and not, as Asay correctly argues, one about truth. A complete truthmaker theory will account for all the claims that a

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'semantic' above can be changed to 'linguistic' without any significant change to the meaning or spirit of the arguments presented here.

theorist wishes to take to be true, under whichever theory of truth, in virtue of some entity that makes those claims true. Truth, and theories of truth, are concerned with the truth conditions for a given sentence to be taken to be true; truthmaking under the account discussed here is about the entities that fulfil those truth conditions. Thus truthmaking retains its original *ontological* intuition, stripped of any additional theories of truth, showing that it stand apart from such theories.

The minimal notion of the truthmaker principle, stripped of commitments to theories of truth, that I have offered will be sufficient to characterise realism and anti-realism. Indeed, by adding features onto this minimal conception of the truthmaker principle we may be in danger of repeating the mistakes that have already been discussed in the case of correspondence theories of truth. By adding additional characteristics and theoretical features into the truthmaker principle we run the risk of building realism into the principle. This is exactly the same move for which Devitt criticised correspondence theories of truth: of adding realism into the premises of their theory of truth.<sup>72</sup> Of course, were I giving a full account of all things that we are interested in philosophically, then I would most likely need to be committed to a certain theory of truth, be it substantive or deflationary. My contention has been that *this addition need play no extra role in characterising realism and anti-realism*. The details, and precise characterisations remain to follow in the remainder of this section; thus far I have indicated the stripped down nature of the truthmaking principle under consideration here; shown how the distinction between realism and anti-realism will follow and thus that truthmaking does not have an inherent commitment to realism; and have shown (motivated by the conclusions from sections 1.2 and 1.3) firstly how truthmaking does not need to lead to a correspondence theory of truth, nor rely on a theory of truth at all to be formulable. This provides us with the truthmaking tool to now characterise realism and anti-realism.

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<sup>72</sup> It of course remains a theoretical possibility that we could add premises into the truthmaker principle that would result in an anti-realist position. To my knowledge, no theorist is yet to do this, whilst the addition of some realism premises is what causes the truthmaker principle to often appear to be a variant on correspondence theories as we have already seen.

## 1.5 Specifics of the Truthmaker Account of Realism and Anti-Realism

One effective way to show that, stripped of any prior connection to theories of truth, truthmaker theory can be a tool for both realist and anti-realist alike is to simply give an account of key positions characterised by the tools at hand. As we shall see, a key part of the distinction between the different answers to the realism question will hinge on whether truthmaking is taken to be a cross-categorical relation. It has already been argued that nothing in TMP either forces or denies that truthmaking can be cross-categorical, and thus whether it is a feature of the relation *brought about by the nature of the truthmakers themselves* and the kinds of ontological commitments within a theory.

Let us remind ourselves of our original, though flawed, conception of realism:

R<sub>1</sub>: A metaphysical claim, C, is realist iff it is, when literally construed, true, and has a truth value which is (i) objective, (ii) determinate, (iii) non-trivial, and (iv) independent of our mental (cognitive) capacities.

We rejected this characterisation on the grounds that the notion of truth cannot do the necessary philosophical work to understand what makes a theory realist or anti-realist with respect to metaphysics. Consider the claim:

S: There exists something composed of Clinton's nose and the Eiffel Tower.

Realists and anti-realists alike can take S to be true or false. This, in part, explained why the notion of truth could not adequately distinguish realism and anti-realism for us. If both realists and anti-realists accept S is true, then the only option available to distinguish between the different metametaphysical positions is through whatever theory of truth we decide to accept – something that has already been shown to be insufficient to do such work.

In the last section, I have argued that the truthmaker principle can be understood appropriately to be the tool with which we can characterise the difference between realism and anti-realism. The important factor here was in terms of the nature of the truthmakers that make a claim such as *S* true. Asay, in his account of realism through truthmaking, makes use of “realism-relevant” entities (2012: 389-390); unfortunately this is too vague to help us much here. The notion of ‘realism-relevant ontology’ assumes that we have a prior understanding and thus way of characterising what *is* a realist theory. We cannot give an account of realism through what is realism-relevant without first assuming that we have some grasp on what it is to be realism-relevant. This is, though, exactly the issue that is on the table. Asay’s interest is far broader than ours here, in particular being concerned with realism more generally. Our narrower focus can allow us to be more precise. We shall see that  $R_1$  still has some use for us in that the sorts of characteristics that applied for the *truth value* of a claim will be similar to the characteristics to look for in a *truthmaker* for a realist theory. The work that was done to explicate what features a truth value should have were it *prima facie* of the sort to be considered by a realist, can carry over into the account of realism through truthmaking. Let us assume that *S* is true, and consider what various positions within the realism/anti-realism debate would take to be the truthmakers for such a claim. It is not important that *S* is *actually* true or not for the purposes here (and I do not wish to take any position in the mereological composition debate).

First let us consider the realist, so as to have a characterisation to consider the non-realist positions in contrast to.  $R_1$  required ‘objective, determinate, and non-trivial truth values independent of our mental (cognitive) capacities’. The notion of determinate truth value plays no role once we move to truthmaking, as by talking about a claim that has a truthmaker, we have assumed that there is a true claim to be made true by that very truthmaker (I will return to views where there are no truths later in this section). This leaves us with the following revised characterisation of metaphysical realism:

R<sub>2</sub>: A metaphysical claim, C, is realist iff it is, when literally construed, true and has a truthmaker, T, such that (i) T is objectively the truthmaker for C, (ii) T is non-trivial, and (iii) T exists independently of our mental (cognitive) capacities.

R<sub>2</sub> might, on first glance, appear to be very similar to R<sub>1</sub>. The conditions that are within R<sub>1</sub> are the same as in R<sub>2</sub>. Due to this, it is worth stressing exactly the source of the difference. It lies in the distinction between a truth value and a truthmaker. By placing the emphasis on the truthmaker as carrying the philosophical weight of a realist or an anti-realist claim, we restore the *ontology* of the theory to the centre of the debate over realism. The lack of ontological concern was one of the major criticisms of characterising realism through truth in §1.2, and thus this shift to truthmakers in R<sub>2</sub> is required lest we fall into the same objections.

Furthermore, truthmaking allows for different truthmakers to be relevant in different situations. Two realists, two anti-realists, or even a realist and an anti-realist, might agree on the *truth value* of a claim; but they might be distinguished through the *truthmaker*. This has two initial benefits. First, this allows us to still take the claims of the anti-realist in the spirit intended. They really do think that certain claims are true, and there are no grounds for the realist to claim that they are not *really* true for the anti-realist – they are simply true in virtue of different truthmakers than for the realist. Second, this also ensures that the claims I am making here are neutral as to the first order metaphysical debates. The two realists can both accept a claim is true, but that it is so in virtue of different truthmakers. I need say nothing more here, just so long as each of their truthmakers satisfy the criteria in R<sub>2</sub> in order to maintain the label of ‘realist’, about choosing between them, nor even about whether their respective positions are mutually incompatible. These debates can be left to one side here, in line with the desire in this thesis to stand clear of first-order metaphysical issues and debates as much as possible.

Note further that there is nothing in principle that prevents us understanding R<sub>2</sub> in terms of falsemakers instead. This means that this account, if it can account for realism at all, can account for a position that claims all metaphysical claims are false,

as those falsehoods must have falsemakers which are to be understood in the same way as committing the theorist to a certain ontology that makes those falsehoods false. This explains why Chalmers' claim earlier in this work that those who deny that numbers exist as being realists is correct. To speak in terms of truth and truthmakers keeps the account simpler and thus I shall keep talking of truthmakers here – of course a switch to falsehoods and falsemakers could be easily accomplished if wanted by simply negating the truths and truthmakers discussed here. The assumption of the truth of C also rules out those forms of anti-realism that would wish to argue that metaphysical claims have no truth value. This 'non-cognitivist' metaphysics fails to take claims such as C as being capable of having a truthmaker, and thus is correctly classified as anti-realist.

It remains to detail why  $R_2$  has the form that it has, and how the realist is different to the anti-realist. Going from  $R_1$  to  $R_2$ , objectivity remains needed to ensure that a realist's metaphysical claims have the required philosophical bite. The realist must hold that the truth of C is in virtue of T (this is after all just the truthmaking principle), hence the need for (i). (i) rules out anti-realist positions that would wish to claim that C is true in virtue of something other than T. This ensures that it is the truthmaker, T, itself that distinguishes between realism and anti-realism, as secured by the nature of T itself.

Chalmers' categories included the 'lightweight realists'. Previously, I argued that such a position should not be viewed as realist.  $R_2$  provides reasons for this, forcing such a view into anti-realism. The lightweight realist was able to accept that there are some objective metaphysical truths, not grounded in reality, nor our choice of conceptual scheme, but rather in the nature of all possible conceptual schemes. These positions survive (i). However, (ii) rules them out. Trivial truths are insufficient to support the notion of metaphysics – if the domain of metaphysics has any content then it must be more than an investigation into trivial truths of the nature of conceptual schemes, more than truths based on analytic relationships between concepts. Such trivialities cannot therefore be the truthmakers for realist claims. *Prima facie* we might think that the lightweight realist also fails (iii), however it should be possible for a theorist to develop a position wherein the objective, trivial truths are

mind-independent despite their truthmakers being conceptual. The range of possible conceptual schemes could be taken to exist mind-independently, satisfying (iii) and thus the need for (ii) to rule out as realist a metaphysical position that only deals in trivial truths.

(iii) rules out the various forms of relativism, conventionalism, and idealism. Consider Chalmers' classifications again. His 'anti-realists' could accept trivially true ontological claims such as 'There are even perfect numbers'. However the truthmaker of that assertion would only be the subjective language framework that we have chosen to adopt, one, as Chalmers puts it, "largely independent of ontological reasoning" (2009:93). The truthmakers of such claims would thus be the subjective language framework, meaning that this position fails to be a realist due to (iii). Take an idealist who wishes to accept C as true, but would locate the truthmaker for C within our ideas. Consider Berkeley – if he were to accept that C was literally true, then what would be the truthmakers for such a claim?<sup>73</sup> Cameron (2008: 118-119) discusses, given the background of truthmaking (though not used in the way they are being used here), how it is that we should conclude that Berkeley was not a realist. Lewis (1990: 153) has a simple answer to this – Berkeley should not be considered as taking claims such as 'There are trees' as literally true as, though he may believe in trees, Berkeley would not mean the things that we mean when we discuss 'trees'. Cameron instead takes Berkeley to be anti-realist in virtue of him having false beliefs about what trees *are*. This therefore rules idealism out as realist because Cameron says that the sort of thing that Berkeley takes the claim C to be true in virtue of is not the sort of thing that is 'acceptable' in our ontology. (iii) expresses this limitation. For a realist, the truthmaker must be mind-independent, something the idealist would deny. Similarly, relativist, metaphysical deflationist, or conventionalist positions, often summarised recently as being the view that metaphysical debates are 'purely verbal', are ruled out as realist as social conventions, or the nature of our language are not independent of our cognitive capacities. Take Hirsch's 'Quantifier Variance' (2011). This view holds that metaphysical debates should be deflated as the disagreements reduce down to variations in how the theorists understand the

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<sup>73</sup> Of course, much like the discussion Meinong earlier, the suggestion here is not that Berkeley would *actually* use the language of truthmaking. The discussion here is only one of philosophical exposition and illumination.

meaning of the existential quantifier. Realism as defined through truth would struggle to accommodate this as anti-realist, as a Hirschian could accept that metaphysical statements are true but only due to the presupposed meaning of the existential quantifier. The truthmaking account easily deals with this position though, correctly classifying it as anti-realist as the truthmakers for the metaphysical statements would be the varying meanings of the existential quantifier in that specific language. It is the semantic restriction upon the quantifier that is the truthmaker, and this would fail condition (iii).<sup>74</sup>

It is worth stressing again that  $R_2$  ultimately gains its force from the ontological nature of the truthmaking principle. The above discussion of how  $R_2$  can delineate certain key positions correctly as realist or anti-realist revolves around the *kinds of entities* that a position takes to be the truthmaker for a given claim  $C$ . It is the *ontology* that makes a theory realist or anti-realist – it is the nature of the truthmaker that is central to where on the realism/anti-realism spectrum a theory falls. This ontological nature is needed in a characterisation of realism and anti-realism because, as Dummett points out, the realist and the anti-realist could agree on the *truth conditions* for a sentence; they would not agree over the actual ontologies being posited. Through the notion of a truthmaker, the claim for the realist becomes one about the independence of the entities in question, not about the truth of the sentence, something an anti-realist could also accept but only *through positing different kinds of truthmakers*. A further way to express this is in the *cross-categorical nature* of the truthmaking principle for the realist. The realist will hold that the truthmakers, be they facts, state of affairs etc., that are suitable given first-order metaphysical commitments, are (at least in part) of a different category to the claim  $C$  which is a linguistic entity. Many of the various forms of anti-realism that we have mentioned would deny this cross-categorical property of truthmaking, holding that the only possible truthmakers for  $C$  would be within the same linguistic or conceptual category of entities as  $C$  itself. It would only be further entities of the same ontological category that could serve as the truthmakers for metaphysical claims, hence the lack of depth to metaphysical issues. This is not intended to be a strong claim to the

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<sup>74</sup> A far more detailed discussion of Hirsch and realism will follow in §2.32, in order to argue, contra Hirsch's own self-ascription, that his quantifier variance is best characterised as an anti-realist position.

conclusion that a realist does take the relation to be cross-categorical, the anti-realist does not. Much more research into what exactly would constitute a cross-categorical relation would be needed to support such a claim, which cannot be given here. However, talking in this way may help illuminate the philosophical work being done by R<sub>2</sub>.

We have therefore seen that the truthmaking account can correctly classify various positions within the debate. However there is a significant additional reason for adopting the truthmaking account that the above paragraph also hints towards. When we consider our characterisation of the realism question, the realism question defined through truth runs the risk of becoming overly epistemological, running into concerns over whether certain conceptions of truth are accessible or not. The truthmaking account makes the distinction between realism and anti-realism to be about what sorts of entities we posit, and thus distinctly *ontological* in nature. It seems intuitively correct that a metametaphysical issue so central as the realism question should find its answer within the domain of metaphysics not epistemology – realism and anti-realism therefore are ultimately disagreements over what sorts of entities we can take to exist. The anti-realist might wish to claim that the realism debate is only about how we think about the world; but this would only be to beg the question against the realist, whose claims we have understood as being about the world, not how we think about it. Anti-realism, being a rejection of the claims of the realist, cannot be thus understood.

One consequence of this distinctly ontological account might be that under this view, anti-realists (of whatever conception) can be interpreted as still ‘doing metaphysics’. This is in the sense that their claims, and thus the truthmakers that they are subsequently committed to, populate an ontology that falls out of the theoretical commitments. Even an anti-realist position is committed to a certain view of what truthmakers exist, and thus what entities are within the favoured ontology. Populating an ontology in such a way *is* metaphysics; it is to be committed to certain entities existing (and presumably others not existing). This is a metaphysical, and ontological, enterprise. There are some similarities here to Lowe’s rejection of scientism (1998: 3). Scientism, as Lowe describes it, intends to show the impossibility

of metaphysics as the sorts of answers that metaphysical questions demand are already given within our best sciences. For the supporter of scientism, there simply is no work to be done by the metaphysician (bar some minor tidying of scientific theories), and we should adopt whatever metaphysics our most successful, explanatory, and powerfully predictive theory of science demands. Lowe rejects such a view as presupposing metaphysical answers, and sees scientists as “inevitably mak[ing] metaphysical assumptions, whether explicitly or implicitly, in proposing and testing their theories—assumptions which go beyond anything that science itself can legitimate” (1998: 6). Scientific theories therefore *rely* upon prior metaphysical claims in order to even formulate their views. Our truthmaking account gives us a reason why Lowe’s argument is correct, and a mechanism to explain how it is that scientism presupposes the very metaphysical conclusions it seeks to deny. Scientific theories, or at least their true statements, require truthmakers the same as any other theory. The truthmaking account of realism and anti-realism therefore implies that those theories are, through their truthmaking commitments, committed to an ontology. This explains why Lowe is correct to say that such those holding such positions are already ‘doing metaphysics’ prior to their claimed rejection of metaphysics.

Some anti-realists may object to this consequence. However, I see it as hardly surprising. One guiding principle in metaphysics is the notion of difference-making.<sup>75</sup> I take this to be an often unexpressed notion that is commonly adhered to by metaphysicians. Difference-making is to be understood as the intuition that a change in the metaphysics that we take to be correct, or to the ontology that we posit, must reflect a difference in the way that the world is. This is the major feature of first-order metaphysics. Take two metaphysical claims:  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ . For  $\alpha$  to be true, then the world needs to be a certain way; for  $\beta$  to be true, as a competing metaphysical claim, the world must be a different way. Thus there is no difference in the world without an accompanying difference in the correct metaphysical claim. Armstrong states his commitment to this idea as that “if anything that is true had not been true, then being [the world] would have to have been different in some way” (2004: 8). If  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  were

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<sup>75</sup> I take this term from Lewis 2001a; however I do not intend it to tie me to Lewis’ conception.

both true, then there would be no substantive difference between those views. The truthmaking account shows us how moving from a realist position to an anti-realist one (of whatever creeds) results in terms of difference-making – in moving from  $\alpha$  to  $\beta$ . The commitments that fall out of a realist and an anti-realist in light of the truthmaking account are differences that reflect what is accepted as part of the world – a difference in the first-order ontology that a theorist posits, even if one such ontology should be classed as anti-realist. We must be clear on the limit on this train of thought presented here: this section is work in metametaphysics, not first-order metaphysics. A methodology has been provided through which we can clarify and categorise the available first-order positions – i.e. the positions on the realism/anti-realism spectrum. No first-order claims are being made or supported here, as no specific ontology has been argued for. Thus this conclusion in no way answers the realism question, and the ascription of ‘doing metaphysics’ to anti-realist positions should not be taken to be an argument in support of realism. The metaphysics ascribed to the anti-realist here is not sufficient to conclude that realism is correct; instead the use of truthmaking to characterise the realism question only allows us to understand the commitments of both realism and anti-realism.

The truthmaking account is therefore neutral as to whether realism or anti-realism is correct. An anti-realist might flat out reject truthmaking, claiming it to be the same sort of obscure metaphysical notions that Hofwber (2007; 2009) has written on; but the discussion in this chapter has shown how the anti-realist need not claim this. Truthmaking helps to explain why claims the anti-realist wants to accept are true: why the claims of Chalmers’ lightweight realist are true, and why ontological claims within a Carnapian language framework can be true in virtue of the truthmaker that is that particular framework (see §2.2 for more on Carnap and linguistic frameworks).

Despite this, it is important that mere intention to refer to a certain sort of entity does not mean that we can (this point has been made by both Sider 2011 and Hirsch 2011). Thus the realist may *intend* to refer to the entities in an external reality; may *intend* that the truthmakers for their claims satisfy  $R_2$ ; may *intend* that their claims satisfy all criteria that could be placed upon a realist claim; *but that intention could still*

*fail*. Interestingly the reverse is also logically possible: the anti-realist may intend that their claim is only correct as of the certain language that we have chosen to use, but the claims might actually describe the nature of reality. In either case, there remains the question of whether we could justify that a claim describes reality. As such both the realist and the anti-realist can embrace this characterisation of the distinction through truthmakers without causing their other theoretical commitments any damage.

## Section II

### Anti-Realism and Language:

#### The Threat of Deflationism

Back in the late 1940s, Carnap\* recalls, metaphysics, like poetry, was supposed to be on its last legs. Yet everywhere that he turns these days, there is a philosopher espousing a metaphysical position – someone claiming to be a ‘realist’ about this, an ‘irrealist’ about that, a ‘fictionalist’ about something else. Out in the college towns of New Jersey and New England, Carnap\* finds, there are more ontological options than kinds of coffee, more metaphysicians than homeless people. (Price 2009: 321)

Metaphysics was, for a time, considered a dying discipline. Carnap\* (Price’s philosopher who has slept from the 1950s to the present day, awaking and wondering what has changed in those years to his beloved discipline) would indeed be surprised to see such a prevalence of metaphysical realists within philosophy departments. This prevalence of metaphysics, though, is not to say that the objections to metaphysics as a valid and substantive discipline have gone away, nor that Carnap\*’s near namesake’s influence has disappeared. Indeed it will be my contention within this section that one of the most powerful and potentially damaging criticism of realist metaphysics today has a strongly Carnapian spirit, one, perhaps, that Price’s Carnap\* would approve of.

The previous section in this work focused on a meta-level, trying to remain independent of any arguments either for or against realism and the viability of metaphysics, trying to stay clear of any commitments in those arguments. The remainder of this thesis will reverse that focus, and will engage directly with one specific, and currently popular, form of anti-realism, deflationism, that partly

connects with another form that has, by others, loosely been categorised as ‘conventionalism’;<sup>76</sup> and in particular one version of such theses, that of ‘Quantifier Variance’ put forward by Eli Hirsch. Conventionalism focuses on *psychological* influences, arguing that the boundaries that we draw in reality are not really natural, genuine boundaries in reality, and instead such boundaries are argued to be psychological, or based on our classificatory schemes. However, *linguistic* concerns are central to the form of deflationary anti-realism of interest here, with such arguments intending to show that metaphysical disputes are not substantive, and are really (at best) verbal disagreements. Providing a response to this form of anti-realism does not, of course, fully justify and defend metaphysical realism – there are further versions of anti-realism that require a response before such a claim is possible. The focus here though is because, as I interpret it, this form of anti-realist argument is one of the most popular and immediately pressing to the *overall, traditional* practice of a priori analytic metaphysics. This form of anti-realism also mirrors the development of the realism question as detailed in §1.1, as coming out of an interest in the nature and limits of our language, being also, in part, a result of the linguistic turn in the first half of the twentieth century, and the positivist programme of Rudolf Carnap and others. Language will thus be central to the views outlined in this section.

It is worth noting though, that other arguments might be developed from the (still) hugely influential anti-metaphysical ideas that the positivists defended. For example, independently of the linguistic concerns discussed here, we might doubt the traditional practice of metaphysical analysis if we find the positivists’ general focus

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<sup>76</sup> Extreme conventionalism would be a view akin to the idea that all of the distinctions that we make effort to determine are subjective. This notably also stems in part from ideas supported by the positivists, perhaps most influentially Ayer (1952). Sidelle (1989), Dummett (1991), and Goodman (1978), alongside Putnam (see §2.3), are often taken to be the prime examples of ontological conventionalism. Varzi (2011) recently defended a modest version of this thesis, relating largely to boundaries that we draw between parts of reality – see Tahko (2012) for a response to Varzi. Dupre’s pluralism about species (1993; 2002) could also be taken to be a version of moderate conventionalism. It is worth noting though it seems that we all are moderate conventionalists to a degree – for example, I take there to be a boundary between France and Germany. This boundary is real; laws are built around it, passports are required to cross it – but I would not want to say it is a *metaphysical* boundary. Thus a moderate conventionalism that allows *some* boundaries to be psychological does not discredit substantive realist metaphysics; it only requires that we are careful to distinguish between those that we wish to claim are *metaphysically* real, and those that are not. There is not room to discuss the merits of conventionalism, or how we can tell a metaphysical boundary from a non-metaphysical one, in this thesis.

and reliance on science persuasive. Ladyman and Ross (2007) are perhaps the main proponents of such a 'scientistic' view of metaphysics, wherein metaphysics becomes very closely related to the findings of the latest theoretical physics (in particular, but other sciences more broadly also). Ney's (2012) 'neo-positivist metaphysics' attempts to provide some role for "traditional, armchair methods" of metaphysics, but the overall trend if such a view is accepted is that metaphysics becomes the 'handmaiden' of physics and the sciences. I am suspicious of such views for reasons already briefly noted (see §1.1), but it is worth repeating that such views, though potentially dismissive of traditional metaphysical methods, are accepting of metaphysical talk so long as it is consistent with the findings of science, with metaphysics as a 'naturalised' enterprise. In this way, this 'scientistic' metaphysics stands apart from the language based objections to metaphysics under discussion in this work, as metaphysics remains valuable, though to a lesser degree than thought before. My focus is on those, the 'deflationists', that would wish to devalue (all) metaphysical talk.<sup>77</sup>

The remainder of this thesis, then, can, in a sense, stand independently of the arguments in the first section; though of course with the conclusions and characterisations offered in the first section running in the background to these more substantive debates. Therefore, broadly understood, sections two and three will be directly dealing with the question of realism – should we be metaphysical realists or anti-realists, and, thus, do any entities fulfil the criteria set out in the characterisation of realism given in §1 via R<sub>2</sub>? The conclusion on offer here (spoiler alert) will be that we should be realists, and that indeed we *can* legitimately talk about entities in such a way that they fulfil the demands of R<sub>2</sub>. Rather than building a positive argument from the beginning, I will provide a positive argument for realism through a response to the aforementioned deflationary approaches to metaphysics. The connection to the work carried out in the first section will be through this characterisation of such views

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<sup>77</sup> It should be acknowledged here that contemporary deflationists towards metaphysics, such as Hirsch, do not take their claims to necessarily apply to all debates in metaphysics, unlike, say, Carnap and Putnam's more encompassing anti-metaphysical claims. However, in so far as all deflationists seek to produce generalised arguments (or at least arguments that could in principle be applied to more than one area of metaphysical discourse), it seems that the claims are intended to potentially apply to more than one specific area of metaphysical discourse. As such, I will discuss the claims as though they are more generalised arguments against metaphysics, with the intention that the arguments that I produce against the deflationist in §3 can be applied to a number of different areas in support of substantive metaphysics.

as anti-realist. Some of the figures proposing the views to be outlined in this section would self-identify as realists (Hirsch in particular). Throughout this section therefore I will not only outline the arguments that certain key figures give against a substantive metaphysics, but also show how, on my characterisation, on  $R_2$ , those positions are better categorised as anti-realist.

With this in mind, the discussions in this section will be largely historical and expository. I will detail the broad strokes with which 'deflationism' rose in popularity, identifying the key figures in its development to its current supporters, the most prominent of which I take to be Eli Hirsch's Quantifier Variance. §2.1 will clarify some points concerning the notion of 'deflationism'; §2.2 will cover the influence of Quine and Carnap, as each of these played a significant role in laying the groundwork for today's positions; §2.3 will be devoted to a discussion of (the various versions of) Hilary Putnam; §2.4 will be a full exposition of Hirsch's Quantifier Variance, which will then be the main focus of my discussion in §3. The discussion in this section will, therefore, largely not seek to respond to any of these positions, but rather to understand both how the positions developed and what their central tenets are. Responses that seek to restore the status of metaphysical realism, including some discussion as to how we should understand the entire enterprise of metaphysics, will be presented in §3.

## **2.1 Deflationary Approaches to Metaphysics and 'Ontological Pluralism'**

The comments I have here will be brief; but given that the main topic of this thesis from herein is deflationary metaphysics, some preliminary comments on the overall notion of 'deflationism' will be useful. Deflationary approaches to metaphysics come in many forms, and it is not my place here to try to provide an exhaustive list of them, if such a list is even possible.<sup>78</sup> It is enough to consider that deflationary metaphysics

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<sup>78</sup> Recent defences of this of views that might be classed as deflationist are Thomasson (2007; 2009), Hale and Wright (2001; 2009), Chalmers (2009), Sosa (1999), Hofweber (2007; 2009), and, most centrally for this thesis, Hirsch (2009; 2011). Some of these views have alternatively be classed as being defences of 'easy ontology' (most notably those of Thomasson and Hofweber; cf. Sider 2011: 189-99), wherein questions of ontology and metaphysics are easily answered by analytic truths and some obvious

is taken to stand in contrast to 'robust', or, I prefer, 'substantive' metaphysics. 'Substantive' metaphysics takes, as the term suggests, metaphysical questions and statements to be substantive, to be about the structure of the world. The typically used imagery for such views therefore is that of 'carving reality at its joints', 'naturalness', or 'real'. Substantive metaphysics therefore lines up with the characterisation of realism that I offered in §1, satisfying the three criteria that I argued for on the nature of the truthmakers.<sup>79</sup> 'Deflationary metaphysics', alternatively, takes those same metaphysical questions and statements as unable to live up to such rigorous demands, for one reason or another. Deflationary metaphysics therefore often takes metaphysical questions and statements to be only concerned with our concepts, our language, or perhaps our view of the world, and not reality itself. Many of these reasons to be deflationary about metaphysics have been covered in detail and categorised as anti-realist in §1 of this thesis. There may be some theorists who, under the characterisation offered here, come out as anti-realist, despite self-ascribing as realists. I have no general argument against those who take this position (though see § 2.43 for a specific response to Hirsch's ascription of realism). In so far as the characterisation offered in §1 was only a characterisation not a definition, then that there could be some cases where my account might class a theory to be anti-realist despite a self-ascription of realism,<sup>80</sup> is not surprising or particularly damaging to my claims. I simply leave it open that it may be possible to produce an account that both satisfies my characterisation of realism, and comes under the general notion of deflationary approaches to metaphysics. I struggle to see what such a theory would look like, but I do not wish to argue or claim that it is impossible.

This, therefore, provides us with a general understanding of deflationary approaches to metaphysics. Eklund, though, has recently termed a certain form of

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facts. As with the deflationists that are the focus in this work, metaphysics becomes only a reflection on how we use language. I leave the issue of 'easy ontology' aside here.

<sup>79</sup> That characterisation of what realism consists in, for ease of reference, is the following - R<sub>2</sub>: A metaphysical claim, C, is realist iff it is, when literally construed, true and has a truthmaker, T, such that (i) T is objectively the truthmaker for C, (ii) T is non-trivial, and (iii) T exists independently of our mental (cognitive) capacities. This is to be understood therefore as three necessary conditions upon the nature of the truthmakers for a particular ontological statement, for that statement to be understood to be a realist claim about the structure of reality. Should the truthmakers for the given ontological statement fail to satisfy any of these criterions, then the claim should be understood as being anti-realist.

<sup>80</sup> Or, of course, vice versa.

deflationary approaches to metaphysics as “ontological pluralism” (2008: 383). There are some concerns with this terminology (discussed below), however the term will suffice, if the reader prefers it to the term ‘deflationist’. Ontological pluralists take the disputants in metaphysical debates to be simply using the terms of those debates differently, notions such as ‘object’, ‘exists’ etc. This results in the debate being shallow, and only really a disagreement over the meanings of those terms. Ontological pluralists, so described, therefore will hold that “there are languages with significantly different sets of ontological expressions such that these languages are all maximally adequate for stating all the facts about the world”, or “that there are significantly different sets of expressions, tied for maximal expressive richness” (Eklund 2008: 390, 394); the supporter of a substantive metaphysics will want to maintain that one of those languages, with its set of ontological expressions is privileged.

There is one thing that must be stressed here. For ontological pluralism to run counter to substantive metaphysics, it must be the case that at least two of these different languages, or different sets of ontological expressions, are expressively equal, or truth-conditionally equivalent. Without this, the thesis of ontological pluralism would only be the thesis that there are these different languages or sets of ontological expressions, and we could still hold that one could be privileged. The pluralism here must therefore admit of no hierarchy of expressive richness in relation to the world (as opposed to pragmatic reasons for choosing one language over another). A harmless (to substantive metaphysics) version of ontological pluralism is therefore possible, and would be something that few should find controversial – namely that there are many different, potentially infinitely many, sets of ontological expressions. The controversy lies in the denial of any privileged set amongst those sets of ontological expressions, and importantly, privileged in a *metaphysical sense*, rather than some pragmatic privilege.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> As should be expected, the previously defended characterisation of realism can be useful here. We can take ontological pluralism to be deflationary in spirit if there is no set of ontological expressions that passes the characterisation of realism offered here – as will be detailed in §2.43, this is normally through failing to satisfy (iii), the requirement that the truthmakers exist independent of our mental or cognitive capacities, as deflationary ontological pluralism typically will take the truth of ontological statements, and sets of ontological statements, to be made true in virtue of some linguistic fact about the ontological language that we have chosen to speak. If our pluralism about ontological

This strand of deflationary approaches to metaphysics is of particular interest here as the claims within it are closely linked to how we conceive of language. The responses that I offer to this form of deflationary metaphysics will revolve around conceptions of language that are not in tension with substantive metaphysics in the way that 'language' as understood by such theorists are. As such, all mentions of deflationary approaches to metaphysics should be understood as only applying to this particular form – to 'ontological pluralism' that argues from the nature of language, or linguistic interpretations or meanings, to the conclusion that there cannot exist a uniquely privileged ontological account of the structure of reality, or a coherent understanding of the unrestricted existential quantifier.

## 2.2 The Quine-Carnap Dispute

History, so we are told, is written by the victors; and in twenty-first century philosophy, the current winners are metaphysicians. From a point of near extinction under the influence of positivism, current metaphysics is a strong and growing field of research. The revival of metaphysics is sometimes portrayed as being almost a result of Quine alone, and, in particular, his responses to Carnap and the 1948 paper 'On What There Is'. From Quine's work grew the discipline of ontology, and the growth of metaphysical research. This claim that Quine restarted the metaphysical research programme is often repeated.<sup>82</sup> However, my aim here is not to discuss the undoubted major influence that Quine had on reviving substantive metaphysics (an influence that he most certainly had whether he intended to or not); instead the aim is to discuss the influence that Quine also had on the critics of metaphysics. Both sides

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languages allows for a set of ontological expressions (an ontological language) that *does* satisfy the criteria of the characterisation of realism,  $R_2$ , then this can maintain a substantive account of metaphysics, as the pluralism is concerned only with descriptions, not with the existence of a uniquely privileged language with truthmakers that possess the features required of a realist account herein.

<sup>82</sup> Putnam: "If we ask when Ontology became a respectable subject for an analytic philosopher to pursue, the mystery disappears. It became respectable in 1948, when Quine published a famous paper titled 'On What There Is.' It was Quine who single-handedly made Ontology a respectable subject" (2004: 78-9); Chalmers: "Ontological realism is often traced back to Quine (1948), who held that we can determine what exists by seeing which entities are endorsed by our best scientific theory of the world. In recent years the practice of ontology has often presupposed an ever-stronger ontological realism" (2009: 78).

of the debate can draw upon ‘their Quine’ in order to justify arguments. It is the anti-realist Quine that is of interest here, in his ‘friendly fire’ (as Price puts it) criticisms that Quine posed for Carnap. I will therefore begin with Carnap’s critique of metaphysics, before discussing Quine’s response, and how it may not be as positive for realist and substantive metaphysics as it is often taken to be. This will lay the groundwork from which we can understand Putnam’s anti-realism and subsequently Hirsch’s ‘Quantifier Variance’, and the role that language plays in contemporary anti-realist arguments.

## 2.21 Carnap: Meaninglessness and Linguistic Frameworks

Carnap’s negative view of metaphysics can be seen in his note that “[t]his term [metaphysics] is used in this paper, as usually in Europe, for the field of *alleged* knowledge of the essence of things which *transcends the realm of empirically founded, inductive science*” (*my emphasis*; 1931; reprinted 1959: Notes to section 1). Logic, for Carnap, provided a way to give a “new and sharper answer to the question of the validity and justification of metaphysics” (1959: 60), and thus, as with much of Carnap’s work,<sup>83</sup> is central to his claims against metaphysics. The aim in this section is not to argue against Carnap; rather the purpose here is largely exegesis, understanding how Carnap is significant for introducing considerations upon natural language within his critique of metaphysics.

