

Language, Science, and the Nature of Metaphysical Knowledge

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Let us theorize explicitly about what there is rather than attribute our views to the language that we speak [...] we have to take metaphysics seriously, since we cannot hope to derive it from our linguistic practices.
(Achille C. Varzi, 2002, “Words and Objects”)

1. From Aristotle to the Linguistic Turn – and Back Again

In Aristotle’s *Categories*, which is one of the most important works in the whole history of metaphysics, we find a relatively unproblematised reliance on linguistic facts to reveal truths about fundamental extra-linguistic entities. In the beginning of the twenty-first century, such a straightforward relationship between language and the ontological structure of the non-linguistic world seems much more difficult to assume. A central recent influence behind this situation is the so-called *linguistic turn* (cf. Rorty, 1992) which occurred in the last century, and came to have a tremendous impact on how philosophers conceived the nature and limits of their own activity (cf. Loux & Zimmerman, 2003). A perspicuous feature of much of linguistic philosophy was its critical and sometimes even militantly hostile attitude towards traditional metaphysics (cf. e.g. Carnap, 1935; Pears, 1951). After the critique launched by both ordinary- and ideal-language philosophies, it seemed to many that if metaphysics were retainable at all, this could at most be as a study of something like the fundamental features of our *linguistic frameworks* or *conceptual schemes*. Despite the fact that in the twentieth century it was newly formulated in a linguistic dress, such a conception of metaphysics has been called a ‘Kantian’ one (cf. Loux, 2006, pp. 1-16).

For many metaphysicians, however, the recent rediscovery of the discipline (cf. e.g. Armstrong, 1978; Loux, 1978) has meant precisely *a return to Aristotle*, at least in the specific sense that the subject matter of metaphysics has been interpreted in the spirit of global realism as concerning *not* the categories of our thought or conceptual frameworks

(as the linguistic philosophers would have it) but of *reality* or *being* as it is *in itself*, quite independently of us, our varying interests and linguistic practices (cf. Lowe, 2002, p. 14; Loux, 2006, pp. 9-10). Presuming that after the linguistic turn, we cannot just uncomplicatedly return to an innocence concerning the relation of language to extra-linguistic reality, it seems that, as is wont to happen in philosophy (cf. Strawson, 1959, pp. 10-11), we need to inquire once again, in our presently informed state, into the relations of language and metaphysics.¹

In the beginning of the fourth Book Γ of his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle famously maintains that there is a science which investigates being and the attributes which belong to this in virtue of its own nature. He also states that this is not the same as any of the so-called special sciences, for none of these others deals generally with *being as being*. The name ‘metaphysics’ dates from later editorial work (apparently by Andronicus of Rhodes around the middle of the first century BC), and one of the names for the discipline that Aristotle himself uses is ‘first philosophy’ (πρώτη φιλοσοφία). In the following, I shall argue that if we want to do something worth dignifying by the name ‘metaphysics’ at all (cf. Lowe, 1998, pp. 2; 6), then the Aristotelian characterization of metaphysics as *first philosophy* has to be taken with full seriousness. What I take this to imply is that the characteristic problems and terminology of the discipline have to be given an explicit priority over other theoretical considerations having to do for example with language or epistemology. Metaphysics is the most general of all the sciences, and to retain its justifiable position as an autonomous discipline, it needs to hold on to its characteristic research themes and distinctive vocabulary. Focus on language has the unfortunate tendency of distracting philosophers away from metaphysics towards other issues having to do, for example, with the syntax and semantics of our linguistic frameworks. Therefore, the distracting linguistic trend needs to be decisively countered and balanced by emphasizing the importance of taking ‘first philosophy’ seriously.