Carnap can be taken as having two main, though interconnected, strands to his critique of metaphysics – the first, from ‘The Elimination of Metaphysics’ (1931; 1959); the second in ‘Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology’ (1950; 1956). In ‘The Elimination of Metaphysics’, Carnap argues that, under suitable analysis, the language of metaphysics is meaningless. Carnap distinguishes between two ways in which a statement can be meaningless, both of which the metaphysician falls foul of: (1) the words in a sentence could be meaningless, and (2) the inadmissible syntax of the statement yields meaninglessness despite the terms being meaningful. Metaphysical terms are guilty of (1) in virtue of the verification process that ascribes a

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<sup>83</sup> Most notably of course manifested in his proposal that logical truths are a set of fundamental truths from which all other truths could be derived – see his 1928a.

meaning to the term. For example, following Carnap, take some metaphysical notion such as 'principle'. 'Principle', as used by the metaphysician, fails to be meaningful because it lacks the specified empirical truth-conditions from which we can draw the meaning. We cannot know how to verify that how 'principle' should be used in a given situation, and we do not know how it is deducible from simple elementary sentences.<sup>84</sup> For Carnap, the metaphysician claims that the meaning of his terms are different from the standard meaning in natural language derived from these conditions; but once we have rejected these methods to ascribe a meaning to a term, no method remains, and thus the term is rendered meaningless.

The second way in which metaphysical statements are rendered meaningless comes from their syntax, and the failure of natural language syntax to differentiate between the narrower categories of the meanings of words. Consider the two sentences (both from Carnap 1959: 67):

- a) "Caesar is and"
- b) "Caesar is a prime number"

(a) is clearly ungrammatical. The rules of natural language grammar specify that the argument place after a predicative 'is' is filled by an adjective or a noun phrase, and hence (a) is meaningless.<sup>85</sup> (b) though is grammatical; but Carnap argues it remains meaningless. This is due to an inadequacy in natural language, whereby the grammar of that language is incapable of recognising a violation of meaning when a predicate is predicated of something that it cannot be affirmed or denied to be part of. This is the case in (b), whereby, Carnap claims, we are erroneously applying a predicate that applies to numbers to a person. The fact that the sentence appears to be grammatical though could lead us to believe that (b) is false. Carnap disagrees with this, arguing that it is only this illusion of grammaticality that draws us into believing that (b) could be thought of as false. (b) is a pseudo-statement, neither true nor false because it

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<sup>84</sup> An elementary sentence is usually of the form 'x is a y', why 'y' is the term that we wish to understand the meaning of.

<sup>85</sup> (a) could of course be added to in order to make it meaningful, as in the case of "Caesar is and is not a hero"; but Carnap's interest lies in the meaninglessness of (a) as it is in the example without any addition to it.

lacks meaning. (b) is of the same status as (a), but it is harder for us to recognise this: “If grammatical syntax differentiated not only the word-categories of nouns, adjectives, verbs, conjunctions etc., but within each of these categories made further distinctions that are logically indispensable, then no pseudo-statements could be formed [...] In a correctly constructed language, therefore, all nonsensical sequences of words would be of the kind of example (a)” (letter changed to match example, 1959: 68).

Metaphysical statements, though, trade off exactly this sort of confusion within the syntax of natural language. When we consider metaphysical statements,<sup>86</sup> they are prone to placing the metaphysical term in just such unusual argument places – we talk of ‘redness’ as an object rather than a predicate for example. The result is that metaphysical questions and statements are based on the logical defects of natural language. Such mistakes from flawed logical form may abound in ordinary language also, but “the confusion of types causes no harm in conversational language, it is usually ignored entirely. This is, indeed, expedient for ordinary language, but has unfortunate consequences in metaphysics. Here the conditioning by everyday language has led to confusions of types which, unlike those in everyday language, are no longer translatable into logically correct form” (1959: 75).

These two forms of meaninglessness, which metaphysical statements are guilty of, lead to the claim that such statements cannot be salvaged. For Carnap, nothing sensible remains for the metaphysician to state, and metaphysics is eliminated. Of course there are some clear *prima facie* responses. We can doubt the term-meaninglessness within metaphysics through questioning the ways that Carnap thinks that words gain their meanings – in particular the notion of verifiability. The syntactical meaninglessness can be questioned by considering why such a privileged position is given to logical form, or questioning the relationship that Carnap draws between natural language and logic. Further we may ask why it is that we must think that a statement such as (b) truly is meaningless, rather than simply false (assuming of course that Caesar does not have the property of being a prime number). Carnap may

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<sup>86</sup> Carnap’s favourite examples are claims from Heidegger (1929) such as “What is this Nothing?”, but he is correct in that if it is a problem there, then the problem extends beyond just one theorist to the entire domain of metaphysics.

be guilty of begging the question against the metaphysician who may want to say that (b) is meaningful, but simply false, and in that way is no different in kind from other false statements about Caesar that are concerned with predicates that pick out properties that persons can have (e.g. “Caesar is an accountant”, assuming that that is also false). This is not the place to fully flesh out these possible responses. Carnap’s arguments here may not be conclusive against the metaphysical enterprise, but the significance lies in the discussion of language. Language, meaning, and grammaticality, are the basis from which he argues against metaphysics, and here Carnap begins a trend that we will see carries over into the work of Putnam and Hirsch, who in many ways provide modern re-workings of very Carnapian ideas. This said, the influence of Carnap against metaphysics does not really stem from his work in ‘The Elimination of Metaphysics’ – it is to the main source of his influence, his seminal paper ‘Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology’ (1950; reprinted 1956), that I now turn.

Carnap’s critique of metaphysics in ‘Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology’<sup>87</sup> is well known (and I do not intend to present a novel reading of it here). However, an outline will be useful to help understand the historical link between it and the later objections to metaphysics developed by Putnam and Hirsch. As with the previous objection to metaphysics, Carnap’s focus remains on the role of language in metaphysics, though centred on linguistic frameworks rather than meaningfulness/meaninglessness. A linguistic framework is, roughly, a set of rules and “ways of speaking”, a system that is introduced in order to talk about a new set of entities. Ordinary language is therefore a mixture of linguistic frameworks, and in different situation, we jump between those frameworks depending on the conversational need at the time. Ontological questions arise for each framework – for example, does the framework of the physicist include entities such as numbers? These questions are *internal*, and the answers to them dependent on needs and intended uses of that framework itself. Thus internal questions to a scientific linguistic framework will most likely be empirical; or logical within a mathematical linguistic framework. The question of whether something exists or not is therefore an internal

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<sup>87</sup> Unless otherwise specified, quotes in this paragraph and the following one are from ‘Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology’, 1950; reprinted 1956.

question within a given framework – if the linguistic framework posits such an entity, then it exists in that framework, but no further conclusions can be drawn from this. Metaphysical questions, though, attempt to be *external* questions, seeking to ask whether entities are real independent of any given framework. This form of external question for Carnap makes no sense – the questions and answers to them cannot be true or false (as such terms only apply within a given framework), they simply are meaningless, or empty of content. The only external question that we can legitimately ask (the only question that stands apart from a particular linguistic framework) is to ask which framework we should adopt. However, the answer to this is not metaphysical; it is pragmatic, depending upon the current needs and communicational intensions of the speaker.

Thus, to accept the reality of the “thing world” (as Carnap characterises the metaphysical realist) is only to accept a certain form of language, and therefore accept the rules that lead to a language of that form. The *reality* of the thing world cannot be among such statements within a language – such a statement cannot be formulated within a language, as the limit of the language is only the ontological commitments that come from the set of rules that govern that language. We might initially think that the success of the thing language (or at least the success of a thing language that allows for medium-sized dry goods which seems to pick out entities in the world very well) is reason for thinking that that language has some claim to being correct (or true); but, Carnap notes that this would only support the pragmatic decision to accept the thing language over other languages that are less pragmatically useful to our needs – something far short of the justification that the metaphysical realist needs to support their claims. To ‘do’ metaphysics therefore is to mistakenly think that illegitimate external questions can be both validly asked and answered.

It could be tempting here to think of Carnap as endorsing some pluralist, but still realist account of metaphysics. The different linguistic frameworks perform different jobs, and so we might initially be led into thinking that Carnap was pluralistic about which entities exist (though cf. the discussion of ontological pluralism in §2.1). However, and as Price also points out (2009: 324-325), this would be incorrect. The position rather is pluralistic about *language*, and from that pluralism

Carnap draws his critic of metaphysics.<sup>88</sup> For after all, if we have many different linguistic frameworks, all of which have their own supposed ontological commitments, then, as choosing between those frameworks is an external question, we have no basis for that choice beyond pragmatic benefit in a given situation. Hence, Carnap's anti-realism is based on a rejection of the meaningfulness of the very realism/anti-realism question, and, as Ney puts it, is based on the claim that "metaphysicians distort language in various ways to produce statements that in the end prove meaningless" (2012: 55).

Carnap, though, is not an idealist. Idealism, as argued in §1.1, is a first order metaphysical position holding certain ontological commitments, involving a metaphysical claim about what entities exist – they being only mind-dependent entities. Carnap does not seem to suggest such a position, nor indeed could he consistently with the claims already discussed. Idealism, as a first-order metaphysical claim, would also be meaningless for Carnap, as it too would require an invalid external position to be taken. On my broader characterisation of realism (R<sub>2</sub>) we can, though, maintain that Carnap is an anti-realist. Any putative metaphysical claim for Carnap would either not have a truthmaker (nor a falsemaker) due to its status as meaningless; or the truthmaker would be some fact of the linguistic framework that

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<sup>88</sup> There is an alternative interpretation of Carnap, which holds that rather than being pluralistic about language, he is in fact *relativistic* (see Gallois 1998, and Chalmers 2009 for two instances that seem to take Carnap as relativistic about language). Under this view the notion of linguistic framework is better understood as being closer to an 'outlook' or 'perspective'. Carnap's claim would therefore not be one about the meaning of a term being dependent upon the framework that it is part of, but rather the truth of the propositions expressed by those sentences within a framework are only true *relative* to that framework. By analogy, consider a basic understanding of a moral relativist who does take moral claims to be true or false, but only within a certain cultural or social situation. The relativistic Carnap thus takes propositions to only be true relative to a particular framework, and thus the metaphysician is asking illegitimate external questions when asking which of those frameworks, with their set of propositions that are true only relative to that framework, is correct. I do not wish to spend long discussing which interpretation of Carnap is the correct one (without assuming of course that either of the two, the pluralist or the relativist, are). Eklund (2013) provides some good reason to think that the pluralistic reading is most accurate to Carnap's writings, and certain problems that arise should we consider the relativistic reading that may make it unsupportable independently – most tellingly for myself is Eklund's note that the understanding of propositions on this reading is strange, being normally taken to be language-independent. As such the relativist must provide a radical new account of the nature of propositional truth (Eklund 2013: 233). I will therefore assume Carnap as a language pluralist throughout, unless mentioning alternative interpretations explicitly for dialectical reasons.

we have pragmatically chosen to accept. Neither of these satisfies R<sub>2</sub>, and so Carnap is, rightly, characterised as an anti-realist.

The aim here will not be to immediately respond to Carnap. However the significance of the notion of linguistic framework is huge. Thus, before moving on to a discussion of Quine, we must note the importance of Carnap's thesis for the positions that will follow in the remainder of this section, and, in due course, be responded to. The use of language to argue for an anti-realist conclusion reaches a first peak with Carnap. Carnap was not the first to argue that natural language was a poor translation of logical form. This is also the driving force behind Russell and Frege; however they, especially Russell, were (arguably) interested in finding metaphysical answers. The study of logic was important, and indeed central, to philosophical research precisely because it was taken to match the structure of reality. In Carnap we see a rejection of this. Metaphysical questions are ultimately non-cognitive, and no restructuring in order to correct the flaws of natural language in line with logical structure would change that. This is because the kinds of statements that the metaphysician wishes to make would not survive into the logical structure – “the possibility of forming pseudo-statements [i.e. metaphysical statements] is based on a logical defect in language” (1959: 69).<sup>89</sup> This logical defect prevents metaphysical statements from being true or false, from entering into relations with empirical statements, and thus metaphysics is to be *deflated* with its questions, statements, and discussions thrown out as pseudo-questions and pseudo-statements. It is this thought that resurfaces with Putnam and Hirsch, and is central to the anti-realism that I take as the main source of discussion here.

## 2.22 Quine and the seeds of Anti-Realism (and Realism)

One of Quine's most prominent influences on philosophy today is often summed up in the slogan ‘to be is to be the value of a variable’. The current analytic tradition of metaphysics owes much of its heritage to this slogan (or at least takes itself to owe

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<sup>89</sup> See also his 1928b as a further case why Carnap attempt to show that both the affirmation and the denial of the reality of the external world are pseudo-statements. The ‘pseudo’ nature of metaphysics follows from the ‘pseudo-ness’ of (arguably) its founding question.

much – the majority of metaphysics is still done in a 'quantificational' framework, though cf. §1.122), and the underlying thought that the entities that we are committed to in our ontology are those that we quantify over.<sup>90</sup> The entities that exist in reality are therefore those that we quantify over in our metaphysical theories. The domain of the existential quantifier (within a given theory) contains all, and only all, entities that that theory is ontologically committed to. If a theory discusses reality, as metaphysical theories claim to, then the entities that are quantified over in that theory are the entities that the supporter of the theory is committed to taking to exist. Carnap, it should be noted, takes a similar position to Quine here.<sup>91</sup> For Carnap, the introduction of a new entity into a linguistic framework comes from a combination of accepting a new general term, a new kind term, and some entity to be “variables of the new type. The new entities are values of these variables” (Carnap 1950). We could ask, then, why, given this similar view on the role of quantification, Quine, not Carnap, is taken to have laid the groundwork for the subsequent realist metaphysics that would grow in support throughout the latter half of the twentieth century? It is, after all, the role of quantification that Quine supported that has been so influential within metaphysics in the twentieth century. Carnap is certainly more vocal of his criticisms of metaphysics, and this will have played its part in the way that the history of philosophy viewed the two. Furthermore, Quine’s criticisms of Carnap have seemingly been taken to be comprehensive against Carnap’s anti-metaphysical stance. Yablo states that Carnap “is widely seen to have lost” with Quine being taken to have “destroyed the only available model of how quizzicalism might be philosophically justified” (1998: 232).<sup>92</sup> Alspector-Kelly also argues that the orthodox view states that the “positivists’ revolt against metaphysics... was finally put to rest when W. V. Quine demonstrated that Carnap’s last attempt to dodge metaphysical issues fails, and then showed that metaphysics has a legitimate place within a generally naturalistic

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<sup>90</sup> My interest in Quine here is not to his influence on the resurgence of metaphysical concerns in the twentieth century, and as such I deliberately leave such issues only vaguely sketched here. My focus is on an alternative interpretation of Quine, and his criticisms of Carnap.

<sup>91</sup> The exact causal-influential chain between Carnap and Quine (and vice versa) will not be a major issue here – I leave that work to those better suited to analyse the history of philosophy. Any claim of influence here therefore should be taken in a weak sense, contributing to similar views held by both figures and not some clear causal influence from one to the other.

<sup>92</sup> 'Quizzicalism' is Yablo's own term for his scepticism about metaphysical research and debates. The precise formulation of quizzicalism, which is most strongly voiced against debates about whether there are any mathematical objects, is not relevant here. Any alternative conception of scepticism about the legitimacy of metaphysical questions can be subbed in.

framework" (2001: 93). However, as we shall see, it is plausible that Quine's own scepticism towards metaphysics was as strong as Carnap's: as Price puts it, Quine's criticisms of Carnap were "friendly fire" (2009: 321).

Carnap's use of quantification to reveal what we are committed to take as existing cannot be read as supporting metaphysics for clear reasons. He explicitly limits such use of quantification to reveal ontological commitments to solve *internal* questions. We thus have a distinction between 'ontological' questions as being either internal and thus *empirical* in nature, or external and *metaphysical* in nature. Questions of the form 'Does x exist?' can only apply internally to a linguistic framework. Trying to phrase them as external questions, which the metaphysician does, requires us to drop the very notions that are included within the question – to talk of 'x's and to talk of 'exists' *only* makes sense within the specific linguistic framework that had been introduced into. Carnap, clearly, is anti-metaphysical through and through – but what about Quine? We have noted that Quine laid the seeds of realist metaphysics to come, and it is true that Quine's responses to Carnap's position did much damage to Carnap's on-going philosophical influence.<sup>93</sup> However, I will argue, following Price (2009), Soames (2009), Eklund (2013), and Wilson (2011), that not only are Quine's claims not so damaging to Carnap's anti-metaphysical stance as first thought, but also that Quine's own scepticism about substantive metaphysics makes him a strange 'flag-carrier' for the revival of realist metaphysics. This discussion of the historical trends in western philosophy, albeit brief, will help illuminate the anti-realism of Putnam, Hirsch, and other more recent deflationist, 'Carnapian' critiques of substantive metaphysics that I will respond to in §3. First, I will outline the basic argument as to why Quine has been taken to have effectively argued against Carnap's deflation of, and scepticism about, metaphysics through his critique of the

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<sup>93</sup> Clearly, Quine's critique of Carnap, and the broader logical positivist school of thought, has severely limited Carnap's ongoing philosophical influence. This is, of course, not to say that no one reads Carnap. Rather it has largely been assumed over the last 50 years, as already noted above, that, on the subject of the viability of metaphysics at least, that Quine's critique of Carnap was fatal. A recent trend though has changed this – as I will show in §2.4, there is a big growth recently in neo-Carnapian views on metametaphysics and metaontology. Cf. Yablo 1998, Gallois 1998, Price 2009, Soames 2009, Eklund 2009; 2013, Hirsch 2011, Ney 2012, Blatti and Lapointe *forthcoming* for just some discussion, and often support, of Carnapian metaontology (much of this material will be discussed in full later); Chalmers 2012, Leitgeb *forthcoming*, Ebbs 2011 for broader discussions on Carnap's work. Clearly, the current trend towards a reconsideration of Carnap's import and insight is very strong.

analytic/synthetic distinction that Carnap's talk of linguistic frameworks requires. However, I will show how this interpretation of the Quine-Carnap dispute may be mistaken – i.e. how Quine and Carnap in fact agreed about metaphysical ontological, or 'external', questions. This will also illustrate a possible reading of Quine wherein his anti-realism is as strong as any that Carnap defended.

## 2.23 Reconciling Quine and Carnap

Quine's significant critique of Carnap comes in his rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction in 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' (1951). Carnap, in a footnote, notes that:

Quine does not acknowledge the distinction which I emphasize... because according to his general conception there are no sharp boundary lines between logical and factual truth, between questions of meaning and questions of fact, between the acceptance of a language structure and the acceptance of an assertion formulated in the language. (1950 *fn*)

Quine himself stresses this as the "basic point of contention" (1951: 71), as, without the analytic/synthetic distinction, Carnap can no longer create his desired distinction between the supposedly meaningless ontological (external) questions, and meaningful empirical (internal) questions. Quine's issue with Carnap's distinction between forms of questions can be summarised in Quine's claim that there can be no purely internal questions which are somehow fenced off from external pragmatic issues. Thus revisions of the framework, and making decisions between which framework to adopt, will always, at least implicitly, affect the judgements that we make internal to a framework. No clear distinction between languages therefore remains, only a "continuum of gradations", where "statements of ontology or even mathematics and logic form a continuation of this continuum", with "differences only in degree and not in kind" (1951: 71-2).

Before directly discussing Quine and Carnap, there are some *prima facie* reasons for thinking that Quine is a strange figure to have emerged as the saviour of traditional, analytic, *a priori*, substantive metaphysics. Quine, let us not forget, was a devout empiricist and behaviourist. I will not produce an argument here that this combination of views prevents someone from being sympathetic to realist metaphysics, but it certainly seems intuitively likely that someone so committed to the value of scientific and empirical evidence is going to be at the least suspicious of *a priori* metaphysical reasoning.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, in his criticisms of the analytic/synthetic distinction, Quine states: “that there is such a distinction to be drawn at all is an unempirical dogma of empiricists, a metaphysical article of faith.” (1951; 1953: 37). Clearly, for Quine, for something to be a ‘metaphysical article of faith’ is a negative claim hence its use to describe the analytic/synthetic distinction. Quine, as strongly as Carnap, was sceptical of metaphysics, based on its non-empirical foundations. Though it is clear *why* Quine’s work on what entities are included within an ontology lead to a revival in analytic metaphysics; it also is clear that he may not have agreed with the consequences of his work. This first point though is, at best, circumstantial to real argument. Why, then, might we think that, first, Quine was no real friend of metaphysics, and, second, and more importantly, that in his account, although criticising Carnap, Quine does not undercut the major anti-metaphysical claims that Carnap made?

Quine’s defence of confirmational holism, and appeal to theoretical virtues when it comes to scientific and metaphysical thesis alike are important here. Pragmatism is central to Quine’s reasons for accepting one theory over another – the usefulness of a given theory, alongside its simplicity and explanatory power. Whilst theoretical virtues will of course help to decide between metaphysical theories, this is far short of the additional notions of ‘naturalness’ or ‘joint-carving’ that realist

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<sup>94</sup> One example of this suspicion is the autobiography that Quine produced that refused to include any mental states at all – rather the book is a more dispassionate account of occurrences (Quine 1985). It certainly seems strange that a figure who is so convinced of the unavoidable unscientific status of mentalistic terms, that he refuses to talk of them even in an autobiography; that that figure is likely to be at all willing to countenance the sort of somewhat bizarre objects (I think of objects such as those that supporters of unrestricted mereological composition would discuss – the fusion of Socrates’ nose and the Eiffel Tower for example) that realist metaphysicians will discuss as part of their *a priori* reasoning.

metaphysicians appeal to as crucially important for any true or correct metaphysical theory. Put simply, pragmatism and metaphysical realism, whilst not in direct conflict, are uncomfortable bedfellows. Indeed, it is notable that Quine's strict empiricism actually leads him to criticise Carnap for accepting entities such as numbers into his ontology, as well as a commitment to the entities implicit within logic and higher set theory: "The language which Carnap adopted as his starting point was not a sense-datum language in the narrowest conceivable sense, for it included also the notations of logic, up through higher set theory... The ontology implicit in it (that is, the range of values of its variables) embraces not only sensory events but classes, classes of classes, and so on. Empiricists there are who would boggle at such prodigality" (Quine 1951; 1953: 39). Again, I do not think that this shows that Quine is, or is even best read as, an anti-realist or sceptical of metaphysics. The implication from passages like this is only that such an interpretation is possible, and to give us initial motivation to consider whether Quine's critique of Carnap has either the intention or the force to discredit Carnap's points against substantive realist metaphysics in the way that they have so often taken to be. Thus, more important here is to show how Quine's critique of Carnap does not necessarily damage the anti-metaphysical heart of Carnap's thesis. This will lay the groundwork for an exposition of Putnam's anti-realism, and in turn the modern neo-Carnapians, whose work will be the main focus of debate in §3. I am not the first to make claims in this spirit – the recent trend of neo-Carnapianism is accompanied by arguments to this same end. Most persuasive of these are Yablo (1998), Eklund (2013). It is not necessary for my ends in this work to go into as much detail as either of those authors; instead I will provide what I find to be the most persuasive reasons to think that Quine's critique of Carnap leaves his metaphysical scepticism untouched, and, through those reasons, some comments on why that critique has, wrongly, been so destructive to Carnap.

To my mind, the most persuasive reason to think that Quine's critique of Carnap, based on his rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction, is not damaging to Carnap, is simply that, although Carnap was most certainly a supporter of analytic truths, his scepticism about metaphysics does not rely on this distinction. Thus Quine's rejection of the analytic/synthetic divide does not affect Carnap's rejection of metaphysics which is instead based on the internal/external distinction. For Quine's

criticisms to do damage to Carnap, those distinctions need to be the same. I do not think they are. This is not to say that Carnap was right, and that there are no valid criticisms of his scepticism about metaphysics – indeed I will present such reasons to reject Carnapian and neo-Carnapian anti-realism in §3. The claim immediately only goes so far as to say that *Quine's* criticism of Carnap is not as strong as it is often assumed to be, especially by those already predisposed to like metaphysics. This therefore serves to prelude later discussions in this section: without some justification of Carnap's claims against Quine's critique, the neo-Carnapians might be starting from shaky ground, and responding to them would be much easier than I think it is, and certainly would not require the in depth treatment that I am providing here.

As before, I will assume that the most natural understanding of Carnap takes him to be a pluralist about languages. Thus, we have many different languages (or if preferred, language fragments) – these are the frameworks that Carnap discusses. The internal questions concern the commitments within one of these frameworks; the only valid external question is about the pragmatic choice as to which of these frameworks should be made use of in a particular situation. Metaphysics is meaningless as it tries to ask impossible external questions, and to use an impossible, privileged, language framework. However, the distinction between the answers to the supposed meaningless questions of metaphysics, and the empirical questions that we can ask about the commitments of a particular language framework; that distinction is not the analytic/synthetic one. The clearest way to illustrate this, is that the analytic/synthetic distinction is, of course, about two distinct ways for something to be true. For Carnap, then, as a supporter of analyticity, within a language framework, there are two ways for something to be true, analytically in virtue of the meanings of the terms alone, and synthetically in virtue of something that we have found out about the world through empirical methods. Within each framework, there will be both sorts of truths. Under this view, we can take each framework to be individuated by the set of synthetic truths that it possesses, and would cause us to choose to use that framework in a given situation rather than some other. Certain analytic truths will then follow from this, further individuating the frameworks. Indeed, as already noted, one of the criticisms that Quine had of Carnap was that the frameworks could not be individuated and distinguished in the way that Carnap assumed. The inability to do

this comes from Quine's rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction. Without such a distinction, we cannot tell one framework from an alternative framework, as the way that the expressively equal frameworks are distinguished can only be by the different ways that truths are arrived at within that framework.

The disagreement between Quine and Carnap therefore becomes one concerned with 1) the nature of truths within a framework, and 2) the number of frameworks that exist. On the first point, Carnap and Quine simply disagreed with the nature of truth within a framework.<sup>95</sup> For Quine, there is simply truth, with no notion of *analytically* true – all truths are synthetic. Carnap disagrees. Eklund (2013), for example, argues that the reason that Carnap, contra Quine, accepted numbers – accepted that the phrase 'There are numbers' is true – is because, for Carnap, commitment to numbers comes from such a phrase being *analytically* true. The disagreement on the first point therefore clearly is not about *metaphysics*. Rather the disagreement is only about the nature of truths, and how it is that they become true. On the second point of disagreement, Quine takes there to only be one continuous framework, differentiated only by gradations upon the continuum. Carnap disagrees, and uses the analytic/synthetic distinction to show that different frameworks can be properly individuated. Again though, this disagreement has nothing to do with Carnap's attack on the meaningfulness of metaphysics.

So why is it that neither of these disagreements touches upon the attack on metaphysics? The reason for this, as Eklund (2013: 237) also recognises, is that Carnap actually produces a *tripartite* distinction, not a binary one. Three categories of questions and answers exist: internal, external, *and* meaningless, or pseudo-questions, with metaphysical statements being placed into the last category. Carnap uses the analytic/synthetic distinction to distinguish between the internal and external, in that the distinction is what individuates one framework from another, and thus is the only way that (valid) external questions arise – i.e. the pragmatic choice between frameworks. Quine's rejection of the distinction leaves no way to differentiate between frameworks, in line with his holism, thus rejecting the one valid external

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<sup>95</sup> It is worth repeating here that for both, the *only* sort of truth would be that within a framework. Thus to disagree about truth within a framework would also be to disagree about truth in general.

question that Carnap acknowledges, but leaving Carnap's third category of pseudo-questions completely untouched. Quine's holism equally commits him to thinking that questions outside of a framework are meaningless, exactly as Carnap thinks. Under this interpretation, the only reason that we might think that Quine's rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction affects Carnap's rejection of metaphysics is if we mistakenly think that Quine's rejection of the distinction, and thus the way that Carnap differentiates between frameworks, affects the third category that Carnap introduces – that of the pseudo-questions of metaphysics. I can see no reason to think that anything discussed here affects that category as Carnap understands it, and thus the disagreement between Quine and Carnap is actually concerned only with truths within the 'meaningful' categories of Carnap, leaving intact Carnap's third category, and thus intact his attack on metaphysics. Quine's attack on Carnap therefore has only been taken to be destructive to Carnap's anti-metaphysical intentions because of a failure to recognise that Carnap's distinction is tripartite, not binary. Quine thus did not promote metaphysical ontological claims to a level that Carnap denied them; instead his claim was to deny that the methods of science are discontinuous with other methods within the Carnapian project of choosing frameworks – gradations and a continuum rather than a difference in kind between frameworks. Ultimately though both saw the *choice* of framework as a pragmatic matter, and thus not something that can have the import and significance that the metaphysician places on it. From this, Carnap's anti-metaphysical thesis remains valid, despite Quine's arguments about the internal structure of the category of meaningful language frameworks. This should not be interpreted as an overall defence of Carnap's anti-metaphysical arguments. I will provide responses to such claims in §3; but this work intends to show that Quine's arguments do not have the force that they are often taken to have. Supporters of substantive metaphysics will need to look elsewhere for arguments against Carnap, and the recent revivals of Carnapian arguments are not based upon claims that Quine disapproved of, as they are often thought to be.

### 2.3 A Second Major Influence: Putnam

The previous section, if correct, has shown why Quine and Carnap did not actually disagree about metaphysics, or at the least that the standard interpretation of why

Quine's attack on Carnap revives metaphysics can be seriously doubted as a legitimate argument. However, as already noted, the history of western philosophy was not kind to Carnap's anti-metaphysical arguments, and he, until more recently, was thought to have been disproved. The recent attacks on substantive metaphysics that are the main focus of this and the next section therefore, apart from the revived Carnap, draw upon the work of another notable anti-realist, Hilary Putnam. It is worthwhile therefore to devote this section to Putnam, so that by the time we come to the most recent anti-realist arguments, we can identify these significant twin influences.

### 2.31 The Possible 'Falseness' of the Ideal Theory

Putnam's position within the realism/anti-realism debate is notable for the radical change that occurred in his thinking, beginning with his first 'anti-realist' paper 'Realism and Reason' (1976; reprinted and referenced in *Meaning and the Moral Sciences* 1978). Prior to this, early-Putnam<sup>96</sup> defended a strong metaphysical *realist* position, stating that:

As language develops, the causal and non-causal links between bits of language and aspects of the world become more complex and more various. To look for any one uniform link between word or thought and object of word or thought is to look for the occult; but to see our evolving and expanding notion of reference as just a proliferating family is to miss the essence of the relation between language and reality. The essence of the relation is that language and thought do asymptotically correspond to reality, to some extent at least. A theory of reference is a theory of the correspondence in question. (1974; 1975: 290)

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<sup>96</sup> 'Early-Putnam' will be used to refer to Putnam when he was supporting metaphysical realism. 'Putnam' will refer to his writing after the change of position in the 1970s that has been maintained ever since

This is clearly a robustly realist position, positing a close connection between language and thought, and reality. For early-Putnam, although the connection to reality may be complex and altered in character by later social and conceptual influences, at the core of the connection lies a commitment to metaphysical realism, taken as a connection from language to reality as-it-is-in-itself. Early-Putnam's realism is similar in character to Aristotle's, the position that has since come to be known as naïve realism. Simply put, it holds that there are some aspects of our language and thought that mirror reality, and, thus, produce accurate description of the structure of reality. Finding out which parts of language and thought are those that bear this resemblance relation to reality then becomes the main focus for the work of metaphysicians.

I will begin my overview of Putnam's arguments from the start of his anti-realist writings – detailing his realist views in detail will not be useful for the dialectic herein – discussing various significant points within the development of the ideas chronologically. For this reason, although Putnam devotes a large amount of his efforts towards detailing the coherency of his positive conception of an anti-realist position, that of 'Internal Realism', and in particular its differentiation from a relativistic position, I will only briefly comment on this aspect of his work. My focus will therefore be on Putnam's criticisms of metaphysical realism, or (in his own terminology) the 'external perspective'.

Putnam begins to reject a traditional form of realism in 'Realism and Reason'. Influenced strongly by Carnap's anti-realism, and the 'non-realist semantics' of Dummett, Putnam has concerns over the nature of metaphysical realist claims that purport to be discussing a relation that holds between a term in our language and a piece of the world – i.e. the very relation that he previously had accepted in the realist quote from early-Putnam above. The troubling form of realism is distinguished from 'internal realism', the view that a speaker mirrors the world only in the sense of "constructing a symbolic representation of that environment" (1978: 124). Therefore, for the metaphysical realist:

Minimally, [...] there has to be a determinate relation of reference between terms in L and pieces (or sets of pieces) of the world [...] whether understanding L is taken to consist in 'knowing' that relation or not. What makes this picture different from internal realism [...] is that (1) the picture is supposed to apply to all correct theories at once (so that it can only be stated with 'typical ambiguity' – i.e. it transcends complete formalization in any one theory); and (2) the world is supposed to be independent of any particular representation we have of it (1978: 125);

leading Putnam to state that:

The most important consequence of metaphysical realism is that truth is supposed to be radically non-epistemic – we might be 'brains in a vat' and so the theory that is 'ideal' from the view of operational utility, inner beauty and elegance, 'plausibility', simplicity, 'conservatism', etc., might be false. Verified (in any operational sense) does not imply 'true', on the metaphysical realist picture (1978: 125).

A metaphysical realist's theory could thus be 'ideal' and yet lack objective truth, a consequence that Putnam argues makes the metaphysical realist's discussions empty of content. The first argument against the metaphysical realist can thus be phrased as:

[Put-1] Metaphysical realism becomes unintelligible if a uniquely intended interpretation is taken to be such that it *might* come out as false.

Let us see how this claim is arrived at. Consider a theory that breaks the world into infinitely many pieces. This theory, T, contains an infinite number of things, and thus T must contain a possible model that matches the cardinality of the world, whatever that cardinality that might actually be – we can simply choose a set number of the

entities within the broader theory *T* and put them into our chosen model. This model, *M*, will map onto objects in the world via a one-to-one relation. *M* therefore has built into it, by hypothesis, an exact correspondence between the terms of the language used to express the model, *L*, and the pieces of the world. By satisfying this correspondence, *T* comes out 'true' so long as we interpret 'true' as true in virtue of the satisfaction relation, *SAT*, between the terms of *L*, and the world. Note that this satisfaction relation is the one that Putnam takes the realist to be committed to – it is a relation that links language to reality in such a way that language mirrors the structure of reality. *T* would additionally match all *operational* constraints we might ask of *L*, including successful reference for all terms, in that if 'there is a cow in front of me at such-and-such a time' belongs to *T* then 'there is a cow in front of me at such-and-such a time' would be true. *SAT* also meets all theoretical constraints as *M* makes the ideal theory *T* come out true, as it contains within it a model that exactly matches the cardinality of the world.