Not wishing to get involved in exegetical debates concerning the historical adequacy of terms like ‘Kantian’ or ‘Aristotelian’ in connection with different conceptions of metaphysics, I shall simply bypass these scholarly issues by introducing some alternative terminology of my own. By *antimetaphysical linguisticism*, I refer to a position

¹ This undertaking has a natural connection with the question of whether there is ever any chance of actual *progress* in philosophy, and whether it can *learn* anything from the dialectic of its own history. Since the relationship between language and metaphysics is clearly an important question also for the general *methodology* of the discipline, we may safely conclude that the issue has both *historical* and *systematic* relevance.

which denies the relevance and possibility of metaphysics completely, holding that the proper sphere of philosophical inquiry is limited to the study of language. By an *exclusively linguistic* conception of metaphysics, I refer to a view which does accept the relevance and possibility of metaphysics, but construes the discipline as a study of the fundamental features of our linguistic frameworks. By a *language-oriented* conception of metaphysics, I refer to an outlook which accepts the traditional notion of metaphysics as the systematic study of the most fundamental structure of (mainly extra-linguistic) reality, but considers an explicit focus on language to be the best method of carrying out such a task. By a *world-oriented* conception of metaphysics, finally, I refer to a position which tries to approach the systematic study of the most fundamental structure of reality as directly as possible, using language mainly to speak about the most abstract and general features of reality, just as it is used in other fields of scientific inquiry. In the interest of further conceptual clarity, I shall use the term *language* to refer to the linguistic sphere, *world* to refer to the extra-linguistic sphere, and *reality* to refer to absolutely everything that exists, including both linguistic and non-linguistic spheres.

To get a more graspable handle on the overall topic, I shall rely on the restricted context of *first-order monadic predications*, or FOMPs for short. As might be expected, FOMPs come in (at least) two distinct varieties; the linguistic sort and the ontic one. The former reside in the sphere of language, while the latter's place is in the world. Both, of course, are parts of reality. At their simplest, *linguistic* FOMPs are predicative natural-language sentences like 'Socrates is wise', where 'Socrates' is the subject and 'is wise' the predicate. The grammatical combination of the subject and the predicate expresses an attribution of the property of wisdom to Socrates. In a formal version, we could have something like ' Fa ', where ' a ' is a singular term referring to an individual object and ' F ' a general term associated with a monadic property. To keep things as simple as possible, we can assume that ' Fa ' involves no hidden logical complexity in the form of connectives, quantifiers or function symbols. In both natural- and ideal-language versions, simple linguistic FOMPs thus consist of primitive singular and general terms whose syntactically regulated copulations beget predicative sentences which may then be *true* or *false*. Again for simplicity's sake, let us just assume that sentences can be truth-bearers. The entities in the world that are responsible for the *truth-making* (see e.g. Lowe & Rami, 2009) of linguistic FOMPs, I shall call *ontic* FOMPs. It is important to see that although linguistic FOMPs have definite heuristic value for the systematic study of ontic FOMPs, the former do not determine the structure of the latter. At present, I shall be content with a

preliminary commonsensical conception of ontic FOMPs as consisting of individual *objects* like Socrates and monadic *properties* like wisdom together with their predicative linkage, while remaining fully aware of various possible further analyses of objects, properties, and their relations (cf. e.g. Loux, 1998).

In my discussion of linguistic and ontic FOMPs, I shall rely on a useful contrast provided by the theoretical approaches of W. V. Quine and E. J. Lowe. The comparison of Quine and Lowe on these matters is both historically and systematically motivated. In the historical context, Quine has significantly contributed to the rehabilitation of metaphysics in the latter part of the twentieth century (cf. e.g. Linsky, 1997; Koskinen, 2004; Koskinen & Pihlström, 2006), whereas Lowe is one of the most distinguished metaphysicians active in philosophy today.² On the systematic side, however, Quine is distracted by linguistic and epistemic concerns, and consequently lets the ontic ball slip out of his reach. Lowe, on the other hand, is much better equipped and more adequately focused to play the ontological game, and therefore also constitutes a more useful example of what *taking 'first philosophy' seriously* means. In course of the systematic discussion that follows, I hope to present some substantiation of these claims concerning Quine and Lowe too.