However, given the above, how could it be – what further constraints upon reference might there be, that could single out a different 'intended' interpretation, as the uniquely metaphysically special relation between the terms of *L* and the world – that *SAT* is an 'unintended' interpretation? *M* matches the cardinality of the world by hypothesis, and fulfils all operational roles that a language could be intended to fill. However these operational constraints are not sufficient for the metaphysical realist, as none of them lead to the sort of privileged access to reality that the realist wants to maintain is possible. *SAT* may, for the realist, still be an unintended interpretation – operational constraints do not lead to the privileged access of a correct metaphysical description of reality. *SAT* may not 'carve at nature's joints', as it remains a possibility that all our accounts of the structure of reality do not carve at nature's joints. But, Putnam asks, what extra feature is it that the metaphysician asks us to look for in a theory? A theory may be fully verified in terms of the operational constraints on a theory, but it may still be *metaphysically* false. Put simply, what are we to look for in a metaphysical theory that would tell us whether such an ideal theory is false or not?

Thus, for Putnam, the metaphysical realist needs to provide an account as to how the ideal theory *could* be false, else it "appears to collapse into unintelligibility"

(1978: 126). This argument provides the first premise, summarised at [Put-1], for what has become known in the literature as the Model-Theoretic Argument (MTA). The consequences of the MTA go far beyond the scope of my work here, into the philosophy of science, ethics, philosophy of mathematics and more.<sup>97</sup> My focus in detailing these claims is on the ramifications of the argument for metaphysical realism, and my discussion of the MTA should be taken throughout to be referring to a specific formulation of the thesis posed in opposition to metaphysical realism. In order for the argument to have full force against the metaphysician, rather than potentially being dismissed as only an epistemological concern, Putnam requires a further premise that he develops in *Reason, Truth and History* (1981). As we shall see, an additional premise is required to disallow a potential response from the metaphysician, which would be to hold that the additional feature is simply a 'joint-carving' property, 'naturalness' or some other form of privileged metaphysical reference relation. Such a claim would leave Putnam's account thus far as only an epistemological concern about how we know that a metaphysical theory is correct, and not, as Putnam also hopes to develop, an argument against metaphysics in principle.

### 2.32 Internal and External Perspectives

Putnam's metaphysical anti-realism develops further with his distinction between the internalist and externalist perspectives, themselves grounded in concerns over the nature of truth and the possibility of reference to external objects. In *Reason, Truth and History*, Putnam outlines the 'externalist position' that he sees himself positioned against.<sup>98</sup> Putnam states that the opposing position "has no unambiguous name" (1981: 49), but classifies his preferred position as the *internalist perspective*.

The externalist perspective consists of three claims:

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<sup>97</sup> For some examples of this, see Bays (2001, 2008) for discussion directly upon Putnam's use of set theory and an analysis of the 'core model-theoretic argument' independent of its further ramifications on philosophical areas; Van Fraassen (1997) for discussion on the conception of science at work in Putnam's claims.

<sup>98</sup> The externalist position is specific terminology but is often used interchangeably with 'metaphysical realist', and the two will be used interchangeably here.

- [Ext. 1] “The world consists of some fixed totality of mind-independent objects”,
- [Ext. 2] “There is exactly one true and complete description of ‘the way the world is’”,
- [Ext. 3] “Truth involves some sort of correspondence relation between words or thought-signs and external things and sets of things” (1981:49).

The internalist perspective consists of three (parallel) alternative claims:

- [Int. 1] “‘Objects’ do not exist independently of conceptual schemes” (1981: 52),
- [Int. 2] Asking what objects exist “only makes sense [...] within a theory or description” (1981: 49),
- [Int. 3] “Truth [...] is some sort of (idealized) rational acceptability”, an “ideal coherence of our beliefs with each other and with our experiences as those experiences are themselves represented in our belief system” (1981: 49-50).

The contrast between these two positions is clear and owes much to Carnap’s discussion of internal and external questions. As we have seen, in ‘Realism and Reason’, Putnam was arguing against [Ext. 2]. Putnam devotes much time in *Reason, Truth and History* to developing the coherency of internal realism, but my focus will be on the arguments Putnam gives against external realism, most importantly in this work against [Ext. 3].

Putnam’s concerns over [Ext. 3] stem from the nature of reference that he sees the externalist as committed to: namely a similitude theory of reference, a version of the correspondence theory of truth. A similitude theory of reference holds that there is a one-to-one similarity relation between the representations in our minds and the external objects that they refer to. This similarity does not necessarily hold for all the properties of the object in question. Aristotle and Locke, for example, both restricted

such theories to only cover the primary qualities of an object – properties such as length or shape – but not secondary qualities such as colour or texture. If committed to such a view, the externalist will therefore claim that they are entitled to make ontologically true statements in virtue of the correspondence between the representations in our mind and the external object in the world. Thus similitude theory of reference clearly goes hand in hand with a correspondence theory of truth.

Putnam argues that this view of reference must be mistaken. Under the similitude theory of reference the externalist separates the external world from our representations – indeed Putnam states that “the sharp distinction between what really is the case and what one judges to be the case is precisely what constitutes metaphysical realism” (1981: 71). However, given that today’s philosophers would (mostly) not wish to posit a Platonist ability to grasp ‘forms’, the externalist would appear to have a problem in saying how it is that this correspondence occurs and can be justified – how it is the case that we can say that we are picking out one particular *property* rather than another, one *kind* of entity rather than another, and, even more generally, one metaphysically ‘real’ entity rather than another? Even if the externalist tries to make the claim to restrict the similitude theory to the sensations that we experience, there remains a problem with how it is that we pick out the special notion of similarity that we require. As Putnam notes, there is an endless number of ways that two objects or sensations could be similar. For example, the sensation of the chair that I’m sitting on, and the piece of paper in front of me are similar in that both could be described in English; both are occurring now; both are reliant on my decision to sit down to do some work – the list can be extended infinitely. In order to limit the similarity down to a specific set, we must already know what kind of similarity is at issue, and thus we would be opening an infinite regress if we wish to use similarity in order to support metaphysical realism.<sup>99</sup> We must already have an idea of what the similarity relation is in order to pick it out, but it is that similarity that is meant to be guiding our claims about the external world. Putnam’s accusation is therefore that the privileged reference of the externalist already assumes the way that *we* conceptualise the world, and thus reference is empty under any view that attempts to talk beyond

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<sup>99</sup> This is a very similar claim that was made in relation to trying to use correspondence to understand realism and anti-realism, cf. §1.2.

that conceptualisation. If we were able to single out a correspondence between the two separate domains of representations and the external objects, then we would need to have independent access to both domains (1981: 74), something that we *prima facie* lack once we accept, as the externalist will, the distinction between reality and representations of reality – i.e. reality and appearance. Instead, Putnam thinks that reference can only amount to a Wittgensteinian notion of use as showing how we conceptualise the world,<sup>100</sup> with truth and similarity as (ideal) rational acceptability. Once truth is dependent on a conceptualised account of reference, it is clear that the correspondence theory of truth also falls. Correspondence between word (or thought) and the metaphysical reality clearly requires as a necessary minimum a similarity between representation and reality, wherein the representational content of our claims in some way mirrors the structure of reality.

We can therefore sum up Putnam's main objection to metaphysical realism in *Reason, Truth and History* as:

[Put-2] Reference cannot be a claim of similarity between our representations and the external objects.

Taken together [Put-1] and [Put-2] combine into a version of the MTA that attacks the coherency of metaphysical realism. [Put-1] remember held that metaphysical realism faces a problem in that once a theory satisfies all operational and theoretical constraints, there are no additional constraints that could limit our theory making or allow us to claim that one theory is true or false. Hence Putnam argues that it is unintelligible for a theory to satisfy *all* constraints and yet could still be false. By itself, though, [Put-1] is not strong enough to deny that the metaphysical realist has the ability to appeal to some brute metaphysical link between our language and the

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<sup>100</sup> See Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (1978) for more on his view of language games, and use-theory of meaning – (too) briefly stated, meaning for Wittgenstein is a social phenomenon, external to the individual mind. Meaning therefore only refers to phenomena within a constructed social world, and not to an independently existing world or reality. Goodman (1978) also makes a similar point when he argues that we cannot hope to know what perceptual facts are independent of the way that we have conceptualised them. The metaphysical realist's aim of describing the way that external objects *really are* therefore cannot get off the ground, as we cannot move beyond the way that we conceptualise perceptual inputs.

world. [Put-1] could be sidestepped simply by saying that one of the constraints that the uniquely intended theory needed to satisfy was that of similitude with reality. Reference could be a metaphysical glue that tied language to the world.

However, [Put-2] further strengthens the claim of [Put-1] through denying the appeal to a theory of reference that relies upon a primitive notion of similarity. Without this option, there are no further options available to the metaphysical realist, and hence the position's unintelligibility would be restored. A proposed metaphysical realist theory simply has no options available to detail what non-epistemic constraints are in force that indicate the truth or falseness of a given theory. MTA alone has been taken by some to be proof against the metaphysical realist and, of Putnam's metaphysical anti-realist arguments; it has generated the most literature in opposition of its claims.<sup>101</sup> MTA, as already mentioned, focuses upon epistemological problems for the *coherency* of the metaphysical realist's proposed theories; in his later work Putnam shifts focus, instead aiming to deny the fundamental dichotomies that the metaphysical realist position relies upon.

It should be noted that the work done on characterising realism through truthmakers rather than truth in §1 does go some way in undercutting Putnam's argument thus far. Putnam assumes throughout that the realist is committed to a correspondence theory of truth, something that we have already seen does not follow without an additional 'realist' premise that those things that the truths correspond to are both existent and mind-independent – states of affairs, facts, or some other metaphysically robust notion – this point will be detailed fully in §3.11. It should be remembered that the exegesis of Putnam offered here is intended to illustrate the inspiration for more recent arguments against the substantivity of metaphysics, especially that of Hirsch. Putnam's MTA is, therefore, significant in that it takes a concern about the nature of our language seriously. The objection to metaphysics at its heart is one that is based in language, as Carnap's was also, and the theories that we build from languages. The MTA is an epistemological concern about discovering

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<sup>101</sup> I will not directly argue against the model-theoretic argument here, as that would require its own in depth treatment in order to do that topic justice. See Devitt (1983; 1991), Dyke (2008), Merrill (1980), Lewis (1983; 1984), and Resnik (1987) for some direct arguments against the model-theoretic argument.

which language, or theory, is the privileged one – Putnam's later arguments build upon this, and argue that this is not a mere epistemological concern, but a principled concern about whether any such privileged language is possible. This form of argument underpins much of the more recent arguments against the substantivity of metaphysics that will be discussed from §2.4 to the end of this thesis.

### 2.33 Rejecting underlying dichotomies

In *The Many faces of Realism* (1987) Putnam puts forward a different argument against metaphysical realism. Though again largely concerned with explicating the internal realist position, Putnam stresses a rejection of any proposed distinction between “what is ‘simply true’ and what has only ‘assertability conditions’, or the cut between what is already true or false and what is an ‘extension of previous use’ [...], or between what is a ‘projection’ and what is an independent and unitary property of things in themselves” (1987: 26-7). Putnam’s aim here is slightly different to that of the earlier works. [Put-1] focuses on an epistemological problem that arises if we accept a metaphysical realist position, whilst [Put-2] argues that the notion of reference that the metaphysical realist requires is not an attractive one. The claims against metaphysical realism within *The Many Faces of Realism* attempt to undermine a deeper foundational aspect of metaphysical realism – namely the very dichotomy between the external and the internal that the realist wishes to maintain, the ‘cut’ described in the quote above. In rejecting this dichotomy, Putnam sees himself as taking Kant (or at least his particular reading of Kant) as his inspiration – “as a forefather, not [...] as scripture” (1987: 43). Kant therefore under this reading is “not committed to, but rather suggests a rejection of, the distinction between things in themselves and projections” (1987: 43).

The claim amounts to a denial that there is a point where we can delineate between the subjective and the objective – no way in which we can make a principled decision about whether one form of predication relates to a (metaphysically) real property or merely a reflection of our culture or interests. The lack of a methodologically satisfactory way to make this cut between subjective and objective is exhibited for Putnam through the philosophical disagreements that we see. For

example (and following Putnam's example) the position upon the subjective/objective scale that philosophers place counterfactual statements varies hugely, some taking them to be an insight into objective matters about the world, others as only a subjective view we could take. Putnam suggests that we should simply reject this scale by rejecting the notion of objectivity entirely – rejecting therefore what Carnap took to be 'external questions'. Instead, objectivity is only relative to a conceptual scheme that we accept:

*Given a language, we can describe the 'facts' that make a sentence of that language true and false in a 'trivial' way – using the sentences of that very language; but the dream of finding a well-defined Universal Relation between a (supposed) totality of *all* facts and an arbitrary true sentence in an arbitrary language, is just the dream of an absolute notion of fact [...] and of an absolute relation between sentences and the facts [...] 'in themselves'; the very dream whose hopelessness I [Putnam] hoped to expose (1987: 40)*

(Note though that this does not force Putnam into ontological relativity. Putnam, as Carnap before, denies the relativist's thesis that there is no notion of 'better' or 'worse' conceptual scheme. The conceptual scheme “restricts the ‘space’ of descriptions available to us; but it does not predetermine the answers to our questions” (1987: 39). A theory may still be declared as ‘better’ given the previously mentioned ‘assertability conditions’. This links strongly with Goodman, who stresses that the “[w]illingness to accept countless alternative true or right world-versions does not mean that everything goes [...], but only that truth must be otherwise conceived than as correspondence with a ready-made world” (1978: 94).)

Once the objective/subjective scale is relative to a language or conceptual scheme, metaphysics loses all of the significant content that it claimed to be able to discuss. We can summarise this objection as:

[Put-3] Terms such as 'fact', 'exist', and 'object' cannot be used independently from a conceptual scheme; thus the metaphysical realist's putative notion of 'objective' or 'external' is meaningless.

The ontological commitments that we should accept are simply those that the language or theory that we have accepted demands of us. If a theory requires abstract entities for example, then we should accept abstract entities into our ontology. Granted that we have no universally accepted theory or language, there is also therefore no universally accepted ontology – “we don't have a single, unified theory of the world off of which to read our ontology” (Putnam, 2004: 81). This amounts to Putnam's thesis of conceptual relativity, which we shall see is a major influence upon the quantifier variance of Hirsch, and other recent deflationary approaches to metaphysics.

It must be remembered though that Putnam, unlike some other 'fully fledged' anti-realists, sees himself as having taken a “long journey from realism back to realism [...] but not [...] back to the metaphysical version of realism” (1999: 49). Putnam's 'realism' is based on an acceptance that the truth of a statement depends in part on the world beyond the speaker. However for Putnam, this world beyond the speaker is not the same as the 'external world/reality' for the *metaphysical* realist. Rather it is the influence of other speakers, and of other conceptual schemes, upon how readily we accept the validity of a further conceptual scheme. The world therefore is not entirely of our own making and thus there is no risk of falling into forms of idealism or solipsism. However Putnam (following and crediting William James) stresses the need to preserve “the insight that 'description' is never a mere copying and that we constantly add to the ways in which language can be responsible to reality” (1999: 9). The mistake of metaphysical realism here comes from “supposing that the term reality must refer to a single superthing” (1999: 9). This metaphysical reality limits or structures all the possible thoughts that we can have, and fixes the totality of possible knowledge claims independently of language users themselves. However, for Putnam these claims cannot stand, as it is only a contingent fact about finite human abilities that limits the number of conceptual schemes that can be

created. If knowledge claims only can be coherent within the conceptual scheme that they are designed to apply within, then there cannot be any 'external reality' or 'way things-are-in-themselves' (or anything for that matter beyond the finite limits imposed by our nature) that could limit possible knowledge claims.

We can therefore state:

[Put-4] Descriptions cannot be (mere) copies of a reality that is  
independent of our concepts or language,

and,

[Put-5] There is no independent limit upon the number of  
possible knowledge claims other than the contingently  
limited possible conceptual schemes available to  
language users.

It should be clear now why Putnam's version of anti-realism is important to a thesis that wishes to focus on the relationship between language and metaphysics. [Put-1] – [Put-5]<sup>102</sup> together attack the metaphysical realist on many fronts, both seeking to show that the position is incoherent within itself, but also seeking to undercut central foundational premises. But ultimately Putnam's objection is that the metaphysical realist is mistaken because the needed separation of metaphysical claims from the language and concepts of the philosopher themselves is impossible; a variation of the objections to metaphysics that stemmed from the linguistic turn so popular throughout the twentieth century in western philosophy, and the theses defended by Carnap. Without some identifiable privileged access to the world in order to support metaphysical claims, the metaphysical realist is, for Putnam, not only incorrect, but the very notions that they wish to discuss, a mind-independent, 'unconceptualised' reality, are taken by Putnam to be indescribable and unfit for any purpose (Mueller and Fine 2005). Of course even under this picture we can create an ontology, as a list

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<sup>102</sup> I take these five premises outlined above as the basis for Putnam's anti-realism. Although questions about the nature of realism remain present within his other work, the focus largely shifts from attacking the metaphysical realist to detailing and defending his proposed alternative, 'internal realism' (see Putnam 1988; 1999), and connecting that position with other philosophical concerns most notably ethics (see Putnam 1990; 2004). Though an interesting debate in itself, it is not the concern here.

of the entities that a given theory or language takes to exist; but the crucial claim here is that this is as far as ontology can go. Take our everyday perception of the world. It contains various macroscopic entities such as chairs and tables. For Putnam, this is a particular ontological view of the world, and one in which our everyday language indicates our ontological commitments. For example, our everyday language allows for chairs to exist, but not mereological compositions of a chair and the Eiffel Tower. This language thus furnishes us with an ontology. Crucially for Putnam, this ontology may be correct, but cannot be the *sole* correct description of the world, as this would be to adopt the notions of a mind-independent, unconceptualised reality. The claim that a posited ontology hooks up with the world – with some deeper, mind-independent structure of the world – is unjustifiable under Putnam's proposals.<sup>103</sup> To create an ontology is to simply read our commitments off the chosen language or conceptual scheme. It will be clear that Putnam's anti-metaphysical work is in many ways a development and refinement of Carnap's attack on the coherency of metaphysics. Carnap and Putnam, especially Putnam's later objections based around conceptual relativity, are central within the current trend of deflationary approaches to metaphysics, and it is to the most prominent example of which, Eli Hirsch, I now turn.

## 2.4 Contemporary Deflationism: Eli Hirsch

One aspect of Carnap and Putnam's theses that I have not commented on thus far is that although the focus of their work is firmly on the language of the metaphysicians, and how that language cannot carry the sort of theoretical weight that the realist wishes it to; neither of them are specific about language. Both discuss language in fairly general terms. The internal constraints on a language framework, or a conceptual scheme are discussed in order to show that the metaphysician cannot

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<sup>103</sup> There is also the additional aspect of substantive, realist, ontology, namely that the goal of ontology can be conceived as attempting to provide a *hierarchical* categorisation of reality. A list is not a hierarchy, and the *hierarchical* aspect of the structure of reality is of course something that is prominent within the ontologist's distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental entities. However, I see no reason why Putnam's non-metaphysically committing ontologies of the commitments of a particular language cannot also contain hierarchies. Language is also hierarchical, and thus it is likely that Putnam's ontology of reading the commitments of each particular language will also have a hierarchical structure. Hierarchies in ontology would not appear to be unique to realist, substantive accounts of the discipline.

make claim to the privileged description of reality that they wish to appeal to; but relatively little is said as to *why* this leap from language to metaphysics fails, little said as to which part of language leads to this problem rather than just 'language' more generally. Hirsch, within his 'Quantifier Variance' attempts to rectify this, giving an account of *where* in language the problems lie – namely in the varying meanings of the existential quantifier that the metaphysicians make use of within their theories, given that post-Quinean ontologies are *built* around quantification. If those quantifiers mean different things though, as Hirsch argues, then metaphysical disputes become merely verbal, concerned only with which meaning of the quantifier we should accept. This claim, of course, needs a full exposition. As we shall see in this exposition, Hirsch's Quantifier Variance thesis is firmly rooted in the history of Carnap and Putnam, and the emerging 'deflationary' approaches to ontology and metaphysics.

In §2.41 I will outline the core aspects of quantifier variance and how this could be taken to result in metaphysical disputes being 'merely verbal'; §2.42 will investigate the notion of a verbal dispute further, most notably Chalmers' influential discussion of the phenomena. In §2.43, I will (briefly) return to the notion of realism versus anti-realism. I will argue that although Hirsch describes himself as a realist, his view – indeed, I think, all ontological pluralist deflationary views of this sort – are best characterised as anti-realist. This is done through the characterisation of the realism/anti-realism distinction offered in the first section. Lastly we shall see how Hirsch takes quantifier variance to lead to his view that we should look to ordinary language to answer any ontological questions that we might have, arguing against 'revisionary' metaphysics (§2.44). Though these views are not logically tied to each other, it is interesting to note that a form of ontological pluralism will often lead towards a preference for ordinary language metaphysics should we wish to maintain any worth in asking ontological questions. Holding that there are multiple, equally correct, ontological languages intuitively leads to a stronger importance for our ordinary language, and the ontological commitments of a language as it is spoken by the greatest number of people, i.e. our ordinary language.

## 2.41 Quantifier Variance

At the heart of quantifier variance lies the denial of there being any “metaphysically privileged sense of the quantifier” (2002b: 61). As with Putnam's conceptual relativism, quantifier variance holds that the “quantificational apparatus in our language and thought – such expressions as ‘thing’, ‘object’, ‘something’, ‘(there) exists’ - [have] a certain variability or plasticity” (2002b: 51). Needless to state, this is not some mere phonetic variability concerned with the terms that we use, such as ‘object’ instead of ‘table’. Rather it is a strong claim that the “world can be correctly described using a variety of concepts of “the existence of something”” (2002b: 51). In particular, this variability is within a central notion in ontology, that of existence, and the piece of structure that, post-Quine, many metaphysicians use to understand what our ontological commitments are: the existential quantifier.

Hirsch's thesis is, therefore, more specific than its ideological predecessors in Putnam and Carnap. For example, whilst Putnam talks of the ‘meaning’ of ‘object’ being variable, and relative to the conceptual scheme, Hirsch attempts to place that variability into the structural aspects of the metaphysicians' claims. This structural claim is perhaps the claim that Putnam also intends, but its explicit formulation in Hirsch's work helps the deflationist avoid one immediate response that the supporter of substantive metaphysics might have, namely that such deflationism is only a semantic thesis, concerned with the arbitrary meanings of certain phonetic labels and terms. No-one, after all, would deny that we *could* use the term ‘object’ to refer to what we normally call ‘table’. This is not controversial, nor is it damaging to substantive metaphysics, as the metaphysician will merely respond that the objection confuses language and its arbitrary externalisation route, and metaphysics. However, the explicit claim that the variance comes within the *structure* of existential claims limits this semantic response. Assuming that we have a notion of ‘exists’, which of course the metaphysician requires, then a variable meaning of ‘exists’ manifesting in the variable domain of the existential quantifier in different languages, poses a much more serious problem for substantive metaphysics. It is the source of the varying interpretations of the quantifier that makes the claim here structural rather than semantic, or lexical. The domain of the existential quantifier is a structural aspect of

that interpretation of the quantifier – Hirsch’s claim relates to this aspect of the quantifier, not that it carries a more general notion of existence as its semantic content.

In the introduction to his book *Quantifier Variance and Realism*, Hirsch invites us to consider what he calls 'Urmson's Dictum' (from Urmson 1958). This dictum states that “even if sentences differ radically in logical form, so long as they are truth-conditionally equivalent, it makes no sense to say that one of them is metaphysically more right than the other” (Hirsch 2011: xi). We can, of course, as Hirsch encourages us to, extend this dictum from isolated sentences to whole languages, wherein “two languages are truth-conditionally equivalent if, for any sentence in one, there is a truth-conditionally equivalent sentence in the other” (2011: xi-xii), leading to languages of equal metaphysical merit. Quantifier variance is intended to explain how these languages could be truth-conditionally equivalent. Hirsch argues that, following his favoured example in mereology, each of the mereologist and the anti-mereologist have an ontological language, containing truth-conditions under which their respective claims about mereological objects are true. Each language has a different variant of the generally understood concept of 'exists', and it is only under those particular conceptions of 'exists' that the mereologist's or the anti-mereologist's claims are true – the dispute between them is then 'merely verbal'.

Hirsch takes it that we can have some general understanding of a verbal dispute, citing a disagreement over whether a “standard drinking glass is a cup” (2005; 2011: 146). There is a sense in which a disagreement about whether a glass is a cup is merely verbal in that it depends on what we take to be the definition of 'cup' in English (assuming that we are speaking plain English). So, Hirsch asks us to imagine two people, one who denies that a glass is a cup, and one who asserts it. We can imagine a community of speakers for both of these people that agree with their respective representatives over whether a glass is a cup, but agree in all other ways as closely as possible with each other. These two communities therefore can be taken to be speaking two different languages, and each of them has truth-conditionally equivalent sentences in their own languages. The only remaining question, Hirsch claims, is “which language is (closest to) plain English” (2005; 2011: 147). The dispute

is merely verbal therefore in the sense that the two disputants are only arguing over which of their languages is closest to plain English.

The initial response here is that we could hold that, from the point of view of one language community, the other language speakers do use the same definition of 'cup', but thus that they are all speaking falsely. However, Hirsch argues that there is “a widely accepted principle of linguistic interpretation that has often been called the “principle of charity”” (2005; 2011: 148), which prevents this. Especially following Davidson's claim that the interpretation of a language is central to explaining a person's behaviour and psychology (cf. his 1984), Hirsch holds that the principle of charity means that, “other things being equal, an interpretation is plausible to the extent that its effect is to make many of the community's shared assertions come out true or at least reasonable” (2005; 2011: 148). The upshot of this is that, for Hirsch, both sides of our 'cup' dispute should interpret the language of the other community as true in their commonly asserted statements about cups. From within one language, to claim that the other community's relevant statements about cups are all false by interpreting their statements relative to our own language would be to “depict the [other community's speakers] as inexplicably making false and unreasonable judgements about cups” (2005; 2011: 149). It must be noted here that statements about cups in this example are intended to be highly controversial between the communities; but the principle of charity should lead us to still interpret the other community's language as having different but equivalent truth conditions, such that both language's cup statements come out as true within that language.

The dispute about cups herein therefore is not substantive. The argument runs analogously, Hirsch claims, for the disputes between ontologists, and in particular those concerned with physical-object ontology and mereology. I will not run through the entire analogous argument again.<sup>104</sup> The crux of Hirsch's argument comes in the idea that, say, the mereological essentialist, and the four-dimensionalist both have claims that are true only in *their ontological language*. As in our toy cup example, the only question that remains, according to Hirsch, is which of these languages is closest

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<sup>104</sup> Those who wish to see the particular metaphysical example in full detail, see Hirsch 2005; 2011: 153-161.

to, or is, plain English. Each side can, and under the principle of charitable interpretation should, accept that the other side of the debate speaks true sentences in their own ontological languages – which is closest to English is the only remaining issue. The talk of English here is most certainly not some external measure against which we can judge the 'correctness' of our ontological language. Hirsch's discussion of plain English relates to his advocacy of returning to ordinary language (I return to this issue in §2.44). English is rather just another language, with its own ontology. We could just as well ask whether English relates to the ontological language of the mereological essentialist. It is Hirsch's objections to revisionary metaphysics that prevents him from phrasing the question in that direction. What is crucial here is that the languages are only being compared to each other, and not some external 'correct' account. Asking that question, for Hirsch as for Carnap before, is not possible, as the meaning of the ontological language is only internal to that language. It is a verbal dispute therefore as it concerns only choosing which of the ontological languages (the mereological essentialist's; the four-dimensionalist's; or indeed English's 'ontological language') we wish to speak.

The *source* of this verbal dispute is the differing meanings of 'exists'. As in the cup example, the different languages of the disputants contain a varying existential quantifier, under which the claims of each side come out true within their own ontological language. The difference with the cup case is therefore only one of scale. Far more sentences are 'controversial' cases when the dispute centres around the meaning of the existential quantifier than when it centres on the meaning of 'cup'; but the principle remains the same. It may appear thus far that all Hirsch has shown is that we can use different ontological languages with differing ideas of what exists – hardly a problematic position. However, the claim runs far deeper than that. For whatever notion we have of 'exists' will only have its meaning relative to the language that it is part of. We cannot say that one notion, one domain of the existential quantifier in one language, is any 'more correct' than another, as we have to charitably interpret that all the other variants of the quantifier are true within their own language. As already noted, the claim here is distinctly Carnapian in spirit. 'Exists' has a meaning, or rather the existential quantifier has a domain, within one

language, and there is no uniquely privileged meaning or domain that can serve as the one against which we can judge the differing ontological languages.

## 2.42 Some More on 'Verbal Disputes'

The notion of a verbal dispute is clearly central to Hirsch's metaontology. It will be useful, given its importance, to see some further support in the literature for a similar notion, most clearly detailed by Chalmers (2011), which will also help to elucidate the concept of 'verbal dispute', better laying the ground for the critical discussion of Hirsch's work, and the application of 'verbal dispute' to metaphysical debates in §3.

Hirsch largely characterises a verbal dispute through examples. However, he does offer a definition, where a verbal dispute is "a dispute in which, given the correct view of linguistic interpretation, each party will agree that the other party speaks the truth in its own language. This can be put more briefly by saying that in a verbal dispute each party ought to agree that the other party speaks the truth in its own language" (2009; 2011: 229). The problem here though is that, as Hirsch admits, this definition is very closely tied to what we take to be the 'correct view of interpretation'. Hirsch, of course, ties this to his principle of interpretative charity; however, if we, contra Hirsch, think that one aspect of the correct view of linguistic interpretation is that the language 'carves reality at its joints', then we can accept Hirsch's notion of verbal dispute whilst maintaining support for substantive metaphysics. Hirsch's position does not fall with this claim though; instead to support Hirsch's claim we can introduce a more rigorous definition of verbal dispute. Chalmers provides just such a definition, which is consistent with the rest of quantifier variance.

Chalmers' definition (though he later moves away from the idea that this is a stipulative definition, suggesting that this is a 'characterisation' instead) is that:

A dispute over S is (broadly) verbal when for some expression  
T in S, the parties disagree about the meaning of T, and the

dispute over S arises wholly in virtue of this disagreement  
regarding T (2011: 522)

Chalmers therefore understands a verbal dispute as arising in virtue of a metalinguistic disagreement. This handles Hirsch's quantifier variance cases easily – indeed, the main thrust of quantifier variance is exactly that the dispute between different ontological languages and the quantifiers in them, is wholly in virtue of the meaning, or the interpretation, of the quantifiers. The theories gain their ontology from the ontological commitments that are specified through the existential quantifier; those quantifiers, for Hirsch, *mean* different things, they are different variations of the meaning of 'exists'; and thus we can see how this would qualify as a verbal dispute for Chalmers. As Chalmers notes, the phrase 'in virtue of' is doing much of the philosophical work here, and thus needs further elaboration. Chalmers states that we should understand this as an "explanatory 'in virtue of'" (2011: 523) – the metalinguistic disagreement *explains* why we might otherwise think that there is a first-order disagreement.

As a brief aside, there are, I think, potentially some interesting consequences for understanding a verbal dispute in this way when we are considering ontological expressions in particular in light of the truthmaking account of realism that I have supported here. The line of thought, briefly stated, focuses on how we understand the 'in virtue of' relation, especially in light of the understanding used in §1 where 'in virtue of' was explicitly *non-explanatory*. For Chalmers, in a verbal dispute the 'in virtue of' is carrying philosophical weight, and it is explanatory. The existence of a verbal dispute explains why a disagreement exists, but the existence of a truthmaker is explicitly taken to *not* explain why a truthbearer exists, nor then the existence of truths. This is all fine. However, under Quantifier Variance, a particular variant of the quantifier exists 'in virtue of' the entities that are within its domain. The particular variant of the quantifier is understood and individuated through what entities are within the domain of that quantifier, and so it only exist 'in virtue of' the existence of an ontology that matches its domain (and vice versa). Explaining the view this way seems fine; but which understanding of the 'in virtue of' relation is being used here. An issue might arise if, in order to justify the verbal nature of disputes concerning the

interpretations of the quantifier, the quantifier variantist must appeal to the explanatory notion, but to explain the truth of the claims within a certain interpretation, the quantifier variantist must use the non-explanatory notion. If this is the case, then it might seem that an invalid shift between the two different understandings of the ‘in virtue of’ relation has occurred. Either the quantifier variantist must accept an explanatory notion, keeping the claim of a verbal dispute, but thereby losing the claim to truth within an interpretation; or accept the non-explanatory notion, keeping the ability to say what it is that is the truthmaker for a certain interpretation of the quantifier, but losing this way of understanding why the dispute is verbal. This would need far more detailed spelling out before it could be raised as a serious objection to the quantifier variantist, but it may be an issue that is worth looking at in future research.

Chalmers also suggests a reason why such verbal disputes appear throughout philosophical arguments. ‘Conceptual pluralism’ holds that “there are multiple interesting concepts (corresponding to multiple interesting roles) in the vicinity of philosophical terms such as ‘semantic’, ‘justified’, ‘free’, and not much of substance depends on which one goes with the term” (2011: 539). Indeed, Chalmers is keen to stress pluralism beyond this too, such that we should be pluralists about what properties it is that the concepts pick out. Therefore there might be multiple properties, all similar to each other to a degree, picked out by a single concept that we employ. The reason that verbal disputes occur is because we often fail to realise that in a disagreement we are merely picking out different, but similar, properties that are connected to the same pluralistic concept.

Although Chalmers does not apply his notion of verbal disputes in detail to ontology and metaphysics specifically – his favoured example rather is free will – it is worth commenting on whether conceptual pluralism must lead to a deflationary view of metaphysics.<sup>105</sup> The question of interest is whether the concept of ‘exists’ is an

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<sup>105</sup> For what it is worth, Chalmers discussion of verbal disputes does lay a series of questions for many disputes in philosophy that we take to be substantive, and questions that substantivity. These questions should be asked in philosophical disagreements, and it seems clear to me that some of the disputes will prove to be verbal once we investigate these ideas. The interest here though is limited to

example of his conceptual pluralism? Let us assume that ‘exists’ is a good candidate for conceptual pluralism – we certainly do seem to have numerous conceptions of ‘exists’, each with slightly different meanings; this after all is Hirsch’s claim in quantifier variance, and one that we would be hard-pressed to deny. Prima facie, it seems that under a conceptual pluralist understanding of ‘exists’, then there would be no single privileged role associated with the notion of ‘exists’, and thus no privileged interpretation of the quantifier (in Hirschian terms).

Chalmers, though, does suggest a possible solution to the problem of conceptual pluralism for specific concepts that we might want to take to be privileged in his discussion of ‘bedrock concepts’. Bedrock concepts “are concepts so basic that we cannot clarify substantive disputes involving them in more basic terms” (2011: 550). Bedrock concepts are taken to “function as “concept magnets” of a sort: many different patterns of thought are consistent with possessing the same bedrock concept. Of course one can still chart other concepts nearby, but there is a sense in which bedrock concepts may serve as the basic axes in conceptual space” (2011: 557).

Some may find this picture an attractive one to rebut the sorts of claims made by Hirsch. The bedrock concept of ‘exists’ would be privileged, and the alternative versions of it would be the example of alternative ontological languages that Hirsch discusses, each bearing some relation to the bedrock concept, but each lacking the privileged function ascribed to the bedrock concept. Work would be required to show that ‘exists’ does indeed count as one of Chalmers’ bedrock concepts, but, assuming that that can be provided, substantive metaphysics could proceed as a study of what entities are within the domain of this bedrock concept. There is not space to provide a detailed discussion of this, but there is a reason why I do not think that this is an attractive option for those that wish to maintain a *realist, and substantive metaphysics*. The characterisation of realism offered in §1 led Chalmers’ lightweight realism to be classed as an anti-realist position. The reason for this was the trivial nature of metaphysical truthmakers for the lightweight realist, relying as they did on the nature of *conceptual schemes* rather than entities in reality. However, the overall aim of this

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ontology and metaphysics understood generally – and these are disputes that I will argue are substantive.

thesis to produce arguments against deflationary approaches to metaphysics that satisfy the realism characterisation developed and defended herein. Chalmers' notion of bedrock concept will therefore not suffice. The privileged nature of a *bedrock concept* of 'exists' will only produce truthmakers for ontological claims within conceptual schemes. We could understand this as a privileged description of our conceptual scheme, but it could not extend into the realist, and substantive notion of a privileged description of reality.

### 2.43 Deflationary Views as Anti-Realist

One issue that Hirsch is very clear on is that he takes quantifier variance to be a realist position on the realism/anti-realism question. Although I leave my major criticisms of Hirsch to §3, wherein the deflationary view of metaphysics is the subject matter, some comments on the concept of 'realism' are needed here, as I think that Hirsch's self-ascription of realism may otherwise cause confusion, and is, I will argue, an ascription that we should reject.

As Hirsch states, one "initial reaction [to quantifier variance] may be that, if we are free to choose between different ways of conceiving of "the existence of something", then this threatens a robust realist sense that there are things in the world whose existence does not in any way depend on our language or thought" (2002b; 2011: 69). However, he continues:

[t]he fallacy in this formulation lies in the claim that the doctrine of quantifier variance implies that our linguistic decisions determine whether or not there exists something composed of Clinton's nose and the Eiffel Tower. What the doctrine does imply is that our linguistic decisions determine the meaning of the expression "there exists something composed of Clinton's nose and the Eiffel Tower". Hence, the truth or falsity of this sentence depends in part on our linguistic decisions. It is merely a use-mention confusion to conclude that whether or not there exists something composed

of Clinton's nose and the Eiffel Tower depends on our linguistic decisions. (2002b; 2011: 70)

Thus, whilst there are variations of interpretations of the quantifier such that “there exists something composed of Clinton's nose and the Eiffel Tower” comes out as true and other interpretations that lead the sentence to come out as false; but there is no way for “whether or not there exists something composed of Clinton's nose and the Eiffel Tower depends on our linguistic decisions” to be true under any interpretation of the quantifier, with this second sentence expressing “an absurd form of linguistic idealism that is not at all implied by quantifier variance” (2002b; 2011: 70). Hirsch takes this realism to be one of the major differences between his thesis and Carnap's - “whereas Carnap's formulation sometimes seems to suggest an anti-realist or verificationist perspective, my [Hirsch's] position is robustly realist” (2009; 2011: 220).

Leaving aside whether Carnap would count as a realist or an anti-realist on the account that Hirsch provides, clearly, for Hirsch, what amounts to realism is a rejection of idealism. However, as I have already argued in §1, understanding realism and anti-realism-as-idealism in this way is a mistake in the current metaontological and metametaphysical literature. Idealism has long been a (largely) unsupported position in the realism/anti-realism debates. Understanding realism as merely being the claim that there are objects in the world, and that our linguistic choice does not bring entities into existence, is to force all self-ascribing anti-realist positions that are not idealist to be characterised as realist. As I have already argued, even Kant, under this understanding, would be counted as a realist, despite his staunch rejection of all of metaphysics.

Furthermore, it is unclear what the objects that there are in the world, which do not depend on our linguistic decisions, are like, and whether this world that exists independently of those linguistic decisions has a structure. Hirsch states that he is sceptical of whether the world has any structure, or, at least, sceptical of the world having a quantificational structure of the sort that Sider explicitly argues for (Hirsch 2011: xiii; cf. Sider 2009; 2011). If the world does have some structure, even if not quantificational, then we must surely ask why it is that we could not, in principle,

represent that structure. i.e., even granted our finite cognitive capacities, if the world has a certain structure, then it would, *prima facie*, seem to be possible to provide a uniquely privileged representation of that structure, contra Hirsch's claims around quantifier variance. If the world does not have structure, then, as I argued in §1, we can follow Devitt in thinking that the positing of an unstructured 'stuff-world', as such a world could not contain objects as that is taken to imply structure, is an "idle addition to idealism" (1991: 17). The intuitive pull of realism is not just that it stands contra idealism, but also that there is something we can say about reality. Certainly the realism that Hirsch maintains is not one where we can accurately represent reality at all – after all, quantifier variance disallows that possibility. We can therefore ask, in what sense is Hirsch's commitment to realism meaningful in any way – how is it anything more than a denial of idealism? If the world independent of our linguistic decisions has structure, then why can we not in principle have a privileged description; if the world does not have structure, then, as I argued in §1, the positing of a 'stuff-ontology' is not enough to support a worthwhile commitment to realism. It remains unclear which horn of this dilemma Hirsch would want to grasp. The alternative is that quantifier variance is better understood within the category of anti-realist positions, independent of and without collapsing into idealism. In what follows I argue that this is the case: Hirsch has already shown how quantifier variance is not an idealist position; it remains to explain how we can understand it as anti-realist.

Let us remind ourselves of the characterisation of realism offered at the end of §1:

R<sub>2</sub>: A metaphysical claim, *C*, is realist iff it is, when literally construed, true and has a truthmaker, *T*, such that (i) *T* is objectively the truthmaker for *C*, (ii) *T* is non-trivial, and (iii) *T* exists independently of our mental (cognitive) capacities.

Under this truthmaking characterisation of realism, it is the nature of the truthmakers appealed to for some ontological statement that we assert to be true that makes a theorist realist or anti-realist. Hirsch, let us remember, is willing to accept that certain

ontological claims are true, at least relative to their ontological language. The question therefore is whether the truthmakers for such ontological statements satisfy R<sub>2</sub>. It would seem that Hirsch's truthmakers might pass (i), potentially struggle with (ii), but would certainly seem to fail to satisfy (iii).

First, let us be clear on what the truthmakers for Hirsch's accepted ontological statements are. It seems to be clear that the truthmakers must be the particular variation of the interpretation of the existential quantifier within that particular language. The truths in each ontological language are, for Hirsch, taken to stem trivially from the domain of that existential quantifier, with no further way, independent of that language, to judge the 'correctness' of an ontological claim. We might wish to make different ontological claims, in which case we choose a different ontological language, with a different interpretation of the quantifier. In this case the truthmakers for that alternative ontological language's true ontological statements would be different. Although Hirsch's claims to realism mean that choosing one of these ontological languages over another does not change what objects there are in the world, the ontological statements are only true in virtue of the specific variation of the interpretation of the quantifier that we choose, not the world or the objects in themselves. That this is the case for Hirsch can be seen in his comments that "once we reject as unintelligible the idea of a metaphysically privileged concept of "a thing", there is no reason for us to resist acknowledging the concept that we in fact have. And, then, there is no reason to resist acknowledging the obvious and trivial truths that flow from that concept" (2002b 63). The same move should be made by the Quantifier Variance theorist for the concept of 'exists'. Once we assume, as they hold, that there is no privileged concept of 'exists', we should acknowledge the notion of exists that we do have. The notion we do have will vary from language to language. Within each language, 'obvious and trivial truths' will flow from that concept. This view seems to be that it is the *concept* itself, which is decided through language choice, from which truths come.

In light of this, Hirsch's truthmakers could be taken to satisfy requirement (i). (i) held that the truthmakers are objectively the truthmaker for the ontological statements that are true – i.e. it is not a case of subjective choice that a certain

truthmaker makes a statement true. In the sense that, granted one interpretation of the quantifier, it will objectively be the case that that interpretation of the quantifier leads to a given set of ontological commitments, these truthmakers will be objective. The mereological essentialist's ontological language, for example, will contain a certain interpretation of the existential quantifier, and the language's ontological commitments will objectively follow from that interpretation of the quantifier. However, these truthmakers fare worse with (ii). In one sense, the truthmaker for Hirsch might be considered trivial, in that he often characterises the domain of a particular interpretation of the existential quantifier – i.e. the ontological commitments of a language – as following trivially from that interpretation. This though could be said of all ontological claims understood in a Quinean way. Instead the notion of triviality here is one of whether the truthmaker for an ontological statement is merely the consequence of some logical law, or trivial ontological claims grounded in the nature of our conceptual schemes.<sup>106</sup> Hirsch's truthmakers potentially satisfy this notion of triviality. The particular interpretation of the quantifier in an ontological language may allow for non-trivial ontological truths. For example, the ontological language of the mereological essentialists' seem to do just this as it requires more than just the laws of logic and the mereologist languages' particular variation of the existential quantifier to make all the claims of the mereologist come out as true – additional metaphysical premises are added, particular metaphysical claims held to be inviolable.

Quantifier variance truthmakers, though, certainly fail to satisfy (iii). There is no way of understanding talk of 'interpretation of the existential quantifier' as being independent of our mental or cognitive capacities. Hirsch's truthmakers are strictly mind-dependent in this sense. The only way that we *could* understand an interpretation of the existential quantifier that satisfies (iii) would be if that interpretation was exactly the sort of uniquely privileged interpretation of the quantifier that Hirsch develops the entire notion of quantifier variance to deny is possible. Only an interpretation that 'carves reality at its joints', or is 'natural' could be one that is independent of our cognitive capacities. Without such a notion, all the

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<sup>106</sup> The target for this clause was Chalmers' lightweight realism and views of that form, which allowed for objective but trivially true ontological statements through logical law or the nature of conceptual schemes. See §1.21 for reasons why this view should be characterised as anti-realist.

interpretations of the quantifier, in all possible ontological languages, are only interpretations within a given ontological language. They would not be possible interpretations without the linguistic structure that goes with them, and thus are inherently mind-dependent, failing to satisfy (iii). Under this characterisation of realism, we therefore have good reason to support my earlier claim that Hirsch should be understood as an anti-realist, something that we should expect if we maintain a realism that is something more than just a rejection of idealism.

Indeed, this conclusion can be extended across all forms of deflationism, to 'ontological pluralism', as Eklund terms it. Ontological pluralism revolves around the claim that metaphysical disputes are caused by the disputants "using 'exists', 'object', etc. - as we might say the ontological expressions – differently" (2008: 383). They do not therefore typically think that metaphysical statements are *false*, but instead that they are only *true* in virtue of the specific meaning, or interpretation, of such ontological expressions relative to a particular language or language framework. The truthmakers therefore are, as we have already seen with Hirsch, the specific meanings, or interpretations, which are built into the ontological statements already. Following the claims that I have made above, the truthmaking account of realism therefore provides us grounds for why such ontological pluralism turns out to be an anti-realist position. Carnap, and Putnam's work to a degree, can more easily be described as anti-realist than Hirsch's.<sup>107</sup> It is, I think, still useful though to be able to see *why* ontological pluralism, so described, is an anti-realist claim.

But, we could be concerned here that this issue is only terminological. I accept this point if we wish to allow such terms as realism to become largely empty of content. To my mind, there is something of worth in understanding where, on such a central issue in the metametaphysical and metaontological literature, a position falls. Whether a theory can be adequately classified as realist or anti-realist will tell us a lot about what we might expect from such a theory. This is especially the case through the truthmaking characterisation of realism defended in this work which focuses on

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<sup>107</sup> I say 'Putnam to a degree' as Putnam does maintain that he is a 'realist' but this is within his notion of 'internal realism' that he certainly distances from traditional metaphysical realism. This is in contrast to Hirsch, who in his self-ascription of realism does seem to intend this to be understood in a traditional metaphysical sense.

what sorts of entities are accepted by a theory into their ontology. Such terms become important then when we wish to compare theories, and comparing the ontological commitments must be a central aspect of any such theory comparison. Many of the theoretical virtues, such as parsimony, simplicity, rely on a prior understanding of the ontological commitments of the theories being compared. It is for this reason, that I am keen to argue that quantifier variance is best understood as an anti-realist theory. Quantifier variance is particularly important in this sense, as the very sorts of meaningful true statements that realism has traditionally been associated with – with the notion of a uniquely privileged language or description of reality – are denied under quantifier variance. It seems strange, if nothing stronger, should quantifier variance therefore be classified alongside the theories that it seeks to argue against.

A further note is required. As commented on at the beginning of §1, the anti-realism under consideration here is global. It might be the case that some theorists are deflationary about some metaphysical debates but not others. This would be a partial deflationary account, which would be in a sense analogous to the trope theorist that is an anti-realist about universals. Such a view is possible under the account defended here, under the proviso that in the debates that they are not deflationary about, the truthmakers for claims satisfy R<sub>2</sub>. I leave it open that such a position could be coherently developed. There is, though, one initial concern that would need to be addressed. In so far as the deflationary positions are primarily concerned with ontological debates (the *existence* of mereological wholes; the *existence* of numbers, etc.), how is it the case that within some debates the concept of exists can be deflated but not in others? Put another way, say we are quantifier variantists. If I hold that mereological debates are merely verbal in virtue of the lack of a privileged existential quantifier; what is it in virtue of that I could think that the debate over the existence of numbers is substantive? It cannot be in virtue of a privileged existential quantifier, as that would be inconsistent with other positions that the quantifier variantists wish to hold. This does leave aside whether there are other possible routes to deflationism about metaphysical debates. Other routes might be entirely consistent with a partially deflationary account of metaphysics. However, in so far as my focus here is on deflationism based on claims about the existential quantifier, it is not yet clear how such a partial deflationism would look.

## 2.44 Ordinary Language and Revisionary Metaphysics

Thus far, Hirsch's argument claims that there is no privileged notion of 'exists' against which we could judge our ontological languages, and that we might think one particular language accurately represents. However, Hirsch's aims are clear – he wishes to push further than only an argument against substantive metaphysics as it has been traditionally conceived, and to a return to the 'ordinary language' philosophy that was dominant for a period in analytic philosophy in the twentieth century.<sup>108</sup> Hirsch distinguishes between two main strands of argument for ordinary language philosophy: the first, “typified by Moore, comes out of basic epistemology” (2002a; 2011: 98) – I will set this strand of argument aside in this work; the second, falls out of linguistic considerations, and it is along these lines that Hirsch wishes to argue, contra 'revisionist' philosophy.

In order to proceed, some working characterisations of these views are in order. I will take ordinary language philosophy to be the view that philosophical problems are best solved by considering the opinions and structure of the language of the 'man on the street'. It is within ordinary language that many philosophical issues will either be solved, or will never come to be a problem in the first place. Take the existence of the table in front of me – I, and other speakers of English, will typically assert to its existence, and thus, from our ordinary everyday talk of tables, we can conclude that tables do indeed exist. The mereological question of whether this table combined with Socrates' nose comprises a further object, does not generally arise; but if it did, then such an object would be rejected, as ordinary speakers would not typically assert that such 'gerrymandered' objects exist. Appeals to perception are

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<sup>108</sup> It is not required for my aims here to go into as much detail as some may like about 'ordinary language' philosophy. I take Hirsch's conclusions to be (largely) in line with the views of the notable 'ordinary language' philosophers when such views originally found popularity – I have in mind Moore, Austin, P. F. Strawson, Wittgenstein; but I make no claim to being an expert on those figures, and nothing claimed here is intended to suggest that they would have supported this form of ordinary language philosophy. Here I will rather focus on Hirsch's own arguments for its importance, and his own conception of what ordinary philosophy amounts to, which, as will become apparent, is largely focused on ordinary language as it is applied to ontology and ontological questions normally asked by metaphysicians, themselves typically opposed to a strong relationship with 'ordinary language'.

often central to this view, wherein ordinary language takes its terms and its commitments from what we all typically perceive – we all typically perceive the table, and the pen on it, as being two distinct objects, and we have what Hirsch calls a “charity to perception”, such that our language contains terms and sentences intended to make perceptual reports, and we should take those reports to be “generally accurate (to a fair degree of approximation)” (2005; 2011: 149). I take such charitable approaches to the widely accepted perceptual reports of a community as typical instances that ordinary language philosophers would take seriously.

'Revisionists' alternatively will reject those reports (or at least will be far more inclined to do so). This rejection of ordinary language, and the intuitions and perceptual reports that underlie the ordinary language philosophers' answers or deflation of metaphysical questions, may have many sources for the revisionist. Most typically, though, the revisionist would base this rejection on some a priori metaphysical principle. For example, if we think that, as a matter of a priori metaphysical necessity, that the fusion of two parts composes a further object (in line with the theory of unrestricted mereological composition), then we will be lead to reject certain intuitive and perceptual beliefs about objects, such as the idea that an object can have parts that are spatio-temporally distinct and separated from other parts.<sup>109</sup> What is crucial here is that the revisionist will, in some sense, think that the ontological commitments that stem from ordinary language are wrong, and the correct ontological commitments, those that accurately describe reality and are uniquely privileged, will contradict those of natural languages. For this reason, notions such as *Ontologese*, a language of the metaphysician, in which, by hypothesis, the quantifier of the language carve reality at its joints, have been touted, perhaps most prominently by Sider (2009; 2011).

Hirsch also introduces a further useful category, distinguishing between revisionists, and crypto-revisionists (2002a; 2011: 104). Crypto-revisionists, unlike the revisionists as described above, will claim that their ontological statements do not actually contradict the ontological statements of ordinary language. Instead, the

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<sup>109</sup> The classic example of the fusion of Socrates' nose and the Eiffel Tower illustrates this well. I do not think that our pre-reflective thoughts about fusions and the objects that can be composed from certain fusions, but not others, would intuitively allow for the object that is the fusion of those two parts.

metaphysician and the ordinary speaker can both speak truths even though they would on first glance disagree, as the metaphysicians' talk is in some sense 'stricter', whilst ordinary language talk is 'loose'. The ordinary language statement on this view is not actually trying to make the ontological assertion that it initially appeared to be. Butler's famous distinction between loose and strict identity would be one such example, wherein the metaphysicians' identity claims are held to more rigorous tests, and the ordinary language identity claims are, 'strictly' speaking, false (1736). I do not wish to discuss crypto-revisionist's claims in any real depth here – I agree with Hirsch that the principle of charity is such that metaphysicians have little ground to inform the speakers of a natural language that the statements that the speakers in that community typically assert are 'strictly speaking' false.<sup>110</sup> I shall therefore assume from herein that the options are to be a revisionist or to embrace ordinary language metaphysics.

So, what is Hirsch's argument in favour of a return to ordinary language? The first premise is quantifier variance. Once we have, as Hirsch argues, concluded that there is no uniquely privileged interpretation of the quantifier, this stands as the background behind our question as to what ontological language we should accept. The major premise in favour of revisionist metaphysics has been undercut by this background – the idea that the ordinary language ontological commitments are incorrect as such commitments do not carve reality at its joints, in the way that the revisionist's theory is claimed to, is lost. What remains therefore is to consider whether there is any reason for the revisionist approach to be supported?

We must remember that the revisionist being considered here is taken to be claiming to speak English (we will return to those that speak Ontologese shortly). The

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<sup>110</sup> I shall not fully argue for this claim, but my assumption here will be that the metaphysician should bite the bullet and accept that they disagree with the ontological claims of ordinary language. It still remains on this view to explain the relationship between the ontological claims of the revisionist metaphysicians and those of ordinary language. It will become apparent in §3.2 that my favoured approach here is to deny that the metaphysician, when doing metaphysics, are speaking English, say, at all – that they instead speak Ontologese. This, indeed, embraces the ontological pluralist's insight that there are many different ontological languages – what remains for the revisionist and supporter of substantive metaphysics is to show how Ontologese is a uniquely privileged ontological language through the positing of an unrestricted existential quantifier; arguments to this end will be the topic of §3.3.

revisionist is, therefore, 'correcting' the ontological commitments that the ordinary speaker asserts. However, given the principle of charity, and stripped of any claim to the uniquely privileged ontological language, we should accept the ontological commitments that would mean that the majority of typical speakers are found to be speaking truths – for after all, the principle of charitable interpretation ensures that we should, all else being equal, think that ordinary speakers' assertions are true. Hirsch's principle of charity, lest we forget, is based around the Davidsonian idea that the simplest and best explanation for the actions and behaviour of a person, including their linguistic behaviour, is that there is good reason for this behaviour.<sup>111</sup> The best explanation of the linguistic behaviour of ordinary speakers is that their ontological assertions in 'plain' English are correct. If ontological questions are verbal, concerned only with different interpretations of the quantifier; and if revisionist metaphysicians take themselves to be 'correcting' the mistakes of ordinary language; then the revisionist is making a mistake to claim that the 'correct' interpretation of the English quantifier is anything different from the one that ordinary speakers would give assent to. Ordinary language is therefore the best way to establish the correct interpretation of quantifiers in English – the claims of the revisionist deny the principle of interpretive charity, and hence mistakenly attempt to claim an interpretation of the quantifier that goes against that which is typically asserted to by ordinary speakers of English.

What options, then, are left for the revisionist? If the revisionist is indeed trying to 'correct' English in the way that Hirsch has thus far in this exegesis assumed, then there do not seem to be any options. The revisionist may claim that there is a 'conflict of charity' occurring, wherein "typical speakers of the language are disposed to assert conflicting sets of sentences" (2002a; 2011: 108). Such conflicts might be cases where the basic ontological claims that we make conflict with general principles that we wish to hold.<sup>112</sup> However, such conflicts do little to aid this form of revisionary metaphysics. We can first ask why we should hold the revisionists' general principles,

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<sup>111</sup> See Davidson 1984, especially, 'Belief and the Basis of Meaning', and 'Thought and Talk'.

<sup>112</sup> Hirsch's example is the general principle that two things cannot wholly occupy the same place at the same time; people seem disposed to assert this claim as physical law, yet this contradicts certain commonsensical assertions such as those about statues and lumps of clay, the topic of much philosophical debate (2002a; 2011: 108).

rather than rejecting them and accepting the ordinary claims of the community of speakers. Leaving aside the need to show that reality *does* follow this sort of general principle rather than being indefinite in some way, accepting the ordinary claims of the speakers clearly satisfies the principle of charitable interpretation more than the alternative option. Added to this, general principles are the sorts of things that are meant to be changed and adapted to fit counterexamples – as Hirsch points out, it is surely the natural move to adapt such general principles that have a large number of significant counterexamples, and through that, accept the ‘correct’ interpretation of the English quantifier to be one that fits with the commonly asserted ontological statements in ordinary language.

Hirsch then seems to have given a strong case against this form of revisionary metaphysics; and it is one that I agree with. However, there remains the alternative route for the revisionist metaphysics, namely to bite the bullet and accept that, when doing ontology, in the Ontology Room, we are not speaking English, we instead are speaking an alternative language, Ontologese. Hirsch, of course, thinks that this is not a valid option – stating that in trying to stipulate a language that is aligned to reality’s quantificational structure, we are “trying to “stand both inside and outside language” at the same time” (2008; 2011: 214). I will leave in depth discussion of this point to §3 – I find the move to Ontologese plausible, defensible, and to be the best option available to the supporter of substantive metaphysics within a broadly Quinean quantificational meta-ontology. This requires a defence, contra Hirsch, of the view that the notion of a privileged, unrestricted quantifier is intelligible, which can then be posited as the quantifier in Ontologese.<sup>113</sup>

It suffices here then to state that Hirsch’s arguments against substantive metaphysics are clearly strong, and do require a detailed defence if we wish to carry on with metaphysics as it has been traditionally conceived (as I do). The historical thread from Carnap to Putnam, and then to Hirsch should also be clear. Language is central to the claims of all three, with the limits of meanings and interpretations of term and quantifiers as crucially important for them all to argue that metaphysical

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<sup>113</sup> Though see §3.21 for some discussion of the ‘ordinary’ unrestricted quantifier, and the unrestricted quantifier of Ontologese.

statements and questions end up as ‘merely verbal’ or meaningless. This section, I hope, serves to provide the base exegesis for the responses that follow in the remainder of this thesis. The focus will be on language, and thus ultimately the issue is of the relationship between language and metaphysics, as well as a detailed defence of the intelligibility of the unrestricted quantifier through considerations of language. Under the conception outlined thus far, the nature of language is such that it can only stand in a deflationary, and anti-realist (from the understanding in §1.5), relationship with metaphysics. I will argue against this conception of the relationship in what remains of this work.

## Section III

### Substantive Metaphysics:

### Responding to the Deflationist

Say that a question is ‘unanswerable’ if no straightforward answer to it, stated in the same terms as the original question, is truth-evaluable – where this failing is in principle; not a reflection of mere epistemic shortcomings but of deficiencies in meaning (Thomasson 2009: 444-5).

In this quote, we have the deflationist charge against substantive metaphysics, the charge against realist metaphysics – metaphysics that satisfies the characterisation of realism defended in §1. §3 as a whole, as the title suggests, responds to these claims, but most specifically to the form of deflationism that Hirsch can be taken to be the main proponent of; that of quantifier variance.

These responses will be a mixture of directly arguing for the principled possibility of joint-carving terms, and arguing that there are flaws in the deflationist arguments and assumed conception of metaphysics. Joint-carving here can be taken to refer to the carving of reality, being, or even of nature. My favoured term will be reality throughout, but I do not intend this usage to be commenting on the fine-grained distinctions between these that others might draw. It suffices here that when I talk of joint-carving, I talk of carving of the kinds of entities that might be taken to be the realist truthmakers described in §1.5. These of course likely could be so conceived, in line with that characterisation, in different ways. I wish to make no comment as to how these should be conceived, and thus that some may wish to take the notion of joint-carving to be carving something other than reality. I will use the term reality, but nothing substantive should be taken to be implied by this.

§3.1 is devoted to responding to a couple of specific parts of certain deflationary views, claims that are largely based on misunderstandings of the metaphysicians project. From §3.2 onwards, the focus will be on language, and in particular the notion of the unrestricted quantifier. Throughout §2, we have seen how the deflationist's account is built around concerns over language, over the meanings or interpretation of words, quantifiers, and sentences. Language is at the heart of many deflationary claims, and must therefore be our focus to respond to deflationism,<sup>114</sup> ultimately in such a way as to provide an account of the relationship between language and metaphysics that is consistent with metaphysics as a substantive enterprise.

§3.2 will begin this by introducing one possible, promising line of response, made through the positing of the 'unrestricted' quantifier to understand metaphysical claims, in part viewing this within the idea of a special language for ontological disputes, for within the 'ontology room', Ontologese. Ontologese is a language in which the quantifier terms are stipulated to be joint-carving, and is the language that metaphysicians *intend* to speak. Ontologese therefore relies upon the coherency of the unrestricted quantifier. However, merely intending to speak a language, to use an unrestricted quantifier, is not enough – I can *intend* to speak Swahili, I can *intend* to know Vogon poetry – *intending* to do something is not the same as being able to<sup>115</sup> – more therefore is needed to justify the claim that the notion of an unrestricted quantifier is coherent, and thus that we *can* speak Ontologese.

§3.3 will build upon this discussion of the unrestricted quantifier, and Ontologese, in line with providing an account in which the unrestricted quantifier can be both legitimately posited, and is in fact present already within universal grammatical structures of natural languages. In §3.31 I give some brief arguments against two of the main claims against the legitimacy of the unrestricted quantifier. From §3.32 onwards, I will focus on those objections that arise from a consideration of

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<sup>114</sup> Other responses to deflationism are, of course possible, most notably in Sider 2009; 2011; Hawthorne 2006b; Hawthorne and Cortens 1995; Eklund 2008; 2009. Other forms of deflationism, rather than the main concern here (that of Hirsch and quantifier variance), may require alternative responses.

<sup>115</sup> This point I take to be uncontroversial. Certainly both sides of the metaontological debate agree that intending to speak the language is not enough (cf. Hirsch 2008; 2011: 212, Sider *forthcoming*).

language and in particular the Hirschian objection from the nature of language's quantificational apparatus, and will provide arguments against these: in §3.321 I will consider what conception of language is in use in the deflationist account; in §3.322 I will show how this conception is flawed, and should be replaced with an alternative conception based on the generative grammar programme, begun by Chomsky in the 1950s, and built on the idea of Universal Grammar (UG); in §3.323 I argue that this alternative conception allows the unrestricted quantifier to be not only intelligibly posited, but manifested within universal grammatical structures that are present in all languages' quantificational apparatus.

As a more positive proposal, §3.4 will be the most speculative part of this thesis. I will directly assess the relationship between language and metaphysics, in order to outline a positive account of how language and substantive metaphysics could be related. The deflationist's attack on substantive metaphysics will have been shown to miss its target, and I will sketch how we can conceive of a substantive metaphysical enterprise in such a way as it is entirely consistent with the already mentioned theoretically and empirically justified conception of language. To this end, I also advance some re-conceptualisation of metaphysics, but this is itself independently justified. §3.4 is therefore intended to show that the deflationist's claim cannot be that language however it might be conceived is inconsistent with a substantive account of metaphysics, as I intend to provide a schematic account of just such an account of the relationship between language and metaphysics.

I of course cannot claim that these responses to the deflationist are complete, or that they all necessarily apply to all forms of deflationary approaches to metaphysics. For instance, as already noted, my focus will be on the deflationism of Hirsch, and his 'Quantifier Variance' thesis. Whilst the arguments I make, especially those in §3.3, I believe apply to broader deflationary proposals, I leave the exact fleshing of this out to one side here. I will thus talk as though Hirsch's version of deflationism can be taken to be a model for general deflationism. This oversimplification is recognised, but one needed in order to provide substantive and novel responses to the varied, though connected, lines of objection that make up deflationary approaches to metaphysics. The claims here will also likely be at least

somewhat unpersuasive to those that are already very predisposed towards deflationism. If that is the case, then they do at least illustrate methods by which the supporter of substantive metaphysics can justify their own endeavours, and provide a positive account of how language and metaphysics can be conceived in such a way that, contra the deflationist, they are consistent with each other.

### 3.1 (Some) Preliminary Responses

Before moving onto some more substantive responses, a couple of quick responses are worth mentioning. These responses would not seem to be, by themselves, hugely damaging to the deflationist. Some may be more damaging once further claims are made later from §3.2 onwards – such as additional claims added to the response through ontologese; others will largely serve to undermine specific parts of (certain) deflationary claims, without necessarily undermining the broader deflationary argument.<sup>116</sup> These responses are useful, despite any limits in their applicability, in order to help lead us into a position where the current deflationary arguments can be argued against.

#### 3.11 Truth (again)

The first argument that we can make against deflationary approaches to metaphysics emerges out of the truthmaking characterisation of realism and anti-realism developed in §1.5. A significant part of the Carnapian, and neo-Carnapian, critique of metaphysics is the idea that sentences are only true relative to a given framework. Carnap's arguments hold that the metaphysician attempts to appeal to some notion of truth that stands independent to any linguistic framework. The metaphysician's statements are neither true nor false, and this means that they must be meaningless. Putnam, expresses this as the claim that the metaphysical realist must hold that "truth involves some sort of correspondence relation between words or thought-signs and external things and sets of things" (1981: 49; cf. §2.32)

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<sup>116</sup> Such as the comments on Putnam, which whilst damaging to Putnam, may not carry over into more recent deflationary accounts.

This charge can be dealt with easily. I have argued at length in §1.2 that realism should not be understood in terms of theories of truth, and indeed should not be understood in terms of truth at all. Putnam's linking of realism to correspondence theory underlies his rejection of some brute relation between our metaphysical theories and the world. Deflationism built around rejecting a realist metaphysics that commits itself to correspondence may be a successful argument – certainly Putnam's claims would *prima facie* seem to be persuasive; but the truthmaking account of realism avoids this problem completely. First, there is no connection to a substantial theory of truth that could be attacked; second, there is no longer any brute relation being called upon to link our words to the world. The truthmaking relation being called upon is available to the realist and the anti-realist alike. Putnam, and his followers, cannot object that the realist is appealing to a mysterious brute relation when anti-realism is understood via the same relation also. It is correct that, for the realist under a truthmaking characterisation, the truthmaking relation does connect our words to reality, as the truthmakers for the realist will satisfy the criteria set out in  $R_2$  (§1.5); but this relation is no different to the relation that connects, for the anti-realist, our words to the appropriate anti-realist truthmakers (as concepts, meanings, interpretations of the quantifier etc.). If the truthmaking relation that the realist appeals to is an unsatisfactory relation, then so too is the anti-realist's – as both, let us remember, might accept the same sentences as true, but hold that they are true in virtue of different truthmakers. The realist is in no worse a position than the anti-realist.

### 3.12 The One, Ideal, and Accurate Description of Reality

A further tenet of metaphysical realism according to Putnam is that “there is exactly one true and complete description of ‘the way the world is’” (1981: 42). This claim is connected to Putnam's early arguments against metaphysics which revolved around the idea that a certain metaphysical theory might be ‘ideal’, in that the theory satisfies all operational constraints, and yet could still be false. Under the older characterisation of realism, via correspondence theory of truth, this objection does seem to have some force. Under correspondence theory, words ‘mirror’ reality, and thus only one complete description would accurately, and truthfully, mirror the way

the world is. Under the truthmaking characterisation though, the realist need not accept that there is only one true and complete description. It is a common claim in the truthmaking literature that one truthmaker can make many true statements true, and that it is possible that many different truthmakers could make a single truth true – it is a many-many relation between truthmakers and true propositions (as truthbearers).<sup>117</sup> If we accept both a truthmaking characterisation, and that truthmaking can be a many-many relation, then there is no need for the realist to think that only one description is complete and accurate to the way the world is. The same truthmakers, i.e. the same entities that satisfy the realist criteria for truthmakers, could make different descriptions true, without damaging the realist's claims. It should be noted though that this does nothing to establish that any of those descriptions is privileged with respect to the world compared to others. Being privileged here may be that one description that a given set of truthmakers makes true may carve reality at its joints better than an alternative description, or that the terms in one description may be more 'eligible'.<sup>118</sup> Not all terms carve at the joints, and a given set of truthmakers could make true two descriptions – one where the terms do carve at the joints and another that does not.