2. Naturalism, Science, and the Canonical Notation

One possible way of providing an ontic interpretation of linguistic FOMPs would be to assume that there is a rather straightforward *correspondence*, and that the singular terms in subject position refer to individual objects, whereas the general terms in predicate position refer to monadic properties. Although this still leaves the ontological structure of objects and the exact nature of properties unaccounted for, such an interpretation nevertheless relies on a similarity in the referring and existentially committing functions of both singular and general terms, or names and predicates. For Quine (see e.g. 1960; 1980), of course, this will not do, and he propagates an influential alternative way of analysing linguistic FOMPs as well as their relation to ontic ones. In fact, Quine's approach is to a very large extent based on the idea of a *semantic ascent* (cf. 1960, §56), which in terms of our FOMPs means that instead of grappling directly with objects and their properties, he

² Cf. e.g. <http://ontology.buffalo.edu/06/Lowe/>.

tends to deal with the issue through singular and general terms, or the elements of linguistic FOMPs that supposedly represent the ontic FOMPs of the extra-linguistic reality. The motivation for Quine's procedure of semantic ascent comes from an attempt to avoid unnecessary bouts of "invective and question-begging" (*ibid.*, p. 272), and in itself, of course, there is nothing wrong with the endorsement of clarity in ontological discussions – provided that after our semantic ascension, we do not get tangled in the linguistic web, and manage to keep our eye consistently on the ontic ball.

Supposing that we have ascended with Quine to the higher ground of linguistic FOMPs, we may then observe that these come in natural- and ideal-language versions, like our 'Socrates is wise' and '*Fa*'. Both are divisible into predicates on the one hand, and names or individual constants on the other. As regards natural language predicates like 'is wise' (or 'wise' if we wish to integrate the copula) Quine (1980, p. 10) is committed to a view according to which that Socrates is wise may be taken as *ultimate* and *irreducible*. This has the strange consequence that even if the predicate 'wise' were true of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, it would be a mere "popular and misleading manner of speaking" (*ibid.*) to say that they had anything in common. Moreover, in such a scenario, there is no entity which would be named by the word 'wisdom'. What Quine suggests, then, is that neither predication, attribute agreement, nor abstract reference actually involves anything of real ontic significance, but that the whole issue is a simple matter of predicates *applying to or being true of* individual objects without any properly ontological ground at all. In this respect, the truth-making of linguistic FOMPs seems to be left a task for primitive *semantic* postulations. The impression is only made stronger by Quine's (1981a, p. 120) insistence that "It matters little whether we read ' $x \in y$ ' as ' x is a member of the class y ' or ' x has the property y .'" In the formal-language version '*Fa*', Quine (*ibid.*, p. 108) thinks that the '*F*' need be regarded as no more than a dummy predicate, or a blank in a sentence diagram.

Having seen how Quine does away with the ontological commitments associated with *predicates*, we may next observe how he (cf. e.g. 1992a, p. 28) extends a similar treatment to *names* or individual constants. Starting with our linguistic FOMP '*Fa*', Quine relies on its equivalence with ' $(\exists x) (Fx \wedge a = x)$ ' to manoeuvre every occurrence of '*a*' into the context ' $a =$ ', and then to treat this context as a simple and indissoluble predicate '*A*', where the separate relative 'is' of *identity* has become the copulative 'is' of