I have phrased these points as being limited to applying to Putnam's specific version of deflationism, but they could be extended to any version that makes similar claims about the nature of metaphysical realist positions. The truthmaking characterisation of realism therefore rectifies some misunderstandings of metaphysical realism, ascribed to its supporters by the positions' opponents; but is not itself sufficient to respond to deflationism. For example, Putnam's own arguments against realism still stand within a truthmaking characterisation of realism and anti-realism, such as his argument from semantic indeterminacy. The truthmaking characterisation of realism and anti-realism is silent on this criticism – it does nothing to protect realism, nor to further anti-realism in this respect. This is not a problem for the truthmaking characterisation – indeed, if it were to follow from the

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<sup>117</sup> A simple example of this would be to consider the number of truths that would be made true by the existence of two atoms,  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ . The existence of  $\alpha$  (alone) makes the proposition that " $\alpha$  exists" true; it also makes " $\alpha$  or  $\beta$  exists" true.  $\beta$  need not exist to make " $\alpha$  or  $\beta$  exists" true. The existence of  $\beta$  alone would also make " $\alpha$  or  $\beta$  exists" true, irrespective of the existence of  $\alpha$ . Thus truthmaking would seem to be a many-many relation.

<sup>118</sup> Where 'eligibility' is something akin to reference magnetism or Lewisian 'naturalness' (1983).

characterisation that deflationism could be rejected, then it could not do what I have argued in §1.5 that it can – serve to characterise realism *and* anti-realism. All that §3.1 has intended to show is that under the truthmaking characterisation of realism and anti-realism indicates where some criticisms of realism were inappropriate in that realism so construed does not make the claims that such arguments focus on. The problem of arguing that any description can be privileged over another, which I take to be my focus, remains, and it is to a crucial piece of such arguments that I now turn. Responses to other arguments against realism I will leave to further research.

### 3.2 The Ontologese Gambit

In the case of fundamental metaphysics, the most straightforward way to resist deflationism is to claim that the crucial expressions in the debate carve perfectly at the joints... [A] *sufficient* condition for substantivity (or near enough anyway) is that the dispute be cast in perfectly joint-carving terms. Such a dispute concerns the nature of fundamental reality. In such a dispute, the existence of alternative interpretations has no more deflationary import (Sider 2011: 71).

Sider holds, and I agree, that this is the ‘most straightforward’ response to the deflationist – to argue that the dispute is cast in terms that carve nature at its joints. The deflationist’s argument is defeated as it is a substantive matter as to which terms carve at the joints.<sup>119</sup> Or, to put this in terms of Hirsch’s claims, as the main example of deflationism to be discussed here, the substantivity of metaphysical disputes is assured simply by claiming that the dispute occurs within the domain of the privileged quantifier, with that interpretation being one that only quantifies over joint-carving terms, and other alternatives thus not being relevant as they fail to carve

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<sup>119</sup> Sider’s caveat of the terms being joint carving being “nearly enough” a sufficient condition for substantivity relates to the possibility that there could be multiple joints in the vicinity but the joints might be of the “wrong sort”, such that the joint that a given answer picks out might be “distinguished” (i.e. real), but that it is the “wrong sort of joint in nature” for the question under consideration. Cf. Sider 2011: 46-54 for his account of substantivity. Such additions are not important to the claims being made here.

nature at its joints. There are, though, also (cf. Sider 2011: 71-72) three other alternatives methods to resist the deflationist argument, all of which should be noted here, but none of which, I argue, are attractive options.

First, we might simply deny the alternative interpretations exist – for example, that there is only one interpretation of the quantifier. Perhaps we could find that there are different syntactic structures that mean that the purported multiple interpretations are really alternative ways of phrasing the one and only interpretation. However, this position would force us, as metaphysicians, to claim that we are ‘correcting’ the meanings or interpretations of terms in a natural language such as English (leaving aside the difficulty that arises from there being thousands of naturally spoken languages, and the differences across them). Under such a view, many commonly asserted claims by the ordinary speaker would be deemed to be false by the metaphysician. As I argued in §2.44, I do not think this option is attractive – we find little ground to stand on to argue against the general principle of interpretive charity when considering the case of a naturally spoken language, and thus this proposed response should be rejected.

Second, we might accept that there are multiple equally joint carving interpretations, but then argue that those interpretations are ‘semantically alien’, and thus do not qualify as candidate interpretations. ‘Semantically alien’ uses of a word are ones far removed from our standard understanding of the term. For example, and following Sider’s example, consider the question of whether “Magnesium is more plentiful on Earth than carbon”. There is an interpretation of ‘magnesium’ whereby this is true if we take ‘magnesium’ to mean oxygen; but this is not an alternative candidate for the meaning of ‘magnesium’ as “the semantic goal we are trying to achieve with ‘magnesium’ is not so unspecific that it could just as well have been achieved by letting ‘magnesium’ mean oxygen” (2011: 71). We might, therefore, make an analogous move to remove the threat of deflationism, holding that the alternative meanings, or interpretations, of metaphysical statements are in fact ‘semantically alien’, and thus do not actually count as alternative candidates. However, again, this is clearly unsatisfactory. It seems that the different interpretations of the existential quantifier are not so far semantically removed from each other as to mirror the

relationship between 'magnesium' and 'oxygen' in the example case. Some specific applications of deflationary arguments might be refuted in this way, but the cases that appear to be most philosophically interesting are those in which we do take ourselves to be using a disputed term in different ways, whilst holding that none of the variations are semantically alien to each other. Therefore, this response is also not attractive.

Third, we might argue that it is unimportant that there are alternative interpretations of some term, or sentence, as what we, as metaphysicians, are concerned with is the world – for example, whether there really is a fusion of two parts, not some mere fact about language or fact about an interpretation of a sentence. Alternative interpretations are uninteresting as by interpreting a claim in an alternative way, by defining the claim to mean something different, the claim is no longer talking about the entity that the original claim was about. Leaving aside the difficulty in deciding which are the 'alternative interpretations', and which is the claim that is directly concerned with the right entity in the world (appeals to the intentions of the original speaker would not seem to get us far here); this view is still not an attractive one, largely due to its own vagueness. It is not clear how such a response engages with the deflationist's arguments at all.

None of my claims here are fully developed enough to entirely dismiss these three options; but it should be sufficient to lead us to look at the original Sider quote, and the method therein as the most promising route to argue that the deflationist's argument that there is no privileged interpretation, no 'joint-carving' terms, is incorrect. There is a further reason to prioritise a response of this kind. In §1.1, I characterised realism such that an important point to realist metaphysics is that it is not the practice of conceptual analysis. Instead, metaphysicians most often take themselves to be discussing the nature of the world, of reality, and the entities therein.<sup>120</sup> This claim was central to my argument that realism must be more than a denial of idealism, and the positing of some 'stuff-ontology' (§1.121). For realism to have philosophical significance (and the desire that is present in the literature to be

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<sup>120</sup> Though cf. §3.42 for a caveat to this, wherein I argue that metaphysics should be taken to be largely concerned with the possible ways that reality might be, not merely the actual world.

termed a ‘realist’ indicates that there is a general feeling that it should have real philosophical significance), then it must be more than conceptual archaeology, more than an acceptance of a ‘stuff-ontology’. To maintain such realism, one that engages with reality, in a manner not completely removed from science – i.e. a substantive domain of enquiry – then it seems as though we require claims of ‘joint-carving’ terms and interpretations. This conception of realism (which I think is the norm, even if unspoken, amongst many metaphysicians) cannot countenance the claim that there is no hierarchy of languages in terms of their joint-carving abilities, nor the claim that no privileged interpretation is in principle possible. To think otherwise would be difficult to marry with the substantive, realist intentions that are common amongst metaphysicians.

Of course, no argument of how to provide such a response has been given yet, but I think it is clear that this is the most promising route to respond to the deflationist. Thus, the remainder of this and the next section are devoted to arguing that the deflationist argument does not hold, and that there are good reasons to think that privileged, joint-carving terms or interpretations are in principle possible, even if we do not (yet) know what they are;<sup>121</sup> the brief comments that introduced this section indicate that the best response to the deflationist is to argue that metaphysical arguments take place in joint-carving terms; and the best way to argue for that is through Ontologese, and a defence of the intelligibility of the unrestricted quantifier.

### 3.21 Ontologese, and the Unrestricted Quantifier

Ontologese should be understood as a language “whose quantifiers are *stipulated* to carve at the joints. Ontological questions in Ontologese are substantive, even if those

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<sup>121</sup> This leaves open the question of whether we can know which interpretation is joint-carving. This is clearly an alternative issue to the one raised by the deflationist, as the belief that we epistemologically cannot know which interpretation carves at the joints (perhaps due to our finite mental abilities) does not lead to the debates between the different interpretations being non-substantive. Even if none of our metaphysical theories are wholly in joint-carving terms, it would still be a substantive matter as to which is closest to the joint-carving interpretation. This epistemological problem is similar to many issues discussed in relation to the question of *scientific* realism, but is not the issue that I take to be my main focus here. Note though that the conception of metaphysics I defend in §3.42 can avoid such epistemological issues, and is consistent with all the claims I make in favour of the substantivity of metaphysics and metaphysical disputes prior to that section.

in ordinary language are not” (Sider 2011: 172). Ontologese is therefore introduced, Sider continues, by “stipulatively remov[ing] any normal metasemantic pressure towards tolerant interpretations that assign non-joint-carving meanings to quantifiers. Ontologese quantifiers are to have meanings that carve at the joints, but are otherwise as similar as possible (in inferential role, for instance, as well as in extension), and similar enough, to the meanings of ordinary quantifiers” (2011:172). Such quantifiers have been described as ‘unrestricted’, ‘absolute’, or even ‘absolutely unrestricted’. The existential quantifier of Ontologese therefore quantifies over absolutely everything, over all entities that exist, independent of any linguistic or conceptual restrictions that we might place upon existential quantification within our ordinary use of quantifiers. It is reasonable to state that the success of Ontologese revolves around the legitimacy of such quantifiers. If unrestricted quantifiers are not legitimate, then the claims of Ontologese to ‘carve reality at its joints’ would seem to fall apart.

It is worth stressing the nature of the ‘unrestricted’ quantifier. There is a common way of speaking such that both the metaphysical realist, and the Hirsch-style deflationist can accept that there are a multitude of different quantifiers, all of which are unrestricted in various ways. A trope theorist’s quantifier will be unrestricted with respect to tropes, whilst the universalist’s will be unrestricted with respect to universals. What is important for the Ontologese quantifier is that it is unrestricted with respect to reality, and only those entities that do in fact exist. This means that the Ontologese quantifier may ignore any other *non-metaphysically substantive* restrictions that might otherwise be placed on the scope of our quantifiers (this point is made again, in more depth, in response to some arguments against the intelligibility of the unrestricted quantifier in §3.31). This is entirely consistent with there being other in-their-own-way unrestricted quantifiers. We may have a language with a quantificational structure that only scopes over entities in the room I am in now. This would, in a sense, be *unrestricted* with respect to the entities in this room, but be *restricted* to all entities outside of this room. That restriction though would seem to be non-metaphysically substantive, and so would not be one that should be applied to the Ontologese quantifier. The Ontologese quantifier is thus synonymous with the idea of a ‘privileged quantifier’, and thus it is in this sense that a Hirsch-style deflationist could not accept the intelligibility of the Ontologese quantifier.

The unrestricted quantifier, it should be noted, can be discussed and defended outside of the highly specialised language of Ontologese. Linnebo states that the unrestricted quantifier is one that “ranges over absolutely all things: not just over all physical things or all things relevant to some particular utterance or discourse but over absolutely everything there is” (2006: 149). This can therefore be understood in any language – we can claim to ‘unrestrict’ the English quantifier for example, such that it bears no relevance to a particular utterance or discourse, but only to “everything there is”. Let us call this the ‘ordinary-language unrestricted quantifier’ in order to distinguish it from the unrestricted quantifier of Ontologese. Assuming the legitimacy of such quantifiers for a moment (cf. §3.3 for a defence of this legitimacy), we need to consider what restrictions are placed on entities by each of the ordinary-language unrestricted quantifier and the Ontologese unrestricted quantifier. Both of these notions have the same single restriction upon them, namely that they quantify over everything that exists, independent of any further restrictions that might be placed on the domain of the quantifier. Given that both are stipulated as only having the same single restriction, independent of any further potential restrictions, the domains must be identical, though expressed in different languages. However, even despite the identical domains, there are some good, though not conclusive, reasons why would should favour a move to doing metaphysical work in Ontologese.

First, a move to a discussion of Ontologese can be for dialectical ease. As I have already noted in §2.44, claiming that a discussion of metaphysics occurs in English may be difficult for additional reasons beyond the objections posed to Ontologese, such as those that Hirsch poses for the prospects of revisionary metaphysics in English. I argue that discussing the unrestricted quantifier in Ontologese avoids these issues, and hence my focus on Ontologese here – I simply wish to place those other issues to one side, and focus on the overall legitimacy of any notion of an unrestricted quantifier. If the objections to revisionary metaphysics and the other issues surrounding the practice of metaphysics being taken to be occurring in English can be overcome, then given the identical domain of the two quantifiers, everything argued here can be argued in a favour of an ‘ordinary’ unrestricted quantifier.

Second, much of Hirsch's deflationary argument against substantive metaphysics takes place within *ordinary, spoken natural language* – indeed Hirsch's interest is often focused on whether the 'correct' interpretation of the *English* quantifier should be based on the existential claims of the ordinary speaker, or that revisionary metaphysicians who posit 'strange' objects that ordinary speakers might not ordinarily countenance (cf. §2.4). For the purposes of this thesis, I have granted Hirsch the claim that a principle of charity would count in favour of the ordinary speaker when our concern is what the correct interpretation of the quantifier of English is.<sup>122</sup> It is the extra claim that Hirsch makes, that of quantifier variance, that I seek to respond to here. Quantifier variance, to remind ourselves, holds that there is no privileged interpretation of the existential quantifier, no interpretation that can make claims that 'carve reality at its joints', or is more 'natural' than any other, etc. Thus, metaphysical disputes are merely verbal; such disputes are only over which interpretation we should adopt at a given time, or which interpretation is the correct one for the English quantifier. Hence the move to Ontologese; by moving the ontological argument to a specific theoretical language some of Hirsch's concerns can be responded to straight away. The metaphysician is no longer concerned with the correct interpretation of the English quantifier, and can cede the argument to Hirsch that the principle of charity will indicate quite what ontological commitments we should think arise out of the specific interpretation of the quantifier present in English – the same claim of course runs for any language ordinarily spoken. Hirsch's principle of charity argument in favour of ordinary language metaphysics, and against revisionary metaphysics, therefore does not concern us once we move to Ontologese as there was an explicit acceptance that the interpretation of the quantifier in Ontologese can ignore meta-semantic issues such as interpretive charity, with the only restriction on the interpretation being that it carves reality at its joints. It is this

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<sup>122</sup> cf. §2.44. cf. also Daly and Liggins (Ms.), who argue that Hirsch's principle of charity argument is not enough to count against revisionary metaphysics even if we do not make the move to Ontologese, and continue to discuss metaphysics in English. Whether their arguments work is not of direct relevance here, except to say that if their claims are correct then this would seem to give the supporter of substantive metaphysics two options for continuing their research – to either continue to speak English, including (presumably) an element of 'correcting' our ordinary language and its metaphysical commitments; or to argue that metaphysics is done in the posited Ontologese.

claim, that the unrestricted quantifier in Ontologese is not intelligible, and thus in principle no quantifier might be privileged, that is of interest here.

Third, and to build on the second claim, a move to Ontologese may in fact undermine parts of the revisionary vs. ordinary language metaphysics distinction. Positing Ontologese, we can still embrace one aspect of Hirsch's work – namely the claim that there are multiple distinct ontological languages, each with their own ontological commitments. Doing metaphysics in Ontologese leaves English (and all other languages) completely intact, along with their own specific ontological commitments. We might think of an account of the ontological commitments of Ontologese as 'revisionary' or 'ordinary' in light of comparing those ontological commitments with, say, those of English. The Ontologese ontological commitments would thus be conceptually revisionary or ordinary by how far those commitments matched our ordinary everyday English commitments; but, as Hirsch argues, such comparisons would not be substantive, nor could they carry metaphysical weight as the discussion would be between the relative, and, crucially, independent ontological commitments of the different languages. Whether Ontologese is revisionary or ordinary in *this* sense is unimportant, so long as it is maintained that the Ontologese quantifier carves reality at its joints. The debate over the substantivity of metaphysics therefore shifts slightly from Hirsch's original starting point. The starting point is not the observation that there are different independent ontological languages with varying ontological commitments. This is unimportant, as it is trivially correct that we can come up with alternative languages that are committed to alternative ontologies; but the cross-comparison of languages becomes unneeded in the debate, as the debate is rather about whether certain ontological statements are true in Ontologese, in virtue of the Ontologese quantifier.<sup>123</sup> The issue is then whether, say, nihilism about composition is true in Ontologese; whether it is true in English or any other language

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<sup>123</sup> This is not to say that Hirsch's work is solely based on the fact that different languages have different ontological commitments. The claims of quantifier variance, against there being any privileged notion of the quantifier, are independent of this. Hirsch's other claims though are in part focused on whether there is a way to decide what is the correct interpretation of the English quantifier in light of competing possibilities (the ordinary view, and various revisionary proposals); it is these parts that are not of relevance once the supporter of substantive metaphysics has decided to shift metaphysical debate into Ontologese.

is unimportant here.<sup>124</sup> The debate entirely turns on the legitimacy of the claim that the Ontologese quantifier carves reality at its joints – that it is, in Linnebo's sense, unrestricted (2006). The metaphysician that has taken on Ontologese *must* claim that the language is privileged, and the quantifiers are central to this claim.<sup>125</sup> Those who do not favour the move to Ontologese may instead understand the claims that I make in the remainder of this thesis in terms of the 'ordinary-language unrestricted quantifier' without too much issue, as the arguments are concerned with the intelligibility of the unrestricted quantifier more generally rather than specifically that of Ontologese; however, I will assume talk of Ontologese throughout.

### 3.22 'Carving at the Joints' and other Primitives

Before directly responding to specific objections to the notion of the unrestricted quantifier, some comments are required on the issue of primitives. The terminology that I have used is that of 'carving at the joints', the terminology perhaps most notably recently extensively used by Sider (cf. 2001b; 2004; 2009; 2011). There are though a number of similar concepts hovering around the same basic idea – that of 'privileged' language or description; Fine (2001) talks of 'Real' (as opposed to 'real'); Lewis often talked of 'naturalness', 'eligibility', or 'reference magnetism'. Terms of this sort were introduced by Lewis (1984) as a response to Putnam's model-theoretic argument (cf. §2.3). Putnam's claim was that there were no extra constraints that were not 'just more theory' that would ensure that the metaphysician was legitimate in thinking that a

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<sup>124</sup> Alternatively, this could be characterised as making metaphysics as interested in 'learning' Ontologese, by working out what claims are true in the joint-carving language and therein working out what truthmakers we are committed to, and their nature. This imagery is loose, and should not be taken literally, as there are of course ongoing issues to such a claim at the very least in light of the prior conceptual and semantic understanding that the metaphysician will have to import from their native (and other learned) ordinary language – Ontologese, as detailed in the Sider quote above, imports additional aspects of the quantifier (its meaning, inferential role, extension) from other languages, only stipulating on the quantifiers joint-carving nature and a willingness to reject other aspects if they do not cohere with this joint-carving. That metaphysicians must strive to reduce the influence of such effects upon their discussion of Ontologese is nothing damaging to the claims here – the point that our metaphysics cannot be 'read-off' our language is a common and well supported idea and feeds into this directly (cf. Heil 2003; Dyke 2008) – but it is enough that this imagery of 'learning' Ontologese should not be taken too literally.

<sup>125</sup> The claim here is not that this is the *only* option available to the supporter of substantive metaphysics. My claim here is limited to the idea that Ontologese is one interesting and promising option available.

theory that satisfies all operational constraints was still potentially false. To justify metaphysics some theory-external constraint is required – Putnam's claim was that no such constraint was possible, only theory-internal constraints, the success of which rely on a presumption in favour of metaphysical realism in the first place. The 'naturalness' constraint, Lewis argued, was the theory-external constraint that the metaphysical realist requires, leading to the idea of reference magnetism, wherein relatively natural entities serve as magnets for terms to refer to. Lewis argues that this constraint is theory-external, and thus saves metaphysical realism from Putnam's claims. The use of metaphysical primitives thus goes back some way.

These terms cluster together and do similar work within the theories that they are posited. Such terms are, I claim, relatively interchangeable. There may be some reasons why a certain term is adopted over another, but these reasons are often linked to the further first-order metaphysical commitments that the theorist wishes to defend.<sup>126</sup> I wish to leave such first-order influences to one side here, and thus nothing overly burdensome should be taken to hold to my use of carving at the joints as opposed to another one of these cluster terms – if another is preferred, and it plays a similar role as carving at the joints is taken to, then a change in terminology can be made without problem here.

Talk of joint-carving, naturalness, privileged languages, eligibility, etc. will likely be taken to be clear to the realist. Many realists will already be committed to one or another of these variants; but there is a growing voice that doubts the legitimacy of such terms, arguing that they require more explication before they can do the heavy lifting that the realist requires them to do. I cannot here give a full defence of such terms, but I would be remiss not to acknowledge these concerns, and provide what I hope are at the least some reasons for thinking that a concept in this vicinity is valid. What follows then will likely not persuade the staunch opponent that there is legitimacy to such terms – the accusation that the terms are ill-defined will likely continue.<sup>127</sup> However, in so far that many of the deflationists about metaphysics

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<sup>126</sup> For example, Sider defends 'carving at the joints' as it suits his defence of nature having a quantificational structure, and his claim that it is structure that should be at the centre of our research in metaphysics.

<sup>127</sup> I have in mind here in particular Hofweber 2009, who argued that what he calls 'immodest'

seek to argue that there is no joint-carving description or no privileged language, there must be some understanding on both sides – you cannot argue against there existing something that you cannot comprehend at all. But there is a legitimate line of argument that the notions cannot be comprehended at all, and thus some exposition of the primitive concepts is required. My claims here are intended therefore only to go against this claim of complete incomprehension, hopefully to push those on the fence into, for the time being at least, accepting that there is some content to these notions.

A first point is to stress that these terms are taken to be *primitive* – they are basic metaphysical primitives indicating whether a particular representation is accurate with respect to the structure of reality. Whichever notion we endorse,<sup>128</sup> they are taken to be a primitive notion that connects with the structure of reality with our words.<sup>129</sup> As primitives, the objection to the coherency of such notions cannot be a simple request for a definition. For something to be a primitive is for it to be explicitly indefinable and unanalysable in simpler terms. We would beg the question to insist that the metaphysician provide such a definition. Furthermore, the objection to the metaphysician that employs such notions cannot be a complaint that they appeal to a primitive concept at all. Primitive concepts abound in philosophy, on both sides of the metaontological debates, and further afield – appeals to primitives are not something peculiar to the metaontological or metametaphysical debates. Furthermore, especially if we continue the Quinean tradition that this thesis has largely assumed throughout, all theories will, at some point, require primitives.<sup>130</sup> The objection therefore cannot be simply due to the *use* of a primitive notion.

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metaphysics' should be rejected due to the impenetrability of these kinds of terms and concepts.

<sup>128</sup> If two or more notions are mentioned, then they are normally taken to be synonyms, referring to the same basic metaphysical primitive, or the different terms are merely expressing slightly different aspects of what are taken to be the same primitive concept.

<sup>129</sup> Or propositions, or assertions, or sentences – nothing rests on which notion we adopt for the nature of our representation.

<sup>130</sup> Some might initially object that appealing to Quine to support the necessity of primitives within theories might unfairly assume points in favour of the metaphysical realist, or the supporter of substantive metaphysics. However, there are two reasons why this is not the case: first, as noted in §2.2, Quine is very plausibly interpreted as no friend of substantive metaphysics, agreeing with Carnap's deflationary anti-metaphysical arguments; and, second, as shown in §2.4, current deflationists such as Hirsch also adopt a broadly Quinean methodology in understanding ontological commitment.

Showing that it is legitimate to appeal to a primitive concept though is of course not sufficient – it still rests on the supporter of substantive metaphysics to try to elaborate their primitive concept. There are many such accounts that try to give some content to the primitive. Lewis, attempting to elaborate the notion through examples of when it applies, states that:

Among all the countless things and classes that there are, most are miscellaneous, gerrymandered, ill-demarcated. Only an elite minority are carved at the joints, so that their boundaries are established by objective sameness and difference in nature. Only these elite things and classes are eligible to serve as referents. The world – any world – has the makings of many interpretations that satisfy many theories; but most of these interpretations are disqualified because they employ ineligible referents. When we limit ourselves to the eligible interpretations, the ones that respect the objective joints in nature, there is no longer any guarantee that (almost) any world can satisfy (almost) any theory. It becomes once again a worthy goal to discover a theory that will come true on an eligible interpretation (1984: 227).

Here, Lewis accepts the uncontroversial claim that we have many different interpretations and theories that could describe the world. Eligibility comes in shades, and thus we can argue that one interpretation may be better than others in that its terms are more eligible than the terms in another interpretation. Some interpretations might be rejected out of hand. Take for example a view that held that all entities are ultimately made up of tables. This ‘table monism’ would seem to be, *prima facie*, clearly an interpretation that is less eligible than other accounts, but table monism might still be formulatable in such a way that the world has an interpretation that satisfies it. Having this formulation though is not enough to make it an eligible theory, as it would seem to be clear that table monism would not respect the objective joints in nature. It is for this reason that Lewis would deem such a theory as ineligible. Likewise, boundaries such as those between countries would seem to be

gerrymandered, and lacking any claim to being objective joints in nature. Such boundaries would also thus be deemed to be ineligible. Even though these country boundaries are useful, and clearly exist in one sense, we would be hard-pressed to produce a theory that held that these boundaries match objective joints in nature.<sup>131</sup> Lewis here then explicates some understanding of the primitive through an understanding of when it applies. The examples cannot seek to define the notion of eligibility, after all the term is a primitive, but we can gain some insight into understanding some cases where it would not apply.

Sider instead defends a conception of objective structure that underpins his primitive concept of metaphysics, the notion of carving at the joints, (in part) through an appeal to the need for such notions at the heart of not just a successful metaphysics, but also a notion that is central to the success of science. Sider holds that at the beginning of a given piece of research, we choose concepts that underpin all the subsequent research that occurs. The concept of objective structure was one such choice for physics; Chomsky's focus on "native speakers' nonprescriptive judgements of grammaticality", and Frege's choice of "the now familiar quantifiers" are two further examples where initial conceptual choice "led to progress where before there had been stagnation". 'Carving at the joints' underpins the success of such concepts – research progressed *because* the initial concept choice carves at the joints: "If the initial choice misses reality's joints, subsequent progress in terms of the ill-chosen concepts is unlikely" (2009: 401-2). The primitive of carving at the joints therefore is not defined here, but Sider illustrates the primitive in action – we can infer its content from the success of disparate notions that we can take to share a similar reason for being successfully chosen initial starting concepts within their respective fields. Objective structure only plays the successful role it does in the three cases mentioned *because* objective structure relies on the primitive concept of carving reality at its joints.

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<sup>131</sup> Perhaps it might be suggested that country boundaries that are marked by the path of a river might be *more* eligible, though this would open questions about where on the river the boundary really is – is it on either bank of the river, in which case the line of the bank would potentially be difficult to objectively describe; or alternatively perhaps it is in the middle of the river, which, given the above difficulty of defining the objective line of the river bank would be similarly difficult to define. Even if river boundaries are more eligible, this does not solve other examples of this issue; for example, country boundaries such as those in Africa, created as a result of colonial demarcation would seem to have no claim to eligibility in terms of respecting the objective joints of nature.

Of course, nothing in this section will have convinced someone that claims it to have been left *completely* unclear as to the meaning of these metaphysical primitives. It is worth noting though that these complaints might seem to also be particularly harsh on the proponents of metaphysical primitives.<sup>132</sup> A Quinean analysis, as has been assumed throughout much of this thesis and throughout much of the literature that is discussed here, takes every theory to have some primitives, some terms that are unanalysable in terms of simpler terms. Granting this, then even the objections to these metaphysical primitives would have to have some primitives somewhere in their accounts – perhaps that of a term being ‘unclear’ as it is often left unspecified as to what exactly it means for someone not to grasp what a term is taken to mean.<sup>133</sup> Given that primitives are not themselves being taken to be objectionable, we might also ask why the metaphysical ones are particularly unclear. Fine, responding to the threat of quietism,<sup>134</sup> argues similarly to this, that in looking at the range of attempts to understand metaphysical notions, it is clear that “we have, in the conception of reality as objective or fundamental, a distinctly metaphysical idea” (2001: 12). Thus, whatever could be said about these notions, it would be wrong to seek a definition of metaphysical notions in other (kinds of) terms – to do so would be “akin to the naturalistic fallacy – just as it would be a mistake to infer the unintelligibility of normative notions from the difficulty of defining them in naturalistic terms, so it would be a mistake...to infer the unintelligibility of the notions of factuality and reducibility from the difficulty of defining them in non-metaphysical terms” (2001: 12-13). Put simply, the claim therefore is why are metaphysical terms special in that they cannot be taken to only be definable in metaphysical terms? The threat of the naturalistic fallacy is one that is taken very seriously by many philosophers, and often motivates a non-reduction of normative

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<sup>132</sup> I am grateful for discussion with Kit Fine concerning this issue.

<sup>133</sup> Some normal ways would be to say that a term is understood if it is known when to use that term, or if you know what the extension of that term is. Both of these criteria, whilst not given a formal definition, have been outlined here for the putative metaphysical primitives, and so we might ask what exactly is still unclear.

<sup>134</sup> Taken to be the view that “metaphysical notions of factuality and reducibility are devoid of content. And, of course, once these notions go, then so does the metaphysical enterprise associated with them” (2001: 12). The talk of factuality and reducibility can be glossed over here. Fine discusses these notions to respond to certain forms of anti-realism that he identifies. The quietist’s claims that metaphysical notions are empty of content can be taken to include all metaphysical notions we might wish to discuss, but with primitive notions being taken to be particularly troublesome.

notions; it would seem to remain to be fully shown why a similar threat of a ‘metaphysical fallacy’ is not equally motivating. Indeed, if we are inclined to think of metaphysics as the most universal of disciplines, following the Aristotelian claim of metaphysics as the study of being qua being; then it becomes even harder to think that metaphysical primitives might be defined in terms of non-metaphysical terms.

The extent of this section is for those that might have some initial idea of the sorts of concept intended by these metaphysically primitive terms, and to indicate how I understand these terms to be functioning. Such primitives underlie the talk of existence, implied by the particular set of entities that lie within the domain of the unrestricted quantifier – my choice of terminology will largely be that of ‘carving nature at its joints’, but nothing rests on this choice. As such, even if no-one additional has been convinced by this account of the meaningfulness of metaphysical primitives, it should be sufficient to allow me to assume that there is some notion that supports my talk of the unrestricted quantifier, the notion that underlies the legitimacy of the claims to Ontologese. What therefore now remains is to argue, contra the deflationists, that the notion of the privileged quantifier, the unrestricted quantifier of Ontologese, is intelligible.

### 3.3 In Favour of the Unrestricted Quantifier

Fine identifies four broad lines of argument against the intelligibility of unrestricted quantification: “one based upon the existence of semantic indeterminacy, another on the relativity of ontology to a conceptual scheme, a third upon the necessity of sortal restriction, and the last upon the possibility of indefinite extendibility” (2006: 20). I will take this list of objections as my starting point, as, as far as I can see, they cover most of the major objections in the present literature. The first and last will not be discussed in full detail here, but do require some brief comments, and a brief response (§3.31)<sup>135</sup>; the second is identifiable as Hirsch’s position within quantifier variance; the

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<sup>135</sup> This is not to claim that such arguments are not potentially damaging to the notion of an unrestricted quantifier, or that they do not require a full response. This is only to say that such a full response will not be given here, only a brief response that might serve to partially undermine any initial support that might be in the reader’s mind for such arguments. My main focus will be on the second and third forms of arguments in Fine’s list.

third makes similar claims to the second in denying that there is any possibility of quantification over ‘bare’ objects, where ‘bare’ is taken to indicate that there is no linguistic or conceptual restrictions that apply to the object prior to our quantifying over them (responses to these will be left to §3.32 onwards).

### 3.31 Semantic Indeterminacy and Indefinite Extendibility

The first form of objections to the intelligibility of the unrestricted quantifier, based on the existence of semantic indeterminacy, is discussed in Dorr 2005, and stems from the consequences of the Lowenheim-Skolem Theorem, which appears to show that quantification over everything is semantically indistinguishable from quantification over something less than everything. Thus the two quantifiers would be indistinguishable, and no absolute quantifier domain of quantification would be identifiable. The last form of response, that of indefinite extendibility, also discussed in Dorr 2005, and in Fine 2006<sup>136</sup>, rejects the very possibility and intelligibility of an unrestricted quantifier, it “rejects the very idea of a completed totality”; Fine continues:

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<sup>136</sup> Fine extensively discusses the objection from infinite extendibility. Fine is no opponent of substantive metaphysics, but does reject the idea of the absolutely unrestricted quantifier, in favour of ‘relatively unrestricted quantification’. This quantification is not modelled on the same lines as the proponents of the infinite extendibility objection take the notion of absolute unrestricted quantification to be understood (this is via a notion of having a ‘most’ extended domain of quantification – see below). Fine discusses the “postulational conception of domain extension” (2006: 40), wherein the way that many currently understand our abilities to understand a change in, or reinterpretation of, the domain of quantification is through either restriction or de-restriction of a quantifier. Fine criticises this, arguing instead that quantification only makes sense relative to a postulate (to sets, to ordinals etc.). The quantifier can therefore be completely unrestricted, “in saying ‘ $\exists x\phi(x)$ ’, one is saying something  $\phi$ ’s, period” (2006: 40). This quantifier is unrestricted relative to this postulate, and therefore can be expanded without problem to include a further postulate, but this expansion “is impossible to regard [...] as a form of de-restriction, since there is no restriction on the quantifier to be relaxed” (2006: 40); there simply is no restriction to start with on the quantifier relative to this additional postulate that we now wish to include. This, Fine argues, allows him to reject what he calls ‘universalism’, and the view that it is only through restriction that a change in the interpretation of a quantifier can be achieved; whilst allowing for domain extension. Fine’s account is very interesting, and deserves more focus than I can afford it here save to say that if we follow the line that absolutely unrestricted quantification should be understood in the way that the argument from indefinite extendibility seems to assume, then Fine’s approach does seem to be the most promising route to follow. In what follows of this section, I argue that this understanding of the unrestricted quantifier is not the one that is in play within Ontologese, and thus that the objection can be avoided on other grounds also.

[f]or if we take ourselves to be quantifying over all objects, or even over all sets, then the reasoning of Russell's paradox can be exploited to demonstrate the possibility of quantifying over a more inclusive domain. The intelligibility of absolutely unrestricted quantification, which should be free from such incompleteness, must therefore be rejected (2006: 20).

There is a particular understanding of 'absolute' and 'unrestricted' that these forms of objection relate to. Dorr states this understanding as: "a quantifier is absolutely unrestricted just in case it has a meaning which is not a restriction of any other possible quantifier-meaning" (2005: 256). Dorr rejects this notion of a quantifier for the fact that it leads to the semantic indeterminacy problem; Fine for the problem of infinite extendibility. It is correct to reject this notion of the absolute, unrestricted quantifier; however that does not mean, I claim, that absolute, unrestricted quantifiers are not possible, as the objection applies to a misunderstanding of what it would mean for a given quantifier to be absolute and unrestricted, at least within Ontologese.

The understanding of the unrestricted quantifier in the quote from Dorr seems to imply that the unrestricted quantifier is intended to be understood as a quantifier which does not have the restrictions present in all other possible quantifier meanings. This seems to say that the unrestricted quantifier is being understood as an 'extended' version of other quantifiers, one that quantifies over more things than all the other possible restricted quantifiers. The objection then runs that counterfactuals can be used to indefinitely extend the space of quantifier meanings, leading to the claim that there cannot be a quantifier that is absolutely unrestricted. For example, take some restricted quantifier, one that only quantifies over objects that are in the room I am in now. This quantifier only quantifies over a few things: a desk; a chair; a computer; etc. A different quantifier meaning, one that quantifies over all the objects in this building, includes a number of further objects. Another quantifier meaning could quantify over all the objects on Earth, including, we can stipulate, entities that are conceptually alien

to us.<sup>137</sup> The unrestricted quantifier that the indefinite extendibility arguments are attacking seems to be one where this process of quantifier-extension reaches some logical limit, wherein it cannot, in principle, quantify over any further object. Their claim is that this sort of a quantifier is not possible; and, further, it is semantically indistinguishable from other less extended quantifiers.

The semantic indeterminacy and the infinite extendibility objections are in a sense related. Both objections argue for the unintelligibility of the unrestricted quantifier in light of the nature of the alternative quantifier meanings that have an alternative domain of quantification.<sup>138</sup> Semantic indeterminacy objections can be taken to be downward facing, in that the argument revolves around the possibility of *less* extended possible quantifier meanings, and those less extended domains being indistinguishable from the unrestricted domain; infinitely extendibility objections can be taken to be upward facing, in that the argument revolves around the possibility of positing infinitely *more* extended possible quantifier meanings, thus making any quantifier, including any posited as unrestricted, only a restricted version of some quantifier meaning that is more extended. Both arguments make use of a scale of quantifier meanings, with more or less extended quantifiers.

However, whilst these arguments might be correct under a certain understanding of what ‘unrestricted’ is taken to mean – the ‘extended’ quantifier of this sort does seem at least questionable for those reasons – we need not think that this is the understanding of ‘unrestricted’ we intend to mean in the case of the ‘unrestricted’ quantifier in Ontologese. Take again the quantifier with the domain of all objects on Earth, including those that are conceptually alien, as described above. This quantifies over all sorts of strange objects; but, as Hirsch and other deflationists have shown, quantification over objects within a certain ontological language does

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<sup>137</sup> I have in mind objects such as the fusions of Socrates nose and the Eiffel Tower as further objects in line with the theory of unrestricted mereological composition; Hirsch’s ‘in-cars’ and ‘out-cars’ (from his 1982); objects posited by supporters of the position that Sosa terms ‘absolutism’ (1999); I take this position to be prevalent enough in the literature (in discussion, if not support) that it requires no major detailing here.

<sup>138</sup> This is in contrast to the alternative objections listed above, which revolve around the rejection of privileged interpretations, or the possibility of quantification over ‘bare’ objects – objects stripped of any prior reference to conceptual scheme, or some prior sortal or kind term.

not result in such objects being justifiably, in a heavyweight substantive metaphysical sense, taken to exist. The metaphysically significant quantifier though is not intended to pick out simply the largest domain of quantification. The quantifier of Ontologese is posited as having quantifiers that carve nature at its joints, thus any object that the quantifiers of Ontologese quantify over, exists (in a heavyweight, substantive metaphysical sense of ‘exists’). The quantifier of Ontologese is unrestricted not in that it is the most ‘extended’, but rather in that there are *no further restrictions* on what objects it quantifies over beyond the requirement that it carve nature at its joints. Remember, Sider’s requirement: that we “stipulatively remov[e] any normal metasemantic pressure towards tolerant interpretations that assign non-joint-carving meanings to quantifiers. Ontologese quantifiers are to have meanings that carve at the joints” (2011:172). It is the removal of other non-joint carving restrictions that makes the quantifier ‘unrestricted’. The ‘unrestricted’ nature of the Ontologese quantifier therefore says *nothing* about how many objects it quantifies over, or about the nature of those objects.<sup>139</sup> This is why the objections from semantic indeterminacy and from indefinite extendibility hold no traction against the positing of the unrestricted quantifier. It may be that the Ontologese quantifier quantifies over more objects than other possible quantifier meanings, it may not; that would be a question for first-order metaphysics to investigate and one that we cannot decide an answer to here. If the Ontologese quantifier should turn out to be the most extended, then the requirement that all its interpretations are joint-carving will maintain its distinguishability from the other possible quantifier meanings.

It is also of no damage to the Ontologese quantifier if it should turn out that it is less extended than some other quantifier in some other ontological language. That this might be the case would not be surprising. We can introduce an ontological language that can quantify over many things that most metaphysical theories wish to deny. Ontologese, and its quantifiers, are not threatened by the existence of such ontological languages, as the simple response is that the alternative language, with its

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<sup>139</sup> i.e. whether they are conceptually strange to us or not. The Ontologese quantifier may quantify over conceptually strange or alien objects, or it might not. Nothing I say here will indicate an answer in either direction over whether it does quantify over such objects, as such claims would be within first order metaphysics and I strive here to be neutral about answers to first order questions and issues. This neutrality is needed lest this discussion about metametaphysics could be accused of begging the question.

domain of quantification, does not carve nature at its joints. For example, take a quantifier that includes all entities within the domain of the Ontologese quantifier, *and* the properties ‘grue’ and ‘bleen’. Assuming that such terms do not carve reality at its joints, this would be a domain of quantification larger, in the sense of containing more entities, than that of Ontologese. Either way, the arguments from semantic indeterminacy, and from indefinite extendibility, seem to require that we appeal to a notion of the unrestricted quantifier that is not the intended one. The response offered here to these two objections is, it should be stressed, not intended to be conclusive. More work would need to be done to show that the claims that I have made do not introduce further problems later on for the supporter of the unrestricted quantifier, most notably from the appeal to primitives that this response relies upon (cf. §3.22). However, the arguments do undermine some of the initial plausibility of the objections. My focus here is on language; great lengths were taken in §2 to show the linguistic motivation that lies behind many forms of deflationism. It is to the explicitly more linguistic objections to the unrestricted quantifier and to substantive metaphysics that I now turn, which will provide more conclusive arguments in favour of the intelligibility of the unrestricted quantifier.

### 3.32 Conceptions of Language

Fine’s list of objections to the legitimacy of the unrestricted quantifier included two further objections based “on the relativity of ontology to a conceptual scheme” and “upon the necessity of sortal restriction” (2006: 20). The first is that ontology is always relative to a conceptual scheme, and is akin to Putnam’s conceptual relativity thesis. The second, on the necessity of sortal restriction is the claim that we cannot think that one language, with its particular sortal restrictions, is more privileged than any other; a similar view is defended in Thomasson 2007; 2009. Hirsch’s quantifier variance incorporates aspects of both of these objections. The inherent relativity of the quantifier, stems from the linguistic, social, and conceptual choices we make, resulting in the quantifier variantist thesis that no privileged notion of the quantifier exists, and hence the unintelligibility of the unrestricted quantifier. That language is central to these kinds of objections should be clear. The link between language and conceptual schemes is an old connection. Sortal restriction explicitly occurs in

language, as “sortal” is *linguistic* terminology. The restriction in our language to entities only within certain sortals, certain restrictions upon what may count as an ‘object’, are the restrictions that the deflationist will claim have no basis to be thought of as metaphysically privileged.

From this, we can state that one common thread in the deflationary literature is that the connection between language and metaphysics is such that metaphysics as a substantive research area cannot be justified. The remainder of this thesis will be devoted to this aspect of the deflationary objections to substantive metaphysics, once again assuming Hirsch to be a prime example of the ‘typical’ deflationist. I will thus argue that under an independently motivated conception of language, metaphysics can be restored to its claims of being a substantive discipline. At the centre of this claim is the unrestricted quantifier. I will argue that the deflationist is incorrect to claim that it is not possible to provide an account of a quantifier that is stripped of all social, linguistic, and conceptual restrictions that might serve to render metaphysical debates as shallow. Variation of the quantifier is therefore not inherently such that metaphysical debates are merely verbal. In this way we can respond to the deflationist’s arguments. To stress, the claim is *not* that the unrestricted quantifier that I argue is intelligibly posited has *no* restrictions; rather the claim is that the *inherent* restrictions that the deflationist argues applies due to the nature of language, do not exist.

Prior to this, though, it is worth reminding ourselves of one central aspect in the deflationist argument, namely that it cannot be only based on semantics, or phonetics. As detailed in §2.41, Hirsch’s thesis is that the “*quantificational apparatus* in our language and thought – such expressions as “thing”, “object”, “something”, “(there) exists” - [have] a certain variability or plasticity” (2002b: 51, *my emphasis*). Though he is never explicit about this, I take it that Hirsch’s use of ‘quantificational apparatus’ must be one that refers to certain *structural* aspects of language. Indeed, the list of expressions that he gives – “‘thing’, ‘object’, ‘something’, ‘(there) exists’” – only can be said to have the same meaning in a sentence due to playing the same function within those sentences, a quantificational function, either on their own or as

part of a larger sentential phrase that expresses quantification.<sup>140</sup> We therefore can say that for these expressions to indicate the same function within a sentence is to say that they play the same quantificational role within a sentence. Such functional role in language is provided by its structure, and thus if it is the functional role of the quantifier that the deflationist is claiming carries inherent, non-metaphysically substantive, restrictions or variation, then this justifies my move to consider the *structure* of language, the *grammar* of language.

The importance of the deflationist's claims being structural rather than semantic or phonetic will become clear throughout the remainder of §3.32; but it is worth though noting (again, cf. §2.41) exactly *why* it is that I assume that the Hirsch's claim must be so conceived. Put simply, we must understand the claims of quantifier variance, and the deflationist more generally, as structural in order for the claims to have any philosophical bite or significance. The reason for this is to stop the view falling into a version of what Pinker calls the "five banal versions of the Whorfian hypothesis" (2007: 126-128).<sup>141</sup> At the centre of the deflationist's claim is an appeal to the relativity of language – the "certain variability or plasticity" (Hirsch 2002b: 51) of parts of our language. The forms of linguistic relativity that Pinker dubs 'banal Whorfianism' though are truisms, and philosophically uninteresting.<sup>142</sup> The threat of linguistic variation cannot be simply that the way that we use certain words can and sometimes do affect what we mean by them – the deflationist's claim cannot simply depend on the words that we use. The realist can counter this by simply insisting that that is not how they are using such terms, and they are using such terms to carve reality at its joints. The epistemological problem for realism is not solved by this, but

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<sup>140</sup> To illustrate this, consider how each of the following sentences could be formalised in the same way into first order predicate logic: 1) The thing is blue; 2) The object is blue; 3) Something is blue; 4) There exists a blue thing. All of these could be formalised into " $\exists xB(x)$ ", where  $B(x)$  indicates that some  $x$  has the property of being blue. Quantificational apparatus therefore can manifest in different ways, though with the same function. Therefore it is functional structure that is important.

<sup>141</sup> Pinker describes these versions of banal Whorfianism more specifically as the views that "language affects thought because we get much of our knowledge through reading and conversation"; "a sentence can frame an event, affecting the way people construe it"; "the stock of words in a language reflects the kinds of things its speakers deal with in their lives and hence think about"; "if one uses the word language in a loose way to refer to meanings,... then language is thought"; and, "when people think about an entity, among the many attributes they can think about is its name" (2007: 126-128).

<sup>142</sup> This point is also explicitly made by Scholz, Pelletier, and Pullum 2011.

as we have already seen in §1.1, such objections are practical, not principled. The deflationist's claim is that metaphysical debate is in principle non-substantive, and the epistemological concern is not strong enough to justify such a strong conclusion. Thus, the kind of linguistic variation that the deflationist appeals to cannot simply amount to semantic variation, else from the very beginning deflationism would not be any threat to the claim that metaphysics is a substantive discipline. We must though interpret a view that we wish to argue against in its strongest light, and in that spirit, deflationism must be viewed as a structural claim, one about the inherent structure of language, rather than a claim about semantics which could not carry the philosophical weight its supporters require it to do. If the variation or restriction is structural, affecting the inherent nature of the quantificational function of language, then the deflationist's argument would be a strong one. However, it is this inherent structural variation and restriction that I argue is not supportable via the sort of conception of language that the deflationist would require; and, further, that a more plausible conception of language points to there being no inherent variation within the structural parts of language that result in the quantificational function.

### **3.321 The Deflationist's Language**

Thus far, I have detailed how a strand of the deflationist's argument against metaphysics revolves around linguistic concerns over the nature of language, and should, in order to consider the arguments in their strongest sense, be taken to be structural. Language, though, and how we conceive of language encompasses a myriad of different issues such as what we ultimately take language to be, how it functions, how it is structured, and how it comes to have the structure that it has, to name but a few. Answers to these questions are far from simple, but also can directly affect what conclusions the nature of language can be taken to lead to. After all, arguments built around certain features of language will instantly appear less plausible should we independently think that there are good reasons to doubt that those features of language actually exist, or function in a completely different way. This interconnectedness of issues within the philosophy of language and the philosophy of linguistics with arguments that rely on certain aspects or characteristics of language should both be uncontroversial and clear. This is not to prejudice this

discussion in favour of any prior conception of language. This holds irrespective of what conception we ultimately favour – if I argue that language indicates that *x* is the case; but the conception of language that I draw upon to prove *x* is shown to be dubious, or even false; then the claim for *x* is instantly weakened. Any argument premised on language needs to give an account of what language is, or at least an account of the relevant parts of language for that particular line of argument. From this, it is immediately reasonable to ask, given that the deflationist's argument is premised on the inherent variability of language, what conception of language does the deflationist's argument rely upon? The force of the deflationist's argument will in part rest upon whatever notion of language that it is that they wish to employ. It is not enough to appeal to the variability of language; an accompanying account of what language is such that it has this inherent variation is also required.

We should though be clear on what the deflationist should be required to provide. As I have argued, the strongest argument that the deflationist thesis could be concerns inherent variability in the *structure* of language, not in the semantics; not within what we happen to take a particular word to mean. I take it to be uncontroversial to think that the structure of language is given by its grammar. Grammar is taken to refer to specific structural features of language, features that conjoin semantic content in specific ways to create the compositional meaning of the sentence.<sup>143</sup> One such structural feature results in the quantificational function of language. The deflationist's argument can then be said to concern the variability of grammar, and the relativity of certain forms of grammar and the affects they have upon the alternative ontological languages. As such, though we might ask the deflationist what conception of language they have in mind to support their claims, we should not necessarily expect the deflationist to provide a full account of their

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<sup>143</sup> My use of compositional here should not be taken to imply that I am relying on any strong form of compositionality in language. I use the term only in its most general sense, in that the meaning of a sentence should not be taken to be solely the result of the collective meanings of its terms, but also relies on the certain form, the certain structure, that those semantic items are placed into. I take this understanding of the role of grammar to be uncontroversial in the sense that the well-known example from Groucho Marx of "One morning I shot an elephant in my pyjamas. How he got in my pyjamas, I don't know" illustrates a syntactic ambiguity in the first sentence, despite the same semantic items in the same basic word order. This use of compositional therefore stands clear of more in depth debates about (possibly various forms of) compositionality in language; for more on this cf. Werning, Hinzen, and Machery 2012.

conception of language. There is, for example, no need for the deflationist to supply a full theory of meaning to support their claims, as, as I have outlined it, nothing in the deflationist's account rests upon some specific account of theories of semantic meaning or content. Granted that I have taken their argument to be concerned with the structure of language – the grammar of language – the conception of language that we ask the deflationist to supply need only account for this aspect of language.<sup>144</sup> In this sense, we can grant the deflationist as much as possible to strengthen their position, and thus be able to ask whether even this strengthened position can validly be held.

However, even granting that the deflationist may remain silent about many (if not most) aspects of their preferred conception of language, they are also strangely silent about how we should conceive of language for those aspects that are relevant to their claims. No detail is given as to how, for example, a language gets its quantificational apparatus, nor what structural claims we must hold in order for it to result in the kinds of inherent variation claims that the deflationist is making. No linguistic evidence is produced, beyond the observation that different ontological languages can exist. However, the existence of different ontological languages is clearly not enough evidence to support the claim that the quantificational apparatus of language is inherently variable, and relative to each particular language. The supporter of substantive metaphysics will also accept as a trivial point that different ontological languages *can* exist – that they can exist after all tells us nothing about whether one of those languages is privileged or not as the substantive accounts of metaphysics require. It does not seem unreasonable that an argument that uses claims about the inherent variation of the quantificational structure of language to argue that *in principle*, not just in practice, it is not possible to have a privileged interpretation of the quantifier; that this argument should also provide and cohere with both empirical and theoretical findings from linguistics.<sup>145</sup> If, as the deflationist claims, the grammar

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<sup>144</sup> It is for this reason that though I will talk about 'conceptions of language', this is only intended to refer to the structural, the grammatical, features of language. Although issues in other areas of philosophy of language and philosophy of linguistics (issues within semantics, pragmatics, even theories of meaning and reference) may be relevant to some other arguments concerned with the substantivity of metaphysics, I leave such issues to one side here.

<sup>145</sup> I will talk of just the empirical and theoretical findings of linguistics as a simplification. A full account would need to similarly satisfy the requirements of other empirical and conceptual fields that also

of language, or at least of the quantificational apparatus of language, is inherently variable, with built in non-metaphysically substantive restrictions, then linguistic analysis should be able to show this, or at least support this sort of claim. This would after all be an empirical claim about the nature of language. I know of no such support in any part of the deflationist literature. Without this, and the supporting conception of language, it would seem as though we can very simply deny that language does in fact work in the way that the deflationist requires.

This is, of course, not an entirely defeating argument against the deflationist's account; but it should still be marked as a major omission from the deflationist's argument that such a crucial aspect appears to be if not totally, then at least largely, missing. We might consider where the responsibility of response lies in the argument between the deflationist and the supporter of substantive metaphysics. We might think it reasonable that the supporter of substantive metaphysics cannot be expected to provide a full response to the deflationist's account until that account is fully fleshed out. It might be thought to be difficult to respond to the linguistic concerns of the deflationist, concerns built upon the relationship between language and metaphysics, when the conception of language remains unelaborated with respect to the crucial areas, those that are carrying the philosophical weight of the deflationist's claims. It will in fact be my contention in §3.322 and §3.323 that an independently supported and plausible conception of language counts against the variability or plasticity claims of the deflationist, and speaks in favour of the legitimate positing of a privileged interpretation of the existential quantifier. However, prior to this, I will consider one possible conception of language that the deflationist might use, might be implicitly present in their claims, in order to be able to compare this conception of language, one that the deflationist might appeal to, with the conception that I will argue in favour of in later sections.

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have a stake in the nature of language, including, but not limited to, philosophical areas of research (philosophy of language, philosophy of linguistics, philosophy of mind); areas in the so-called 'special' sciences (areas in biology, neuroscience); the social sciences (anthropology, sociology, many branches of psychology, but perhaps especially developmental psychology); and the 'life' sciences (especially areas of evolutionary theory). I will leave the interaction of such theories that rely on linguistic claims with all these additional areas to one side here, as my claims will revolve around theories in linguistics, not exclusively but primarily, and interactions with other field of research will be noted when relevant.

There is a theoretical virtue of considering the arguments that you wish to respond to in their best, strongest forms. This has already led to stressing the structural nature of the deflationist's argument, rather than couching the claims in terms of semantics which could easily be refuted by the supporter of substantive metaphysics. I shall also, in the spirit of this theoretical virtue, attempt to give a conception of language that would satisfy the requirements of the deflationist's arguments, that would provide the account of language, grammar, and the nature of the quantificational apparatus that the deflationist requires. This would strengthen the deflationist's arguments by no longer allowing the easy response that such arguments rely on an as yet unspecified conception of language. What conception though most easily fits with, and supports, the conclusions that they wish to draw about the nature of metaphysical disputes and claims? The conception of language that the deflationist must support must be one that supports the kinds of claims the deflationist is making, and therefore must allow for variability in the parts of language that the deflationist arguments rest upon. Perhaps the most influential conception of language that stresses variability is conventionalism.<sup>146</sup>

Conventionalism, especially that developed by Lewis 1969; 1975,<sup>147</sup> has often been proposed to explain linguistic meaning, and it is indeed often present in accounts of language by metaphysicians – for example, Sider, in one of his responses to Hirsch, even states that “the claim that there are multiple candidate meanings for quantifiers is trivially correct, *since language is conventional*” (*my emphasis*, 2009: 391).

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<sup>146</sup> I will talk in the remainder of this section as though the deflationist can be assumed to be supporting a conventionalist theory. As I have already noted, this must, by dint of the deflationist's own silence on which conception of language they support, at best be an assumption as no explicit support for conventionalism is expressed. As will become apparent though, there are some good reasons for thinking that conventionalism would be a natural fit for the deflationist, and this should explain why it is worth considering whether conventionalism would be a conception of language that would support the deflationist's anti-substantive metaphysics claims. I thus recognise that it is completely open for the deflationist to reject conventionalism, but by doing so they would return to the position of having no conception of language that supports their linguistic claims. It should also be stressed that although Hirsch denies one form of conventionalism in ‘A Sense of Unity’ (1978), this is a version of conventionalism concerned with how we come to have a concept of unity. It is completely plausible to hold a non-conventionalist view on this topic, whilst maintaining a conventionalist account of language in the sense relevant to the significant claims in the quantifier variance thesis.

<sup>147</sup> Other examples of conventional accounts of linguistic meaning include Bennett 1976, Blackburn 1984, Davis 2003, Loar 1976, and Schiffer 1972. Such accounts still have significant supporters.

Conventionalism is sometimes taken to consist of the uncontroversial claim that the mapping between a word (the phonetic label) and its referent is arbitrary, and ultimately a matter of conventional agreement. This, though, only amounts to a version of 'banal Whorfianism' that we have already dismissed as philosophically uninteresting. However, conventionalism can be appealed to for a wider, more encompassing, conception of language. Thus, Lewis argued that for a population, *P*, to speak a language, *L*, is for there to be a convention that *P* speaks truthfully in *L*. To speak truthfully in *L* is then contrasted to speaking truthfully in *L'*. Language for Lewis simply *is* this conventional agreement that the speakers of the population speak truthfully in that population's language (1969).

One initial reason for thinking that something akin to conventionalism is the view that Hirsch in particular has in mind comes from the similarities between Lewis' account of what it is for *P* to speak *L*, and how Hirsch thinks that two ontologists might be speaking truthfully within their own ontological languages. Hirsch holds that, within the mereologist's community, speakers adopt a particular interpretation of the quantifier; within the non-mereologist's community speakers adopt an alternative interpretation. For Hirsch, therefore, someone is a mereologist just in case they adopt a certain interpretation of the quantifier, and thus speaks truthfully within the mereologist's community. For that person to speak the mereologist's language (*M*) is for them to follow the particular interpretation of the quantifier that has been accepted by the population of mereologists. Following a particular interpretation of the quantifier, though, is a choice, and the meaning of the quantifier decided by those that choose to use it. That the claims of the mereologist are true comes from the accepted interpretation of the quantifier. Hirsch's account here seems to be very close to Lewis', so far as we might state that for a population, *P*, to speak *M*, is for them to follow the accepted interpretation of the quantifier in *M*, and thus speak truthfully in *M*. This would appear to be alike to the conventionalist idea, though not explicitly stated as one, and this might lend some weight to the thought that conventionalism might be the conception of language that underlies Hirsch's particular version of deflationism.

I have, after pointing to the apparent lack of a conception of language within the deflationist's argument, given some initial reasons for thinking that conventionalism would fit with the spirit of deflationism, and offered one more specific example of similarities between the two accounts. We might therefore have some reason to think that my ascription of a conventionalist conception of language to the deflationist is at least plausible. What remains is to consider whether conventionalism could fully support the claims of the deflationist, via providing a conventionalist account for the structure, the grammar, of language, and therein the grammatical structures that underlie the quantificational apparatus of language upon which Hirsch's deflationism is built. Though conventionalism can give an account of grammar, in the subsequent section I will argue that we have strong independent reasons to reject this account, and thus that this conception of language cannot support the deflationist's claims. The deflationist is left with no notion of language upon which to base their claims of inherent variability.

To give such an account of grammar through a conventionalist theory is, *prima facie*, fairly easy to provide. Just as the semantic content of a word was fixed by the conventional agreement of the speakers within population; so too the grammar is also fixed by such agreements. The particular interpretation of the quantifier, and thus that part of the grammatical structure of the language, is a matter of choice, of choosing to use that interpretation. Within a community, that choice is fixed, and thus all of the population within that community, all of the mereologists or all of the non-mereologists, fix a certain grammar between them. We can therefore under this view state that for P to speak L is for P to use the *grammar* of L correctly. To use the grammar of L correctly is contrasted with the use of grammar in L'. 'Correctly' plays an analogous role as 'truthfully' did in Lewis' account above. The normative force of 'correctly', as with 'truthfully', would be taken to only be based on convention, providing us with an account of how conventionalism might explain the grammar of a particular language. From this, and the above arguments that the claims of the deflationist's are structural, or grammatical in nature; we can take each ontological language's own particular interpretation of the quantifier to be one small part of this conventionally derived grammar. It becomes clear how this can support the claim that the "quantificational apparatus in our language and thought – such expressions as

“thing”, “object”, “something”, “(there) exists” - [have] a certain variability or plasticity” (Hirsch, 2002b: 51). Such quantificational apparatus is part of the structure of the language in question, part of the grammar; and therefore its variability is assured from its source through ‘mere’ convention, and, within that conventional aspect, the choice of the community of speakers to use the language in that particular way. Interpretations of the quantifier are thus inherently variable, and no privileged interpretation of the quantifier can exist, in line with Hirsch’s denial that there is any “metaphysically privileged sense of the quantifier” (2002b: 61). Whether the deflationist accepts conventionalism or not, this account would show that conventionalism is one conception of language that *could* support the anti-substantive metaphysics arguments of the deflationist. However, as I will argue in the next section, there are good reasons, independent of any issue concerned with the substantivity of metaphysics, which show that we should not accept conventionalism about grammar. It is the very *variability* of a conventionalist account of grammar that will be argued against. It is this very feature, independent of whether it is placed within a conventionalist conception of language, or some other conception of language, that counts against the general kind of conception of language that the deflationist requires in order to motivate their linguistically mediated argument against the substantivity of metaphysics.<sup>148</sup> This claim will then be strengthened in §3.323 to argue that once we accept universal, unchangeable aspects to grammar,

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<sup>148</sup> This might also be understood as, in the terms of Scholz, Pelletier, and Pullum 2011, as being a debate between approaching language theorising as an externalist, an emergentist, or an essentialist. In this context externalist theories stress only the actual utterances of speakers, and place the ability to learn to speak a language wholly in the external influences of that learning speaker. Externalist theories thus leave little theoretical import for mind-internal influences on language. Emergentist theories seek to understand language, and our linguistic capacities in terms of non-linguistic human capacities, more general cognitive abilities, often with a key role given to the process of communication (cf. in particular MacWhinney 2005, Tomasello 1999; 2003; 2008, and Tomasello and Herrmann 2010). Sapir is often taken to be the paradigmatic emergentist, holding that “Language is primarily a cultural or social product and must be understood as such” (1929: 214), and conventionalism, so described here, would be understood as an emergentist theory; lastly, essentialists stress the intrinsic properties of language that make language what it is. Largely related to Chomsky, who himself notes the influence of Pāṇini’s account of Sanskrit grammar in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century BC, and the generative grammar tradition, essentialists largely eschew variation in language, in particular when concerned with grammar, as being unimportant in understanding language, in favour of universals, unlearned and tacitly known that allow for the rapid learning of complex linguistic structures by infants. I will argue that the essentialist account is far better suited to understand the grammar of language, and thus the variation based theories of language that the deflationist requires in order to support their claims should be independently rejected in favour of a conception of language theorising that embraces universals.

including within the quantificational apparatus of language, then this universality, already independently motivated within the philosophy of language, and theoretical and empirical linguistics, supports the positing of the unrestricted, and therefore privileged, interpretation of the existential quantifier. Language, and grammar, will in this way be shown to actually *support* the substantivity of metaphysics via the intelligibility of the unrestricted quantifier, and contra the deflationist's claims.

### 3.322 A More Promising Alternative

As shown, the conventionalist conception of language is one that posits a form of relativity in language and grammar, via conventionally accepted linguistic practices within a particular community. This was one reason why, lacking any clear indication as to what conception of language the deflationist wishes to accept to support their claims, I have discussed how conventionalism might be used as a possible account of language that would seemingly support deflationary arguments. Conventionalism and the deflationist's claims both revolve around the variability of language; but is there good reason to think that aspects of grammar are *not* variable?

Before directly arguing that this is the case, some specifics on what parts of grammatical structure are of interest to the claims being made here. Grammar of philosophical interest is not what used to be termed 'surface' grammar within languages. Surface grammar refers to structural features such as word order, and the difference between word order in English, German, and Japanese – these differences in the structure of language are quite possibly conventional, or social, in their origin. Social factors might explain why different languages possess alternative word order preferences, with little extra relevant philosophical consequences from this for the claims being made here.<sup>149</sup> Such grammatical differences though seem to carry little

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<sup>149</sup> Interestingly, Cinque makes the claim that of all the logically possible word orders, only a certain number of these options are actually found to be present in any so far discovered natural language. This could indicate that although the adoption of a particular word order might be a social or conventional aspect of language, the *possible* options might still come from the influence of universal grammar. If this is correct, then it might be the case that the claims that I make below for the universality of aspects of deep structure might have analogous arguments for aspects of surface structure; cf. Cinque 2013. No claim here requires this additional aspect of influence from universal structures in language, and thus I will only discuss deep structure here.

philosophical interest, and cannot be the sort of grammatical features that the deflationist argument can be built upon for the reason that we can very easily strip such surface grammatical differences away from language and maintain a perfectly functional language. For example, the differences in word order in English, German, and Japanese carry no change in (literal) meaning as the relations between the parts of speech remain the same across languages despite changes in the linear word order.<sup>150</sup> The deflationist's arguments, being based on the claim of a strong variation of interpretation of the quantifier in languages, cannot be based upon such weak forms of grammatical variation, and thus we cannot be discussing grammar at the 'surface' level. Surface grammar is contrasted with 'deep' grammar, a level of grammatical complexity that often goes unnoticed by the ordinary speaker, and the level within which the more philosophically interesting and meaningful parts of grammar occur. The study of grammar within the relevant parts of linguistics can therefore be taken to be the study of deep grammatical structures.<sup>151</sup> It is these deep grammatical structures that the deflationist must discuss for their argument to hold, but it is these structures that I will argue should be taken to in fact embrace universality, rather than the variability that the deflationist requires.

The rise of conceptions of language that posit universals is well-known within the history of linguistics. Chomsky's 1959 review of B. F. Skinner's 'Verbal Behavior' (1957) is often taken to have been the first step in showing the failures in a behaviourist model of language primarily due to its lack of linguistic universals, and an illegitimate over reliance on socially mediated reinforcement as a tool to understand language learning, especially concerning grammatical rather than

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<sup>150</sup> It might be argued that a change in word order might cause certain emphasis in a sentence, and thus, through the pragmatic effects on the meaning of a sentence, might alter the meaning that the hearer infers from a sentence. Such change in emphasis cannot though change the literal meaning of the sentence, taken to be the meaning of the sentence divorced from any conversational affects placed on it, and thus is not relevant to the kinds of theories under consideration here.

<sup>151</sup> cf. Chomsky 1957; 1965; 1981; 1986, and the literature on 'transformational grammar', for more on the difference between deep and surface grammar. The notion of deep structure has been replaced within current linguistic theories, most notably in the minimalist programme as developed in Chomsky 1995 by the notion of Universal Grammar. For the purposes here, these two terms can be taken to be synonymous, without loss of theoretical virtues. The distinction between deep and surface grammar is often more recently taken to be the different between grammar and morpho-phonology (respectively). This simplification to talk of deep and surface grammar carries no theoretical implications.

semantic aspects of language. Behaviourism held that language stems only from a complex stimulus-response aspect of human behaviour. Thus grammar, in so far as it can be taken to exist for Skinner, is only a set of conventional rules that we learn through our lives due to receiving the positive feedback on our behaviour. Thus we react in a certain stimulus, and as the response is positive, the behaviour is repeated. Over time this hardens into what would appear to be grammatical rules, but are in fact merely convention based stimulus responses. The similarity, at least concerning grammar, between this view and conventionalism is clear. Conventionalism and behaviourism are not *logically* linked; we can hold one of these positions without holding the other. However, in so far as Chomsky's review of Skinner, and the subsequent generative grammar project that developed, argue against behaviourist models for their claim that social aspects create the grammaticality of language, and thus the resultant variability; arguments against behaviourist approaches to language also find force against conventionalist accounts. These criticisms can be laid at the door of conventionalist and behaviourist accounts of language equally, with respect to the structural aspects of language, as I will show.

The first claim that is required to motivate this alternative conception of language, to motivate UG, is to hold that despite the surface level variation of languages, both in the semantics and surface level grammar, all discovered natural languages can be taken to be far more alike than they might otherwise appear on first glance. Thus, theories that posit universal aspects of grammar across all natural languages can explain the linguistic data. I take this point to be uncontroversial, and in a sense admittedly trivial. It is no surprise that we *can* develop a conception of grammar that incorporates universal grammatical structures into its theory. The limits of what theories we *can* develop are not very restrictive – we can create variation based theories, such as conventionalism, and UG based theories, both of which can explain the data. The decision between them therefore is a matter of *how* they explain the relevant data, and it is thus not to beg the question from here to posit universals from the beginning, and consider whether, taken such universals as a given, we can better explain language, and language acquisition, through a UG based conception of language.

These universals within natural language are taken to be either part, or the result, of Universal Grammar (UG).<sup>152</sup> I remain neutral here as to whether UG contains actual grammatical principles, or rather it contains certain functional processes (such as MERGE or recursion; more on these notions below); I will talk as though the latter is the case as it requires a less committing notion of UG, though either account would still allow the existence of UG to manifest as universals within the grammatical structure of all natural languages. UG therefore is whatever body of knowledge that causes humans to learn languages that conform to UG, under normal developmental conditions.<sup>153</sup> This is not to deny the role of being exposed to linguistic data for the development of language within an infant. As Chomsky argues, the “development of language in the individual must involve three factors: (1) genetic endowment, which sets limits on the attainable languages, thereby making language acquisition possible; (2) external data, converted to the experience that selects one or another language within a narrow range; (3) principles not specific to [the faculty of language]” (2007). UG therefore relates to the first factor; factors two and three allow for the influence of external forces on language development, including those not even part of the faculty of language (as the specific parts of the mind that process linguistic information).

Note that the first factor, a genetic endowment that limits the “attainable languages”, is a claim that the conventionalist conception of language, and the deflationist who requires that the structure of language be inherently variable, cannot accept. This will become more clear in §3.323, wherein I will argue that the universal structure of simple existentials, with their quantificational structure allows for a positing of an interpretation of the quantifier that matches the limits that are required

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<sup>152</sup> There is a sense where UG can be taken for the purposes here to be at least partially synonymous with deep grammatical structure, in that the content or result of UG will manifest at the level of deep grammatical structures rather than surface level features. UG is also linked to the older notion of the Language Acquisition Device (LAD), which was posited as a hypothetical module of the brain that explained the language learning abilities of infants. Within the generative grammar research programme, the idea of a LAD has been largely supplanted by the notion of UG.

<sup>153</sup> Note here that under this definition UG could be ‘empty’ in that there could be *no* such properties of the brain that causes humans to learn languages of this sort. As such the *concept* of UG should be acceptable to all sides of this debate, including the deflationists. The important question therefore becomes what, if anything, is contained within UG. I will argue in favour of the view that UG contains at least some universal combinatorial functions, which manifest as universal grammatical structures within all languages.

for the privileged, unrestricted quantifier discussed earlier in §3.2 and the start of §3.3. Prior to this though, we now have some idea of what is meant by universals; some exposition of the arguments in favour of this view, and their source, is required.<sup>154</sup>

Perhaps the most well-known argument in favour of universals within language comes from developmental, or first-language acquisition, instances, via the 'Poverty of the Stimulus' (POS) argument. Under a view of language wherein grammar is variable, and is decided upon through the conventions of a population of speakers, it is not clear how a young child, with only relatively developed cognitive processes, might be able to come to know the complex and highly theoretical grammatical structures of the language they first come to learn. Children are required to make complex and highly theoretical hypotheses about the structure of the language that they are learning – this sort of hypothesising is often far beyond the normal cognitive skills of adults learning a second language, let alone the cognitive abilities of such young language learners. Yet, children can and do grasp the grammar of the language spoken around them with extraordinary speed. Children are able to learn a language from very sparse examples of the correct grammar of the language they are exposed to, learning the complex hierarchical grammatical structure from only a minimal amount of linguistic data. This is a major claim within POS – that children are simply not exposed to enough evidence, enough grammatical linguistic utterances, in order to infer from them the correct grammatical structure of a language. A further consideration is instances of pidgins and creoles, forms of

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<sup>154</sup> I will not be able to give a full defence of this view, and those that are already staunchly against such a conception of language might be left unconvinced here as I have little new elements to add to the already existing defence of a UG based conception of language. However, what follows should be enough to suggest that the conception is at least plausible, and persuade those not already strongly committed to its falseness that it gives a good account of the linguistic data. Even for those strongly unconvinced though, what follows should be enough to show that the sort of conception of language that the deflationist requires needs a much stronger support for their arguments to hold. One (brief) extra thought in favour of this account of linguistics, and the important role given to grammar comes from the idea that any science must, as a matter of course, at the beginning of its study take some notions as its primitives, and structure the study around those primitives. The wrong choice and the science will not get anywhere, and will fail to develop any good theories that accurately describe, and predict novel, phenomena. Chomsky's choice of universal grammar that I defend here can be taken to be such a choice, and the success of the special science of linguistics over the last 60 years would suggest that this was a good choice. This is what, in Chomsky's terms, allows the current science of linguistics to move 'beyond explanatory adequacy' (cf. Chomsky 2000; 2004). Cf. Sider 2009: 401-2 for some discussion of this form of thought around choice of primitives and science.

language that develop in groups of people wherein no single language is commonly spoken but with a large need for communication to proceed easily, have also been argued to be evidence of universals in language. Bickerton (1981) and Pinker (1994) both argue that the creation of fully grammatical creoles amongst the children of pidgin-only speaking communities points to a universal element of language. The children are found to create fully grammatical systems, which incorporate grammatical rules and structures that are *not present at all* within the pidgins that their parents and others in the speaking community are limited to. Positing UG solves these issues, explaining how it is that children come to learn a language despite the POS, and how creoles come to be grammatical.

Both of these cases seem to provide strong evidence that there must be some universal structure to the grammar of language. Hauser, Chomsky, and Fitch (2002) conceive of this universal aspect to language as the 'narrow faculty of language' (FLN); to be contrasted with the 'broad faculty of language' (FLB), and other extra-linguistic, both organism internal and external, possible influences on language. FLN is thus posited as a human-specific endowment as the result of our evolutionary development, leading to the development of language.<sup>155</sup> FLB is taken to include all conceptual aspects of the mind, as well as the sensory-motor skills that are necessary to be able to have the control of our bodies to enable speech creation, be that by a verbal or any other method.<sup>156</sup> FLN is taken to contain only a recursive function, a function that allows the combination of one set with another to form a third, which thus allows a finite set of expressions to produce a "potentially infinite array of

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<sup>155</sup> I will follow Hauser, Chomsky and Fitch (2002) here in assuming the human-specific nature of FLN, and its role in thus providing the language abilities of humans in contrast to the limited communicational abilities of animals; cf. §3.41 for more detailed comments on the distinction between language and communication. It may be that other animals share some linguistic ability with humans, certain aspects of FLB for example. Language in this way is connected to the speciation of humans. I do not have the space to develop this claim here, nor is it directly required for my arguments here; cf. Hauser, Chomsky, and Fitch 2002, Hinzen and Sheehan 2014, and Miller and Hughes 2013 where I have defended the view that language is the speciation mark of humans.

<sup>156</sup> This fits with recent work on the cognitive abilities of animals, and the view that it is language, and therein whatever parts of cognition that are specifically linguistic (FLN in this account) that explains the difference in cognitive abilities between humans and other animals. For more on this see Carey 2011, Spelke 2000; 2003, and Carruthers 2006; 2011. Carey in particular argues that we should take animals to have concepts, arguing that it is language that allows humans to develop more than the 'core cognition' skills of animals and young infants. I will assume this point here, though it plays no part in the ongoing argument.

discrete expressions" (2002: 1571), with a range that partially encompasses its domain.<sup>157</sup> More specifically, the recursive operation in FLN has been taken to be the linguistic specific function of MERGE (cf. Chomsky 1995, Adger 2003). MERGE is recursive, and functions to combine two syntactic objects into a new syntactic unit, that may be of a new form: thus MERGE will take two syntactic objects, A and B, and form a new object, the ordered set {A,B}. MERGE, for the argument here, can be taken to be the sole aspect within FLN. Given this universal aspect to the linguistic functioning of the human mind, it will be clear how grammatical (but not semantic, as this aspect is included within FLB) universals are thought to come about. Given the semantic variability of language, these grammatical universals might be exhibited in slightly different ways from language to language; however the deep grammatical structure, including aspects such as the relations between the different parts of speech, will exhibit this level of universality.

Perhaps it could be claimed that the deflationist could accept the Chomskian theory of language in which language is constrained by linguistic universals. Such a combination of views would certainly *prima facie* seem possible. However, it is worth noting that for the deflationist's argument to still work, after accepting a Chomskian view of language, it would need to be shown that the relevant parts of language – i.e. the quantificational structures in language, expressed in the *grammar*, not purely the *semantics* – exhibit the sort of variation that the deflationist's arguments posit. This would be an empirical claim about the nature of quantification in language. It is to this that I now turn, and, through linguistic analysis, I will argue that the empirical data, and the theoretical models based upon that data, suggest the exact opposite conclusion. I will thus argue that, contra the deflationist, the quantificational structure of language would suggest that there is *no* inherent variation within the requisite aspects of grammatical structure.

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<sup>157</sup> Though see Miller and Hughes 2013, where I argue that a further aspect, 'agreement', one particular form of relations between parts of speech in a grammatical derivation, must also be part of FLN in order to produce human-specific thought of the required sort. This possible addition to FLN has no influence on the arguments here, and we may think of MERGE as the only part of FLN for ease of simplicity.

### 3.323 Universal Conception of Language, and the Unrestricted Existential Quantifier

The last section outlined a conception of language that posits grammatical universals, indicating some of the empirical and theoretical support for such a view. This was important as a first step against the variation based accounts of language that the deflationist must rely upon in order to support their claims against substantive metaphysics. However, merely outlining an alternative conception of language, even one that denies some of the claims that I have identified as being central within the deflationist's argument, is not enough. In this section I will therefore argue that UG allows for the existence of the unrestricted quantifier, and thus through this, a privileged interpretation of the existential quantifier and the substantivity of metaphysics.

Let us recap some aspects first. The deflationist's claim, or at least the version that I am focusing on here from Hirsch, revolves around the quantificational apparatus of language. Hirsch's claim makes reference to the various and multiple different ontological languages that we could choose to speak, and through which hold different ontological and metaphysical accounts. One promising line of response to this was the notion of the unrestricted quantifier, a quantifier that is posited as "rang[ing] over absolutely all things: not just over all physical things or all things relevant to some particular utterance or discourse but over absolutely everything there is" (Linnebo 2006: 149). Thus, the unrestricted quantifier is free from the sorts of non-metaphysically significant restrictions that the deflationist claims are inherent within every possible interpretation of the quantifier. In §3.1 and §3.2, I gave some initial outline and defence of the unrestricted quantifier from some of its objections; the discussion of language in §3.3 is to argue against these charges of inherent variability. Thus, though I have defended a conception of grammar that is not inherently variable, and allows for universals, it is required to link this to the possibility of the unrestricted quantifier. The claim therefore is that upon considering the universal nature of the quantificational apparatus of language, it is possible to legitimately posit an interpretation that is unrestricted in the requisite fashion to support the claims of the metaphysician that appeals to this notion – an interpretation

of the quantifier that ranges over all things, independent of any further restrictions relevant to some particular discourse, conceptual scheme, or social influences; an interpretation that *only* is restricted by *metaphysically significant* restrictions.

In order to show that the unrestricted quantifier is part of a universal structure in grammar, we can look at the structure of simple existentials. Simple existentials are particularly important for the argument here. Neither side of the debate under consideration here deny the plausibility of understanding ontological commitment through a Quinean analysis. Under such an analysis, the ontological commitments of a theory can be given through the conjunction of all simple existentials that a particular theory accepts as true.

Let us consider a simple existential sentence:

- 1) There is a table.

Linguistic analysis of (1) splits the sentences into three key types of phrases: the CP (complementizer phrase), VP (verb phrase), and DP (determiner phrase). ‘Phrases’ are common with the linguistic literature as a means of understanding sentences through splitting them into their constituent parts and structure. Phrasal categories such as these are syntactic categories, and are common in grammars that build upon Chomskian hierarchy views of language, as originally proposed in his 1957 book *Syntactic Structures*. Such phrasal categories are distinguished from *lexical* categories that relate to traditional parts of speech, which may or may not relate directly to corresponding phrasal categories.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> This is admittedly an over-simplification of the linguistic structure. A full account of linguistic structure requiring various other kinds of phrases beyond these three in order to account for the variety of meanings within a full natural language; but this does not affect the claims being made here. Simple existentials of the sort being discussed here can be understood with only this basic linguistic structure. My discussion of linguistics will assume a Minimalist Theory, first proposed by Chomsky 1995, using the notion of a phrase that is first discussed in Chomsky 1998. I do not have the space here to argue that Minimalism is the best current theory within linguistics, let alone even the best theory within the generative grammar programme, and thus I must simply assume it here, pointing only to its wide defence from many major figures in linguistics. For more on Minimalist Theory, see Adger 2003, Boeckx 2006a; 2006b, Hornstein, Nunes, and Grohmann 2005, Lasnik, Uriagereka, and Boeckx 2005, Radford 2004, Uriagereka 1998, Pesetsky 2001.

Each phrase performs certain functional roles within a sentence that they appear in, including, for the DP, an important role in providing the subject within simple existentials, and thus within the quantificational apparatus of a language. Simple existentials provide a good example of the quantificational apparatus of a language, stripped of any more complex linguistic structure, and therefore stripped of any further influences on what ontological commitments might follow from each accepted existential claim. Therefore, simple existentials, such as (1), can be taken to provide the domain of any given interpretation of the existential quantifier.<sup>159</sup> The DP is crucial in this structure. Following Quinean analysis, it is the DP that provides the content about what kinds of entities are within the domain of the quantifier. Without the DP, the quantificational phrase, the simple existential, would be empty of content as the quantificational apparatus would have nothing within its domain. The DP thus populates the domain of the quantifier, and more broadly, provides the content for an entire interpretation of the quantifier. We can therefore take it that within the simple existential, the DP plays the functional role of introducing content to the domain of a quantifier; and that if something is within the domain of the quantifier, then it can be introduced by a DP within simple existentials. Importantly for my claims here, quantificational apparatus, and the function of a DP within simple existentials, are universal across all languages.<sup>160</sup> Admittedly, the claim that quantificational apparatus, and the functions performed by the DP, are universal are empirical claims, and thus is a claim that is open to being falsified; however, these conclusions fit the empirical findings of linguistics, and thus it seems reasonable to follow such findings so far given the previous arguments in favour of UG over conceptions of language that might stress variability in deep grammatical structures. This can, for the current

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<sup>159</sup> As already noted, this might require the view that each interpretation of the quantifier can be understood as the conjunction of all simple existentials that come out as true for that interpretation of the quantifier. This is no further theoretical commitment though, and I see no reason why the deflationist should object to this move, especially given the deflationist's commitment to the view that different ontological languages will exhibit their alternative ontological commitments through accepting different interpretations of the quantifier.

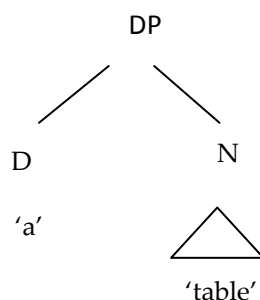
<sup>160</sup> Bošković (2008) has denied the existence of a DP in all languages, citing that Serbo-Croatian lacks DPs completely; but this says nothing about the *function* of the DP within quantificational apparatus. My universality claim revolves around the universality of that function, rather than the DP specifically. Thus, it is possible that the function within a language's quantificational apparatus could be played by some other piece of linguistic structure. Indeed Bošković argues that the NP (noun phrase) fulfils the linguistic functions in Serbo-Croatian that the DP fulfils in other languages' quantificational apparatus.

argument, even be strengthened. The universality of the functions ascribed to the DP follows from the universality of quantification within languages. If a language has quantification, then it will require some piece of grammatical structure that will allow the domain of that quantification to be populated, to allow some content to be included within the domain of quantification. Whatever views might be held about the exact nature of DPs, the universality of quantification within all languages seems to be a harder claim to deny. First, a language that could not quantify would be one that could, following Quine, make no ontological commitment, whether this is taken to be in a metaphysically substantive form or not. Quantification is absolutely required for this, irrespective of how that quantificational apparatus manifests.<sup>161</sup> Second, and specifically concerning the arguments of the deflationist under consideration, the very notion of different ontological languages relies on each of these languages having quantificational apparatus. The deflationist assumes this in order to motivate their initial premise on the variability of ontological commitment via different interpretations of the quantifier. Without this assumption, there simply would not be the varying interpretations of the quantifier that are then used by the deflationist to argue for the non-privileged nature of such interpretations. Variance in the quantifier requires there to be quantification in each and every ontological languages under consideration. Given this, it is reasonable to make the same assumption here in a response to them. Therefore, given the arguments in favour of there being universal grammatical structures, we can conclude that quantificational apparatus (of some form), and the associated functional role that is played by the DP to populate domains of quantification, are universal across all languages.

We can now consider the linguistic analysis of the structure of a DP. In (1), the DP can be taken to have the following basic form:

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<sup>161</sup> By this, I intend only the trivial acceptance that languages might have alternative phonetic or semantic restraints and influences on the precise structure of the quantificational apparatus in a given language. Once again, it is the functional role of the quantificational apparatus that is relevant, however it manifests in each language.



As already seen, it is the DP that allows the introduction of an entity into the sentence, thereby populating the domain of the quantifier in (1). I assume here that it is possible that there is an interpretation of the quantifier such that (1) is the only simple existential that comes out true under that interpretation. (1) therefore would exhaust all the ontological claims of that language, presumably positing a world wherein the only existent is a table. The DP's functional role within a quantificational phrase such as (1) is to introduce a putative entity, allowing the quantifier to include it within its domain. Of course, few, if any, ontological languages posit such an extreme desert ontological landscape as to include only one existent, let alone one where the sole existent is a table. Therefore in so far as we can understand the ontological commitment of a given ontological language via the conjunction of all simple existentials that are true within that language (or that interpretation of the quantifier in Hirsch's terms); then we can expand this toy example in whatever way as to cover all the ontological claims of any given example of an ontological language. Just as the DP populates the domain of the quantifier in (1), and thereby provides the ontological commitment of a language that accepts (1) as the only true simple existential; so will the DP populate the domain of a quantifier that is larger than the posited world above.

Given that it is the DPs that are within the accepted simple existentials that defines the domain of the quantifier, of the particular interpretation of the quantifier, then we need to understand the claims of the deflationist in these linguistic terms. The deflationist's claim can be understood as the view that the DP is inherently variable, and that we cannot understand the DP in a way that is independent of non-metaphysically substantive restrictions such as those restrictions from social, or pre-existing conceptual sources. Understanding quantification through the linguistic analysis offered here, and through the role of DPs in quantification, requires that the

deflationist's view should be understood in terms of the position that what may go into a domain of quantification (through the role of the DP) is inherently variable. This would be the reformulated deflationist view in line with the linguistic terms and analysis that I have introduced here.<sup>162</sup> In this way, it needs to be made clear that the argument for universals within grammatical structure may begin to *undermine* aspects of the deflationist's view, but alone it cannot wholly argue against the deflationist. The deflationist can reformulate their view in line with the view of grammatical universals in this way, though I will argue that this reformulation relies on a strong misunderstanding on the nature of a DP and the influence of grammatical structure upon the *content* within those structures. My claim therefore is that, contra what the deflationist requires, there are good reasons to think that the DP is *not* inherently variable, and that it is possible to understand the DP without any such non-metaphysically substantive restrictions applying.

Let us call the DP, taken through abstraction in isolation from the rest of the sentence, 'bare', and thus that (1) consists of a 'bare' DP, exemplified by 'a table', and quantificational apparatus, exemplified by 'There is'. We have seen that so understood it is the 'bare' DP that provides the content for the domain of the quantifier – the domain is given by the content within the DP, not by some aspect of the quantificational apparatus. What matters for the debate between the deflationist and the supporter of substantive metaphysics is what limits exist upon the bare DP – what content can be manifested through a bare DP? If there is inherent variation and restriction within the bare DP, this would support the deflationist's claims. Metaphysical debates would thus not be substantive, as we would be mistaking social, conventional, or conceptual restrictions for metaphysically accurate theorising. If there is no inherent variation or restriction, then there would seem to be no principled reason against positing an interpretation of the quantifier which has a domain, understood through simple existentials and the DPs therein, of only those

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<sup>162</sup> This reformulation of the deflationist's view is in an attempt to be fair to their view prior to my objections to understanding the DP in such a way as their view requires. This understanding may be one that the deflationist would reject – I leave the possibility open to the deflationist to respond to my understanding of their view with an alternative conception. However, this understanding seems to maintain key aspects of the original deflationist position, such as the appeal to variation, as well as the anti-substantive metaphysical spirit of the arguments, and thus I am confident that it is a reasonable reformulation of the deflationist position as it has so far been proposed.

DPs that accurately pick out metaphysically real entities – only those DPs that carve reality at its joints.

The question therefore comes down to whether we can conceive of a bare DP that has no social, linguistic, conceptual, or otherwise non-metaphysically substantive restrictions upon it. That this is the case comes from that fact that it is possible that the DP in fact has *no* restrictions, metaphysically significant or not, built into its structure – from this point, it is a simple addition for the metaphysician to only consider bare DPs that carve reality at its joints as providing the content of the unrestricted existential quantifier.<sup>163</sup> It would remain a difficult task to identify which bare DPs the metaphysician should accept through this method; but it was not the deflationist's argument that metaphysics might be difficult, or even so difficult that we might never have sure answers. This issue is the previously discussed epistemological problem for metaphysics (cf. §1.1). Epistemological concerns are not the principled claims that I take as my subject here. The argument was that no privileged interpretation of the quantifier is in principle possible – what is required, therefore, to show that this claim is false, is to argue that a bare DP carries no inherent restrictions at all. That the bare DP carries no inherent restrictions upon what kinds of entities it may refer to, what it populates the domain of a quantifier with, comes from two pieces of further linguistic analysis – one to consider the determiner branch of the bare DP, the other the noun branch. Once both branches within a simple existential are shown to carry no inherent restriction, then we will have shown that the entire bare DP carries no such restrictions also.

First, the unrestricted nature of the bare DP is best exhibited, in English, by the use of the indefinite 'a'. 'a' (or its semantically identically variant 'an') can be taken to only indicate that for the phrase 'There is an x' that there is some unspecified 'x' in existence. No further restriction is implied within it. Other common DP structures, such as 'the table', 'my table', 'this table', 'Jones' table' etc., may introduce further restrictions that would have to be considered when we are judging the truth value of

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<sup>163</sup> This claim does rely on the claim that primitives such as 'carving reality at its joints' are meaningful. This is not a problem here as these arguments are not intended to argue against those whose claim is that metaphysical primitives are not intelligible; though, cf. §3.22. This is not the main claim of the deflationist's under consideration here, and thus should be put to one side here.

the simple existential that contains one of these other DP structures, via an alternative determiner. This explains my use of the determiner 'a' here – and indeed explains why if we are considering the ontological commitment of a given interpretation of the quantifier, then we must use the determiner stripped of extra, not necessarily metaphysically substantive, restrictions as would be the case in the examples above. If some argument persuades us that 'a table' also carries with it such restrictions then a new phrasing may be required; but there is no linguistic evidence that the indefinite article has any such influence. 'a table' therefore should be read as including no further ontological commitments than a commitment to a chair's inclusion in the ontology of a language – i.e. all interpretations of the quantifier – that assert 'There is a chair'. 'a' carries no prior linguistic, social, or conceptual influences on what entities populate the domain of the quantifier. Therefore, the determiner branch of the bare DP can be shown to carry no inherent restrictions, and cannot be the source of the deflationist's variability claims.

Second, the process of nominalisation in language allows concepts that would normally be classed linguistically as one part of speech, to be turned into a noun, and thus suitable to be within a bare DP. Through this process we can talk about 'a walk', 'a kicking', 'a beauty', or 'a classic', changing what would normally be verbs or adjectives into nouns. This process, importantly, can be carried out on any instance of any semantic category, allowing us to consider every simple existential within every ontological language. Consider whether beauty exists. If it does, then we would presumably take beauty to be property. Considering whether properties exist requires us to be able to nominalise their normal adjectival part of speech, and consider the truth value of the simple existential: 'There is a beauty', or perhaps better phrased as, 'There is a property of beauty'. In order to consider the existence of the property of beauty (or any other property, event, fact, or any given entity of any kind), we are required to nominalise the entity so that they may be placed within the bare DP of a simple existential. Importantly, there are no restrictions upon what can be nominalised. Any part of speech may be nominalised, even parts of speech that do not normally carry semantic information as purely grammatical words – we can thus state the simple existential:

## 2) There is an is.

Within any ontological language, this simple existential can be considered for its truth value under that particular interpretation of the quantifier, and thus whether that language is committed to the existence of such an entity. We might have little idea what an 'is' might be, but the quantifier can be considered, showing that nominalisation does not take into account any normal social, conceptual, linguistic,<sup>164</sup> or even metaphysical restrictions that might otherwise apply. Indeed the only *possible* limit on a bare DP is that the entity to be considered must have a phonetic label as nominalisation has to apply to a phonetic label connected to some lexical item. This though is no limit at all. New words can and are created to refer to new kinds of entities that we wish to talk about, all of which can be placed within a bare DP. This therefore shows that the second branch of a DP, the noun, also carries no inherent restrictions, and also cannot be the source of the deflationist's variability claims.

The analysis so far thus shows that no part of the DP carries inherent variability. The DP, and from this the quantificational apparatus of language understood through simple existentials do not carry *any* inherent variation, or plasticity. It is certainly true, trivially so, that we can have different interpretations that lead to alternative accounts of ontological commitment; but there is no built in, systemic variation. It is open for us to choose any restriction. We might choose an interpretation with a domain that only accepts existentials wherein the DP is restricted to only green objects. We can also choose one that only accepts existentials that are metaphysically significant – that carves reality at its joints and is accurately describing reality. This would be the unrestricted quantifier, and the privileged quantifier. This aspect of choice being invoked does not beg the question against the deflationist. The deflationist's claim was not one of epistemology, or practical inability or difficulty to correctly understand the domain of the unrestricted quantifier – it was one of a *principled* inability. The bare DP shows that that principled inability claim is false. Bare DPs provide a way to understand how the unrestricted quantifier can come about in virtue of the entirely unrestricted – i.e. not even restricted by metaphysically

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<sup>164</sup> That nominalisation can overcome other existing linguistic restrictions and laws is shown by the ungrammaticality of (2).

significant restrictions as the unrestricted quantifier is – inherent nature of the DP, the quantificational apparatus of language understood through simple existentials, and, from these, the ontological commitments of any given interpretation of the quantifier.

It must be stressed here that these claims solve no first order metaphysical issues. No first order claims follow from any claim made herein; rather what has been shown is the substantivity of the debates to discover what is within the domain of the unrestricted quantifier. It will surely remain the case that *some* metaphysical claims will mistakenly take into account non-metaphysically significant restrictions – what I have argued here is that such mistakes are not inherently unavoidable, and thus that a substantive metaphysics is in principle possible, even if it remains very *practically* difficult. Hence, despite the source of the deflationist's anti-metaphysical claims being within the language of metaphysics, a study of the linguistic structure of natural language shows that the unrestricted quantifier that I identified as a promising route of response for the supporter of substantive metaphysics is legitimate.

One objection that will be raised against my account here that should be addressed is that I have unduly placed my faith in the findings of theoretical and empirical linguistics. It would thus be claimed that I have made an illegitimate appeal to authority, and that it would remain to be shown that the quantificational apparatus of language is in any way suited to provide an account of the ontology of reality itself. Indeed, Chomsky himself, states that “there is no a priori ‘naturalness’ to such a system [of innate grammatical universals], any more than there is to the detailed structure of the visual cortex” (1968: 88). Hirsch might argue that my claims about the existence of the unrestricted quantifier rely on Chomsky but then fall foul of this claim, by assuming that the innate grammatical universals are in some sense natural and hence metaphysically significant.<sup>165</sup>

However, this objection is avoidable, as the quantifier is doing no positive metaphysical work – it settles no first order disputes. The quantificational structure

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<sup>165</sup> In fact, Hirsch quotes this same passage in his 1978, arguing that the innate concept of unity we possess should not be taken to match onto the real, or natural, unity that might be in the world. This is clearly a far more directly first order metaphysical than any that I wish to make here, and thus is a problem that my account can avoid.

that I appeal to as a universal is not one that anyone in this debate is taking to be metaphysically significant, as quantification is not the sort of thing that goes *into* an ontology, but rather is the tool to *understand* an ontology, in line with Quine's account of understanding ontological commitment. Hirsch does not deny that the quantifier is the tool to understand what our ontological commitments are; he only denies that any such quantification is, or might be, privileged. That we can make one interpretation privileged in the requisite way is my claim, and the one that Chomskian based grammatical analysis can provide, consistently with the above quote from Chomsky himself.

The deflationist might also object that I have purely appealed to *biological* constraints upon language, and that these could have any implications for deflationism and Hirsch's quantifier variance. The deflationist might not see themselves as making any claims about *language biology*, instead perhaps just claims about logical languages. However, it is clear that Hirsch makes claims about what people mean as a matter of fact by the existential quantifier – the mereologists mean X, whilst the non-mereologists mean Y, and thus the debate is merely verbal about the meaning of X and Y. But insofar as language *is* a biological phenomenon, the deflationist cannot escape facts about the biological constraints upon language. The claims concern languages that are actually spoken, not just conceivable languages. Thus, though I have appealed to biological constraints, this method is justified as the deflationist themselves are making claims about the nature of (spoken) languages; my claims about the biological influences upon language given here are also about this.

Perhaps the deflationist could instead embrace this discussion of the biological influences on language, embracing some evidence from linguistics that would support their claim. In these terms, I would have been arguing that the mistake of the deflationist is to posit some unarticulated constituent; perhaps something could be said to support this from within linguistics. A view of this sort has been suggested recently by Stanley.<sup>166</sup> Stanley argues that "all truth-conditional effects of extra-

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<sup>166</sup> Cf. King and Stanley 2007, Stanley 2000; 2002a; 2002b; 2005, and Stanley and Szabo 2000. There is a large amount of literature attacking the semantics of Stanley's view: cf. Carston (2002a, 2002b), Breheny (2002), Bach (2000), Neale (2000, 2004, 2005), Recanati (2002, 2004), Cappelen and Lepore

linguistic context can be traced to logical form" (2000: 391). This means that all elements of a sentence are encoded within the semantics of the lexical items, or through syntactic operations on those items, that appear within that sentence. Thus, in the case of existential quantification, this would manifest as syntactically encoded restrictions upon all uses of the quantifier, which are valued differently in different speech contexts. The deflationist, as I have taken them, in order for their claim to have force and not purely to concern the words we use, must be making this same move, arguing that every use of the quantifier is restricted by a hidden (i.e. unpronounced) domain parameter in the structure of language.<sup>167</sup> In effect, the deflationist's strong argument against the realist relies on the idea that the semantic restrictions that can occur on a quantifier (something no-one is doubting), are mapped from a relevant syntax in which the quantifier domain-restrictors are encoded in the form of hidden variables in the grammar. All the non-metaphysically substantive restrictions that the deflationist claims are inherent within language, as, though appearing to be semantic in nature, they are written into the syntax of the language. I have already indicated a strong reason to doubt that this is the case; Collins (2007) also produces good reason to doubt Stanley's thesis. I will not go into Collins argument in detail as this would require a detailed discussion of technical linguistics, suffice to say that I find the most persuasive reason for doubting Stanley's syntactic claim is that we simply do not have independent grammatical evidence for such semantically driven restrictions within syntax. Our knowledge of the restrictions comes from the semantics, and yet it is this knowledge that is then taken to be evidence for the hidden variables in the syntax. This is circular. The semantic manifestation of the hidden variables is being used to justify the existence of the variables, which are then supported by the semantic manifestation. This lack of independent evidence stems from what Collins repeatedly refers to as there being 'too little syntax' to support this aspect of Stanley's claims, the justification for the hidden variables within the syntax is "parachuted in from semantics" (2007: 842). The defence of the substantivity of metaphysics through the linguistic analysis I have provided therefore is left untouched.

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(2002, 2005a, 2005b), Elgardo and Stainton (2004), and Pagin (2005). My focus though is on his syntactic claim. I leave the validity of his semantic claims to one side here.

<sup>167</sup> Note that as far as I know, no-one in the deflationist literature has made this link between their theories and that of Stanley. The discussion here is intended thus to pre-empt any claimed support that the deflationist might get from such a link.

### 3.4 The Relationship Between Metaphysics and Language

A discussion of the relationship between metaphysics and language has dominated much of the critical work in this thesis. However, most, if not all, of the discussion has in a sense been negative – I have been arguing that the relationship that the deflationist draws between language and metaphysics cannot be correct as it mischaracterises the nature of language. In this last section, I will aim to reverse this negative focus by providing a more positive account of how language and metaphysics can be understood in relation to each other in line with a substantive metaphysics. This more positive account is something that is seemingly lacking from the literature of metaphysics and language. Much is written from an anti-substantive metaphysics standpoint to say that the relationship between the two must be such that metaphysics is non-substantive; and much is written, as I have so far in this thesis, to respond directly to such claims; but there is little on how the supporter of substantive metaphysics should then view the relationship between these two areas of philosophical study. Given this limited prior work on this issue, this final section of this thesis will be largely programmatic, attempting to provide a first sketch of how such a positive account of language and metaphysics might work. Far more work will be required to fully flesh out and defend this account, work that I cannot provide here; but what I provide should suffice as a broad idea as to how the relationship could be conceived, even if the full defence of certain claims is left to the current literature in certain domains, and the promise of future research into these issues.

In order to provide an account of this relationship, between language and metaphysics, a conception of language (§3.41) and one of metaphysics (§3.42) is required. Each of these will be understood in terms of the notion of ‘possibility space’, each overlapping and diverging in interesting and philosophically significant ways, which justify thinking of metaphysics as a substantive enquiry independent of the sorts of ontological or metaphysical views our language might otherwise push us towards. Metaphysics and language will both be understood as having a particular possibility space. A possibility space is taken to provide the domain of a particular

field of research<sup>168</sup> – a possibility space defines the limits of a domain, such that it delimits the divide between possible and impossible within that domain. That which is within the possibility space of a domain is thus both conceivable and consistent within a given domain; that which falls outside of the possibility space might be conceivable but would be rejected as impossible due to some other theoretical restrictions within that domain. For example, as I will argue, there are initially seemingly possible metaphysical theories that we would reject in virtue of some commitment that that view carries with it. Many accept, for example, a bundle theory of tropes; many though would argue that this position should be rejected as a real metaphysical possibility, holding that there is some metaphysical restriction that should lead us to believe that a bundle theory is not a real metaphysical possibility. It is in this way that the possibility space, in this case that of metaphysics, is narrowed. This account of a possibility space is still admittedly vague here; but the notion will become clearer through its use in the following accounts of how we might conceive of language and metaphysics both individually and collectively in such a way that metaphysics remains a substantive enterprise, an account I provide in §3.43.

In the very last section (§3.44), I will provide one further reason to think that the relationship that I sketch here might be favourable to some. This is due to its adherence to a certain reading of the Aristotelian understanding of the relationship between language and metaphysics. This is most certainly not to claim that Aristotle can only be interpreted as having a similar view to the one I propose here, nor even that he should be interpreted so; rather the claim is limited to whether we can draw some similar conclusions from certain parts of Aristotle's work, and thus the view might gain some credence from this possible interpretation.

### 3.41 The Possibility Space of Language

The possibility space of language will be understood as stemming from the same aspects of language that I argued for within §3.322. Following Hauser et al. (2002) the

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<sup>168</sup> 'Fields' is intended to refer to demarcated domains of enquiry such as that of language and metaphysics. I will also discuss the logical possibility space, and the physical possibility space, which can be taken to be those possibility spaces linked to the domains of formal logic, and physics (and any other science conceived as fundamental).

narrow faculty of language (FLN) is thus taken to interface with the broad faculty of language (FLB), and other ‘third factor’ aspects that affect human linguistic behaviour (such as external influences upon the individual). FLN is taken to consist of only those aspects of language that are uniquely human. There is strong evidence that the central difference between the language of humans, and the communicative abilities of animals, is manifested through the latter’s lack of grammatical and, specifically, hierarchical structures within their behaviours.<sup>169</sup> FLN, and therefore grammar as the source of the hierarchical structure, is thus taken to provide for the different linguistic abilities between humans, and other non-human animals.

As hinted towards in §3.322, this additional structure in the human mind is incredibly important for understanding the difference in cognitive abilities between humans and animals. It is these additional cognitive abilities that are of relevance when considering how language and metaphysics should be related, as the high-level metaphysical theorising that humans engage with certainly takes place within the minds of humans alone. Following Carey (2011), we can think that non-human animals have the ability to make certain proto-conceptual demarcations between particular aspects of the world that we might think of as metaphysical distinctions, but these conceptual abilities are severely limited, being restricted to the strict domains of ‘core cognition’.<sup>170</sup> The propositional thought that metaphysical theorising makes use of, and consists in, can be taken to firmly be part of ‘linguistic thought’. This connects with the earlier discussion of universals within grammatical structure in §3.322 and §3.323. If we follow, as I have argued we should, Hauser et al. (2002) in thinking that FLN consists only in a recursive function, and that this function is

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<sup>169</sup> I distinguish here between language and communication, holding that language refers to a uniquely human ability, whilst communication is an ability shared with non-human animals. Some have pointed to Kanzi, an extremely gifted bonobo who is recorded as understanding at least 660 utterances as evidence that animals can have language abilities of the same level as humans given sufficient training (cf. Savage-Rumbaugh et al. 1993). However, there is evidence that Kanzi whilst understanding more terms than the infant human that he is tested against, lacks an ability to understand the hierarchical structure of the tasks he was asked to perform, most importantly in cases of NP-coordination where Kanzi’s accuracy dips to chance (cf. Truswell Ms.). This also supports the claims of Fitch and Hauser (2004) who argue that there are limits to the pattern recognition abilities in nonhuman primates that relates to the same inability to recognise hierarchical order instead of linear word order.

<sup>170</sup> Spelke (2000, 2003), and Spelke and Kinzler (2007a, 2007b) defend a very similar view under the term ‘core knowledge’.

MERGE (Chomsky 1999); then given that *linguistic* thought is just that – linguistic – then the nature of MERGE and the subsequent grammatical universals it generates will restrict the domain of linguistic (i.e. human-specific) thought.<sup>171</sup> Grammar thus restricts the domain of this particular form of cognition. It also, thus, does, in a sense, restrict the domain of metaphysical theorising in the sense that theorising must necessarily occur in thought. This might at first glance seem to be a claim akin to the deflationist arguments that I have just argued against; however as will become clear in §3.43, this is only a trivial necessity of theorising, that does not affect the substantivity of metaphysical debates.

Interestingly, there is also some philosophical support for these sorts of claims about language and thought: Wittgenstein, in the *Tractatus*, states that his “aim [...] is to draw a limit to thought, or rather [...] to the expression of thought [...] It will only be in language that the limit can be drawn” (Preface). Thus, “the limits of my language mean the limit of my world” (§5.6), and “we cannot think what we cannot think; so what we cannot think we cannot say either” (§5.61). Thus language and thought go together, language constraining thought in a way such that if something is in principle inexpressible then it is also unthinkable. This is the same claim as I have just made concerning linguistic thought. Crucially though, for Wittgenstein and me, this is not some contingent inexpressibility – this is not due to us lacking particular concepts or terms in order to express a particular semantics. This is therefore *not* a claim about how some languages might have certain terms expressing certain semantics that another lacks. Such a claim would only amount to the trivial, banal Whorfianism already dismissed as philosophically uninteresting. Rather the argument is in favour of a *principled* limit to thought that comes through language, and I argue, through structure, through grammar.

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<sup>171</sup> The force of this claim still holds should we come to think that FLN consists of something instead of, or additional to, MERGE (cf. Miller and Hughes 2013), as this altered content of FLN will still produce the hierarchical grammatical structures that distinguish human language from animal communication, and thus still plays a significant role in linguistic, human-specific thought.

Grammar, I have claimed, provides the limits of linguistic thought. These limits arise as even if our *conceptual* store is infinite<sup>172</sup> then in order for those concepts to be included within the structure of linguistic thought they must be able to be functioned over by the content of FLN. If a concept is not suitable to be included in the MERGE operation, then it simply cannot be part of linguistic thought, and thus is not available to the higher level cognitive abilities that we are interested in here. Taking the functioning of MERGE over its inputs as producing the most basic grammatical universals means that we can state that for a concept to be included within higher level human-specific cognition it needs to be suitable to being included within a grammatical structure. To paraphrase Wittgenstein, we cannot think what we cannot think; so what we cannot think we cannot include in grammatical structures – grammar cannot generate such thoughts, and thus such thoughts are not possible. Where these limits lie precisely remains a matter for empirical and theoretical investigation within linguistics and philosophy; but whatever the limits, language limits linguistic thought of the sort that metaphysical theorising relies upon, and thus this limit is important to understanding how language and metaphysical discourse, and the subsequent substantivity of metaphysics, are related.

The result of this discussion is that it indicates the possibility space of language, and consequently thought also. This space is the domain of what is possible, where something is within the possibility space of language so long as it satisfies the limits that grammar places upon the domain. This means that the possibility space of language is provided by our concepts, plus the most basic rules of grammar given by the content of FLN. Any thought that does not satisfy those requirements is outside of this domain, and would thus be unthinkable. The notion of something being unthinkable here is intended to cover two aspects – the first is that which we cannot think at all due to our finite cognitive capacities; the second is that which we cannot conceive of as possible even within our linguistic structures – i.e. something that through the rules of grammar plus the definitions of our concepts produces an inconsistency and so can be rejected as being impossible. The domain of what is possible to conceive within linguistic structures is wide, but its importance

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<sup>172</sup> Which it might well be reasonable to think that it is, excepting finite memory influences, but I leave this to one side here.

will become clear once it is compared to that of metaphysics. However, prior to that, it is worth noting that this domain is the same as the notion of narrow logical possibility, or conceptual possibility. Conceptual possibility has been taken to be given by the definitions of our non-logical terms, whilst still complying with logical laws – the possibility space of language as described here is the same domain of possibility.

Given the empirical nature of many of the claims that I have made here in favour of the close relation between thought and language, a caveat can be added for those left unconvinced thus far. Should we come to reject this close tie between thought and language, then this can instead be expressed through a less controversial claim of the cognitive possibility space. The cognitive possibility space would thus take as its domain all of the thinkable thoughts. I assume that given our finite minds, some thoughts will be for one reason or another unthinkable for us; these are excluded from the domain of cognition. This domain would, I argue, be the same as the above discussed possibility space of language; but should the reader take such a close link between language and thought to be unsupportable, then all references to the possibility space of language can be replaced with the possibility space of cognition. The arguments I give in §3.43 still hold, but between the relative sizes of the possibility space of cognition, and the possibility space of metaphysics. I have chosen to discuss the possibility space of language for the reason that it follows from the conception of language that I argued for in §3.322, and for the reason that the deflationary arguments that I have thus far taken as my topic focus on language, and the claim that the non-substantivity of metaphysics follows from language. Thus I think this stronger claim, about language and thought, is useful here; but the weaker discussion of cognition may hold even if the stronger claim is rejected.

### **3.42 The Possibility Space of Metaphysics**

In order to compare possibility spaces, we must also conceive of metaphysics in the same terms. This might initially be thought to be a problem, as many, especially some who are inclined to oppose the coherency and substantivity of metaphysics, assume that metaphysics should be concerned primarily with actuality rather than possibility

– think for example of Putnam’s claim that metaphysics is about providing the unique, ideal description of reality. Such a conception assumes that the domain of metaphysics is interested in actuality not possibility. However, E. J. Lowe has defended a conception of metaphysics based on the notion of possibility that suits the purposes here.

Lowe states that:

[...] to a first approximation – I hold that metaphysics by itself only tells us what there could be. But given that metaphysics has told us this, experience can then tell us which of the various alternative metaphysical possibilities is plausibly true in actuality. The point is that although what is actual must for that very reason be possible, experience alone cannot determine what is actual, in the absence of the metaphysical delimitation of the possible (1998: 9),

and that:

This still leaves unanswered the question of how we can attain knowledge of being, or of reality ‘as it is in itself’, especially if ontology is conceived to be not an empirical but an *a priori* science. The answer that I favour divides the task of ontology into two parts, one which is wholly *a priori* and another which admits empirical elements. The *a priori* part is devoted to *exploring the realm of metaphysical possibility*, seeking to *establish what kinds of things could exist* and, more importantly, *co-exist* to make up a single possible world. The empirically conditioned part seeks to establish, on the basis of empirical evidence and informed by our most successful scientific theories, what kinds of things do exist in this, the actual world. But the two tasks are not independent: in particular, the second task depends upon the first. We are in no position to be able to judge what kinds of

things actually *do* exist, even in the light of the most scientifically well-informed experience, unless we can effectively determine what kinds of things *could* exist, because empirical evidence can only be evidence for the existence of something whose existence is antecedently possible (2006: 4-5).

Metaphysics is therefore primarily concerned with the possible ways that reality could be, rather than the way that reality is. Lowe further states this position as being the view that “The *a priori* part [of metaphysics] is devoted to exploring the realm of metaphysical possibility, seeking to establish what kinds of things could exist and, more importantly, *co-exist* to make up a single possible world” (2006: 4). Metaphysics is thus a discipline that seeks to explore the nature of reality, given the underdetermination of the actual by experience and science. Metaphysical debate, that which has been the topic of this entire thesis, is thus the charting of these possibilities, the charting of the domain of metaphysical possibilities given the available scientific and experiential data. This in fact mirrors the insight from Kant that experience can inform us about what is the case, but not about what could not be the case. Though Kant was of course no friend of metaphysics, this is the spirit in which I propose we conceive of metaphysics. Empirical findings cannot decide between the various *metaphysical* possibilities, and we should not prematurely dismiss any of such possibilities on the basis of underdetermined evidence. Metaphysical research explores these possibilities, seeking to answer how reality could be given the experiences and scientific findings we have, and, just as importantly, what combination of views could not be the case given such findings.

Metaphysics therefore investigates not directly whether something is the case, but rather how reality *could* be; whether many possibilities are coherent, and what accepting a certain view might also commit us to. Metaphysics, as with all theory building enterprises, has a number of different claims and ideas on the table. It will be the case that some metaphysical views cannot be held simultaneously without contradiction. This is, I believe, Lowe’s intention by the phrase “concerned with the ways that reality could be”: the role of metaphysics is to consider which of the myriad ways that reality could be, can be coherently and consistently posited as being. Such

possibilities thus are taken to be required to satisfy the laws of logic, plus any additional metaphysical restrictions that we may wish to impose upon our theorising. Metaphysics proceeds and metaphysical progress is, as Samuel Beckett in *Worstward Ho* puts it, with the thought: “Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better.” Each previously thought possible metaphysical view that is rejected is a case of failing to recognise how reality might be correctly; but it is this very process that improves and refines what metaphysical views will do accept as possible ways reality might be.

Understanding metaphysics in this way might initially seem to rule out firm conclusions about the nature and structure of reality, in particular it seems to rule out that something is necessarily the case.<sup>173</sup> This worry is unfounded. Though the methodology of metaphysics is through the notion of the metaphysically possible, the conclusions we hope to reach are still within the actual. Metaphysical debate reduces available combinations of possibilities, ruling out certain views, and allowing others. Thus, we, through such debate, find that a combination of metaphysical views is not coherent, and is not a real metaphysical possibility, despite initial plausibility of such views. This is a metaphysical conclusion about the structure of reality, albeit a negative one. Further to this, such conclusions could result in the conclusion that only one position can consistently be held in relation to a particular problem. Take the question of whether we should posit that tables exist or that particles arranged table-wise exist. It could be that metaphysical debate leads to a position where only the existence of particles arranged table-wise, but not tables as a strongly emergent entity, can be coherently and consistently held. Put more formally, if, in a particular debate in metaphysics, we know that  $p$  or  $q$  must be the case, and if we then find that  $\neg p$ , then it is necessary that  $q$ . This would be a metaphysical conclusion. Assuming that no other possible options remain this result would be a metaphysical necessity.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> I am grateful to audiences at ‘The Viability of Metaphysics’ workshop in Durham, as well as E.J. Lowe for discussions on the issues in this, and the following, paragraph.

<sup>174</sup> Metaphysical necessities should be distinguished from metaphysical claims that are necessarily true. For example, a metaphysical claim might be such that, logically, is it necessarily true. This is different from a metaphysical necessity which is taken to be a claim that is true in all possible worlds. For example, we might think that ‘Water is H<sub>2</sub>O’ is a metaphysical necessity in light of it being true in all possible worlds; but it would not appear to be necessarily true. I am grateful to Sophie Gibb for pointing this out to me.

Conclusions about the nature of reality, and metaphysical necessities, are still coherent under this conception of metaphysics, allowing metaphysics so understood to retain all the explanatory power that a metaphysics conceived through actuality possesses.

The notion of possibility used here, it must be stressed, is *not* that of metaphysical possibility as it is normally used. This conception of metaphysics has nothing to say on its own about modality, or how to deal with modal questions. This would be a first order metaphysical issue, something that I have avoided comment on where possible throughout this thesis. Rather, given that the realism/anti-realism debate and the epistemological concerns identified here concern the status of metaphysical *talk* – the status of its discourse as substantive or not – the notion of possibility here is *epistemic*. It concerns the possible ways that we might think reality is, rather than any claim about the nature of modality. Though this is the case, that something is possible depends on the nature of reality. Metaphysics remains in a sense ‘non-cognitive’ as it is reality that determines what it is that we, with our finite minds, are able to think of as possible.

Furthermore, some comments are needed about the need for metaphysics to determine the possible prior to the delimitation of the actual. The discussion is at the level of kinds of being (cf. also Lowe 1989; 2009a). The phrase ‘kinds of being’ relates to the general categories that we take reality to be made up of. The *a posteriori* element of metaphysics can only tell us if some category is instantiated if we already think that that category, or that kind of being, is possible. This does not mean that science always follows metaphysics; rather it is the claim that fully understanding what the scientific evidence tells us about reality presupposes that we already think certain kinds of being are first possible.

We also need to clearly distance this conception from a pluralist view. Pluralism would hold that there are multiple, equally accurate descriptions of reality. Whilst this view might accept that at a given time there are such alternative accounts of reality, it need not hold (indeed I think it should not hold) that this is ultimately the case. This view is consistent with the claim that there is one privileged description of

reality, even if, as already accepted, certain parts might be inaccessible to humans with our finite cognitive capacities. To illustrate this, we can consider again the unrestricted quantifier. The debate about the possible ways that reality might be can be seen as a debate over what the correct interpretation of the unrestricted quantifier is; of what the domain of the interpretation of the quantifier that only accepts metaphysically significant restrictions, as defended in §3.3, is. Furthermore, a debate about the possible ways reality might be can still maintain that the truthmakers for such claims – i.e. how reality actually is – are objective, non-trivial, and independent of our mental (cognitive) capacities. Any situations in which we think that there is only one possible metaphysical way that reality might be can be required to have such a truthmaker, in line with the characterisation of realism through truthmaking defended in §1.5. This is thus not a pluralist claim (though nor does understanding metaphysics in this way rule out a pluralist view), and is thus consistent with both the pro-substantive metaphysics arguments of the earlier parts of this section, and with the characterisation of realism through truthmaking.

As with the conception of language discussed above, metaphysics so understood in terms of possibilities, can be understood via the notion of the ‘possibility space’ of metaphysics. This possibility space provides the limits of all the possible ways that we still coherently and consistently can think reality might possibly be. The domain of metaphysical enquiries can be defined through this space. What stands outside of this domain is not metaphysically possible, having been ruled out through some metaphysical argument. Continuing the above example, should we find that we can only consistently hold that particles arranged table-wise exist, then the view that tables exist is outside the possibility space of metaphysics. As with the possibility space of language, this draws on previously cited notions of possibility, where the possibility space of metaphysics, as I have termed it, is identical to the already existing notion of broad logical possibility, wherein something is possible iff it is possible in all logically possible worlds, thus satisfying the laws of logic, and additional metaphysical constraints – the connection between broad logical possibility and metaphysical possibility is a well-recognised link.

It remains to give some (brief) independent reasons as to why we might adopt this conception of metaphysics. The main benefit comes from the now available response to the epistemological worries often raised against metaphysics. The argument is that as humans with certain finite cognitive abilities, a description of reality is beyond our epistemic abilities. There is therefore an unjustified epistemological leap when metaphysicians claim to have access to reality. A possibility-based account of metaphysics can accommodate this epistemological concern in a way that other conceptions of metaphysics based on actuality cannot. Under a metaphysics understood through possibilities, it is not damaging that certain metaphysical possibilities, or metaphysical actualities might be beyond our cognitive abilities. It is not damaging as that some ways that reality might be, perhaps including parts of its actual structure, are beyond us is an additional claim that we can accept without problem. The aim of metaphysics is to understand how reality might be, and we can engage in that pursuit independent of whether reality can be known for certain. Reality would not be wholly mysterious, as there are metaphysical views that we have ruled out as beyond the domain of the possibility space of metaphysics; but that other parts might never be known – i.e. are beyond our epistemic abilities – does not rule out investigating how those parts *could* be.

### 3.43 Bringing Possibility Spaces Together

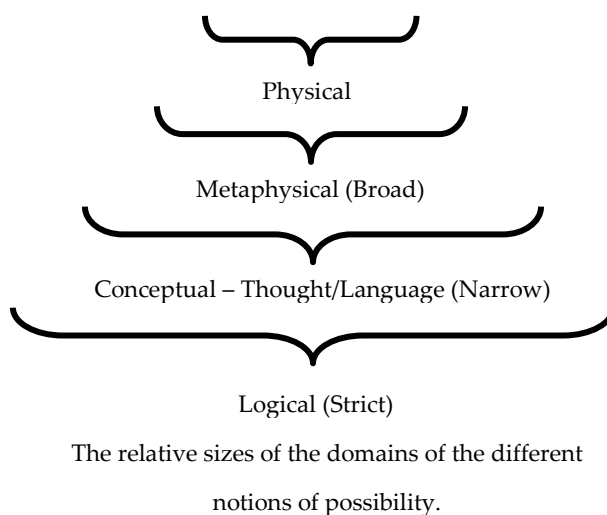
Language and metaphysics have been understood in terms of the possibility spaces that they create. The relationship between language and metaphysics will be illustrated in light of these two differing possibility spaces. The talk of possibility space might still seem too vague. As briefly noted, the term is intended to invoke some of the same distinctions that already exist via different forms of logical possibility.<sup>175</sup> Traditional accounts distinguish between strict logical possibility –

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<sup>175</sup> Cf. Lowe 1998: chapter 1, Plantinga 1974, and Forbes 1985 who follow these distinctions in forms of logical possibility. These figures do mainly discuss different forms of *necessity* rather than *possibility*. However, either necessities sit within a wider range of possibilities, in which case we can convert their discussions of necessities into corresponding possibilities; or, if necessities and possibilities are co-extensive, then the term possible can be replaced with necessary without alteration to the claims made. I talk of possibilities only to be able to not take a position on which of these might be the case, and avoid this issue that is not directly relevant to the aims of this argument. It should also be noted that some, notably Hale 1996, argue against the notion of metaphysical necessity, and thus the notion

possible in virtue of the laws of logic alone; narrow logical possibility – possible in virtue of the laws of logic, and the definitions of non-logical terms; and broad logical possibility – possible in all logically possible worlds. Added to this often is the notion of physical possibility, where something is possible in virtue of the laws of physics. I include this here for a nod towards completeness, but nothing discussed here connects to debates over the status of physical possibility.

The different notions of possibility have differently sized domains of possibility – or possibility spaces in my terms. A different number of things are possible within each. Strict logical possibility will have the widest range of possibilities, followed by narrowly logical, and, lastly, broad logical possibility.



As can be seen, the possibility space of metaphysics is smaller than the possibility space of language. This reflects the *linguistic* possibilities that have been rejected as *metaphysically* impossible. Language affords a myriad of metaphysical claims as the range of conceptual possibilities has fewer restrictions on it than metaphysical possibility. This is due to the fact that certain metaphysical principles are held that restrict the domain of possibility beyond the constraints of the laws of logic and conceptual consistency. Many more possibilities are real possibilities for language and thought than for metaphysics. This is further shown through the commonplace rejection of what Heil termed the ‘Picture Theory’ (2003) within metaphysics. Picture

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of metaphysical possibility, that I draw upon. There are, I think, good responses to Hale, cf. especially Lowe 1998: 16-21, and so I assume here that Hale’s objections can be met, and that talk in terms of possibility and necessity is valid.

theory is the idea that we might ‘read’ our metaphysics off our language. Assuming the mistake in such a methodology, we can see why the possibility space of language will indeed be larger than that of metaphysics, as language allows for certain conceptions of the world that would fall foul of the additional metaphysical principles that we might hold.

One extra claim needs to be defended before this can fully produce an account of the relationship between language and metaphysics. The claim is that language is ultimately concerned with describing reality, irrespective of whether we think that these descriptions might be accurate or not. Thus, the possibility space of language therefore provides ways in which language allows that *reality might be described*. That this is the case should be unsurprising. Language is our method through which we come to understand and ultimately manipulate the world around us. It is language that allows us to develop a system of names for objects and to then describe the relations between those objects. These descriptions need not of course be metaphysically privileged in any way, and it is an extra claim, one that has to be independently argued for, that a certain linguistic description is accurate in a metaphysical sense of accurate; but language’s role of describing the world is clear each time that we use language. When I state ‘There is a computer in front of me’, I am providing a description of the world. The extra claim is to say that that description is accurate – that there is *really, metaphysically*, a computer in front of me; but language is still describing reality independent of this additional claim.<sup>176</sup> This claim should be uncontroversial, and can be accepted by realists and anti-realists of any form alike.

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<sup>176</sup> Interestingly, some recent work by Cinque (2013) suggests that only certain aspects of our description of the world are grammatically encoded. Thus some aspects of language that might be highly cognitively significant have to be expressed through semantic or lexical routes, rather than being encoded directly into the grammatical structure of a language. Those aspects that are encoded grammatically seem to almost directly relate to issues that are taken up in metaphysical debate. Thus aspects that are otherwise highly important to us, and even cognitively universal amongst humans (such as ‘shame’, ‘mourning’ etc.) are not grammatically encoded; but aspects such as “the external and internal temporal constituency of an event (tense and aspect)” (2013: 55) are. Such relations between parts of an event are important to our understanding of causation, and many of the notions that Cinque notes are grammatically encoded seem to relate to issues debated within metaphysics. This might suggest the link between language and its role as describing reality, as if metaphysical notions are encoded grammatically then the grammar of language is forcing us to describe such aspects of reality (again independently of whether we think such descriptions are accurate or not). This claim is of course not fully developed here, but this might indicate a strong link between language and descriptions of reality.

Indeed, previously we have seen that Hirsch accounted for the meaning of a particular interpretation of the quantifier by what sentences come out as true under that interpretation. This amounts to the view that the meaning of the quantifier is understood as coming from the truth conditions of the claims that that interpretation accepts as true claims. This supports my claim that language is concerned with descriptions of the world, where a description is understood in terms of how the world must be for that description to be true: its truth conditions. Thus even Hirsch seems to accept that language is understood as being concerned with providing descriptions of the world.

How, though, can this be tied into a substantive metaphysics? We have seen that the range of possibilities for language is larger than that of metaphysics. Language radically *overpopulates* the possible ways that reality might actually be. We can create, think of, and discuss linguistic descriptions of various structures of reality that we would reject as metaphysically impossible. For example, consider the claim that all of reality is made up of tables – call this ‘table monism’. Only tables exist, and all other entities are ultimately arrangements of tables. Assume that we all accept that this cannot be the way that reality really is, due to some internal inconsistency, or contradiction of some other metaphysical claim that we wish to retain. We therefore have a description that is *within* the range of conceptual possibility, within the possibility space of language, as we can describe reality in that way satisfies the laws of logic and the definitions of our concepts. But the view is *outside* the range of metaphysical possibility, due to the metaphysical inconsistency or contradiction that all have been assumed to accept exists. The restrictions upon the domain of possibility in our language are thus looser than those of our metaphysics. Language only demands that something is possible if it satisfies the laws of logic, and no contradiction occurs in virtue of the meaning of the non-logical terms. Metaphysical possibility might have additional restrictions, such as concerns over the nature of identity, mereology, properties etc. The possible metaphysical accounts of how we can think reality *could be* are thus a subset of the ways that language allows that reality *could be described*.

What is therefore crucial for a positive account of the relationship between language and a *substantive* metaphysics is that language can say nothing about what descriptions of reality that are within its possibility space are also within the possibility space of metaphysics. The decision of the range of the metaphysical possibility space is exclusively a *metaphysical* matter, to be decided by *metaphysical* methods,<sup>177</sup> and *metaphysical* debates. To think that a broader possibility space might be able to influence which of its content falls within a subset is to assume far too much about the influence of the larger possibility space on the smaller. Language *does* provide metaphysical possibilities through the range of descriptions we can provide; but this claim does not damage the notion of metaphysics as I have conceived of it. This occurs only in the trivial sense that language so conceived provides the range for all linguistic thought. Metaphysics as investigating the possible ways that reality might be is consistent with language playing this role, just so long as the metaphysician thinks that language overpopulates the possible metaphysical accounts of reality, as I have indicated that we already should.

It might be commented here that, so conceived, that all of the metaphysical possibilities that were once part of the possibility space of metaphysics should be rejected – i.e. that all are found to have crucial and unsalvageable flaws. The possibility space of metaphysical possibilities available to us would thus close to zero. Whilst this would mean that metaphysical knowledge is not possible for us, this would *not* be a *principled* argument against the substantivity of metaphysics. This is

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<sup>177</sup> I am deliberately vague here as to what constitutes a metaphysical method, as this is a matter of debate in itself. Broadly, I have in mind the recognition that empirical findings will underdetermine the possible ways that reality could be, and thus a distinctly metaphysical method will be one that investigates the limits of this underdetermination of the actual by the physical. Science's own role in metaphysics is thus left vague here. Clearly the findings and thus the methods of science, especially physics, will be important to metaphysical investigation; but I do not though think that this entitles us to think of scientific methods as *metaphysical*. Rather metaphysical methods will be any that build upon this. This is still vague, and does require much more investigation than I can give it here. It suffices for the proposal being defended here that the domain of metaphysics – i.e. the possibility space of metaphysics – is one that is determined by itself, not by some antecedent study of some larger possibility space, and a distinctly metaphysical method is one that delineates that possibility space. One interesting consequence of this is that metaphysics can say nothing about what is contained within the subset of *its* claims – which claims will be part of the possibility space of the physical. Metaphysics must remain silent about this, just as the larger possibility spaces (those of logic, and language) must remain silent about the limits of the narrower possibility space of metaphysics.

because, as already shown, this conception of metaphysics can allow for unknowable, given our finite minds, metaphysical possibilities and actualities. Not all metaphysical possibilities may be available to us, but this is no issue for this conception of metaphysics, and it should, I think, be uncontroversial that some such knowledge may be beyond us. Discovering whether any of the available metaphysical possibilities is an actual possibility, whether we should continue to consider them as a possibility, is thus still a substantive, distinctly metaphysical, enterprise, and is not to be decided by consideration of language, or by consideration of the larger linguistic possibility space.

For further clarification, consider another, more familiar, example within mereology. There is a metaphysical debate about whether it is *possible* for there to be an object composed of Socrates' nose and the Eiffel Tower. This debate is between the nihilist who denies this fusion is possible, and the supporter of unrestricted mereological composition who accepts that the fusion is possible. It certainly is linguistically possible – the fusion only requires a term to pick it out and to be placed in an existential claim: SNET exists (where 'SNET' = the fusion of Socrates' nose + Eiffel Tower). The fusion existing is within the possibility space of language. However, delimitating whether such a fusion is *metaphysically possible* relies on *metaphysical* notions and categories – i.e. charting the possible ways that reality could be via understanding the possibility space of metaphysics. To think language has any sway over the possibility space of metaphysics would fall into the fallacy of the Picture Theory (cf. Heil 2003). Thus, so conceived, language and a substantive metaphysics are consistent.

This notion of possibility space can be understood further through an analogy with the respective sizes of a set and any proper subsets of that set. Consider two sets: that of the natural numbers, and of the real numbers. The set of real numbers contains more members than the set of the natural numbers, and the set of natural numbers is a proper subset of the set of real numbers. However, given only our knowledge of the real numbers, we would not be able to delineate the membership of the set of natural numbers. Being able to give the membership of that set requires us to have further knowledge, a further definition, of what a natural number is. Importantly, there is no

way to get from our knowledge of the set of the real numbers to our knowledge of the set of the natural numbers, even though the set of natural numbers is a proper subset of the set of real numbers. It is true that the set of real numbers will contain all the members of the set of natural numbers, but this is a trivial consequence of the proper subset relation. Analogously, we can (loosely) think of each possibility space as a set of accepted possibilities in line with the specific requirements for possibility space, or set, membership. The set of accepted metaphysical possibilities is a proper subset of the set of accepted linguistic, or thinkable, possibilities, in turn a proper subset of the set of accepted logical possibilities. As in the case above, there is no justification for thinking that the membership of the proper subset can be discovered through knowledge of the larger set; and, further, it is a similar triviality that all the members of the proper subset are also members of the larger set. In the metaphysical case, this is just the trivial consequence that any theory or claim that we might accept as a metaphysical possibility must be expressible, and hence also a member of the set of accepted linguistic possibilities. Put another way, in terms of the weaker domain of cognitive possibilities, metaphysical discourse must be a subset of all cognition. This is a trivial claim from the fact that we are engaging in metaphysical debate. What is in doubt normally in the metametaphysical literature is that there can be, in this terminology, a set of accepted metaphysical possibilities that we can delineate. This is being assumed here – I have argued that this is the case in the rest of §3. Once this is assumed, we can see that the possibility space of metaphysics is a proper subset of the possibility space of language/thought, and that the proper subset relation gives no grounds for thinking that we can through linguistic methods delineate the proper subset of metaphysics; rather it is only through an understanding of metaphysics, through metaphysical methods and debate, that such a proper subset can be appropriately delineated. This delineation thus remains a substantive issue, whilst showing that the domains of language and metaphysics are consistent with each other in line with their respective possibility space, or set, relation.

Of course, nothing said here will persuade someone who is suspicious of metaphysics; but it was not intended to. The aim of §3.4 onwards was to provide a sketch of a positive way that language and metaphysics might be related. Language and metaphysics conceived through the notion of possibility space are consistent with

each other, and metaphysics is retained as a substantive issue as it is only metaphysical methods that can delineate that particular possibility space. This account presupposes responses to the anti-metaphysical arguments posed against substantive metaphysics, in order to show that an option is at least on the table if the metaphysician is asked how the relationship between language and metaphysics should alternatively be understood.

### 3.44 A Neo-Aristotelian Account?

As I have already stated, this relationship between language and metaphysics is admittedly speculative, schematic, and requires much more detail before it could be fully defended. One possible way of supporting a claim is to provide some reasons for thinking that some others also understand the issues in the same way – perhaps this only amounts to an appeal to authority, but it does at least show that such a form of thought is not entirely isolated. The putative support I offer here comes from a certain reading of Aristotle. I make no claims that this was actually Aristotle's view, or that this best fits a broader reading and understanding of his overall philosophy. My intention is limited to the claim that this is a possible reading of certain parts of Aristotle's work, most notably in the *Categories*.

The *Categories* is the main text wherein Aristotle discusses both language and metaphysics. Within it, Aristotle is seeking to understand which parts of speech are significant for further philosophical, and specifically metaphysical, investigation, and which do not carry such significance. Discovering which parts of speech designate a 'real entity' is thus the main aim of the *Categories*, and, for Aristotle, the linguistic categories that a potentially designated entity falls into helps to distinguish designation of a real entity from merely apparent designation. As Moravcsik states:

[i]ntuitively restated, Aristotle's principle says that by what we call semantic and syntactic analysis we can discover certain basic units among the elements of sentences of subject-predicate form, and that these turn out to designate those simple elements of reality which fall into only one category.

Thus the designative link between these simple parts of language and the simple parts of reality which fall into one category is, according to Aristotle, the key link between the structure of language and the structure of reality (1968).

Whichever terms can be found to fall into only one of the categories designate a real entity; those that fall within two or more, do not. For example, 'red coloured' does not designate a simple element of reality, i.e. a real one, as it falls across two categories.

Aristotle therefore thinks that certain aspects of language help us understand whether something is a simple, or real, element of reality or not. Only the subject-predicate structure, for Aristotle, mirrors and informs us accurately about the nature of reality. However, he also stresses that one aspect of language is that it can lead us to falsely believe that something designates a simple element of reality. His main example of this is that of secondary substances. The apparent unity of secondary substances comes from the linguistic ability to place such terms, e.g. 'animal', in the subject position of a subject-predicate structure. Aristotle, though, states that "[t]his, however, is not really so, for a quality rather is meant" (*Categories*, 3b). The unity is only in language, not one that could be in reality itself. Language, for Aristotle, provides a wide range of possible designations, and it is the job of metaphysical research to distinguish between real designators, and the merely apparent. In my terms, this can be seen to be akin to the claim that the possibility space of language is larger than that of metaphysics, with only certain parts of language providing descriptions that are also within the possibility space of metaphysics. My above sketch of the positive relationship between language and a substantive metaphysics can thus be taken to be neo-Aristotelian, only also incorporating more recent developments in the domains under discussion.

In this way, and in line with my earlier claims, only a subset of possible designations of language are metaphysically significant, with the line of reasoning going from metaphysics to language, not vice versa. Aristotle aims to identify which parts of language are metaphysically significant, not just to accept them all as being so; and ultimately it is metaphysical reasons that stop some parts of language – those

that fall into two or more categories – from being real rather than apparent designators. Therefore, for Aristotle too, language overpopulates the possible accounts of reality that we might give, and what Aristotle seems to hold is that it is for *metaphysics* to decide between these options. The descriptions that language provides might be misleading for our metaphysical theorising, but this does not contradict a substantive enterprise of metaphysics – Aristotle, after all, certainly takes metaphysics to be a substantive area of research.

The positive account of the relationship between language and metaphysics I have offered in §3.4, I argue, might then be considered ‘neo-Aristotelian’. Providing a positive account was intended to build towards a replacement of the account that I have argued explicitly against, that of the deflationist, within §3. Far more work would need to be done in order to establish this neo-Aristotelian view as defensible; but simply taken as a sketch of a possible view, the details here are sufficient to point towards an alternative way, that does not fall foul of the mistakes that I have identified with the relationship between language and metaphysics that the deflationist calls upon. That relationship, one that appeals to the supposed inherent variability of language in order to support broadly anti-metaphysical conclusions – at least in terms of resulting in a domain of metaphysics that is non-substantive – has, I’ve argued, many issues, most significantly that the conception of language that this relies upon can be shown to be both empirically and theoretically mistaken given some linguistic analysis of the nature of quantification within language. What remains an open issue is whether there is enough support here to think that the proposal in this section can replace those claims that we have independently rejected. Even if this sketch of a more positive relationship between language and metaphysics does not hold – if it cannot be developed to be defensible – the negative work earlier in §3 remains untouched. Either way the account of language and metaphysics that the deflationist appeals to is flawed, meaning the arguments herein still count towards thinking that, contra the deflationist, metaphysics is substantive.

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