predication (cf. Haaparanta, 1985; 1986; Lowe, 1989, pp. 3-4).³ With the help of this new monadic predicate ‘A’,⁴ Quine then formulates our original linguistic FOMP as ‘ $(\exists x) (Ax \wedge Fx)$ ’. In this version, however, the uniqueness of reference implicit in the use of the original name ‘a’ still needs to be made explicit. When a clause to this effect is added into the construction, we get the final ‘ $(\exists x) (Ax \wedge (\forall y) (Ay \rightarrow x = y) \wedge Fx)$ ’, where the first conjunct explicates the *existence* assumption, the second conjunct the *uniqueness* assumption and the third one then finally takes care of the original *predication* of ‘Fa’. In comparison with the original *analysandum*, Quine’s *analysans* is a complex sentence involving quantifiers, variables, connectives, and the identity predicate. From the Quinean perspective, however, the analysed version of the linguistic FOMP not only makes important implicit assumptions fully explicit, but also leaves the *variables* as the only remaining link between words and objects (cf. *ibid.*), thus conforming with Quine’s (cf. e.g. 1980, p. 15) famous criterion of ontological commitment according to which *to be is to be the value of a [bound] variable*.

For Quine (cf. e.g. 1960, §47), the logical framework of first-order predicate calculus with identity is the *canonical notation* for ontological theorizing, and he (*ibid.*, p. 242) also says that to paraphrase a sentence into the canonical notation of quantification is, first and foremost, to make its ontic content explicit. When applied to scientific theories, Quine’s criterion of ontological commitment becomes a general principle saying that entities of a given sort are assumed by a theory if and only if some of them must be counted among the values of the variables in order that the statements affirmed in the theory be true (Quine, 1980, p. 103). This suggests a certain picture of the relations between language, science, and the nature of metaphysical knowledge. According to this picture, in the process of their research activity and theory-formation, various special sciences like mathematics, physics, and biology make *pragmatically justified ontological commitments* (cf. Pihlström, 1996), which are then explicated and made fully transparent via a regimentation of the relevant scientific theories within the given formal language of canonical notation.

From the perspective of our overall theme of taking ‘first philosophy’ seriously, however, there is an imminent danger involved, because the suggested picture seems to reduce the role of metaphysics to a relatively insignificant business of ontological

³ In the case of a natural-language name like ‘Socrates’, the procedure turns this into ‘is [identical with] Socrates’, or more compactly, just ‘socratizes’ (cf. Quine, 1980, p. 8).

⁴ Cf. Plantinga (1976, p. 149), who discusses Scotus’ *haecceities*, and the doctrine of ‘Boethianism’ which recognizes that there are such entities as *individual essences*.

bookkeeping. If this should happen, then it is the special sciences that are seen to perform all the real work, while the ontological accountants may at best only help to tidy things up after the true heroes have left the stage. Even the very characterization ‘ontological’ becomes problematic, if the supposedly metaphysical accountants are only allowed to register the findings of the special sciences. Mathematicians may well be pragmatically committed to the existence of numbers, physicists to physical objects, and biologists to wombats, but for the serious metaphysician who is interested in the systematic study of the most fundamental structure of reality (cf. Lowe, 1998, p. 2), and who works with the general categories of being (cf. Loux, 2006), such entities as numbers, physical objects, and wombats constitute only a starting point for further investigation. Moreover, metaphysics is typically interested in the nature and existence of entities like *properties* (cf. Mellor & Oliver, 1997) or *universals* (cf. Moreland, 2001), and, as pointed out already by Aristotle (*Met.* IV.1, 1003a, 20-25), such issues simply are of no concern to the special sciences, despite the fact that in their theories, they quite happily help themselves to notions like the properties and relations of various kinds of objects.

Focusing on empirical special sciences, Lowe (1998, pp. 4-5; cf. 2002, pp. 5-7) perceptively includes *scientism* in his list of modern antimetaphysical positions. The doctrine claims precisely that such legitimate metaphysical questions as there are belong to the province of the empirical sciences, and this being so, there can be no scope for a *distinctly philosophical approach* to the questions of metaphysics, conceived as an approach different in its methods or objects from those already embraced by the empirical sciences (cf. Bealer, 1996, p. 1).⁵ For the kind of philosophical *naturalism* that associates itself closely with science and has steadily grown in popularity during the last few decades, largely because of Quine’s strong influence and contribution, the question of metaphysics’ relation to the special sciences is indeed a crucial one (cf. Koskinen, 2004; Koskinen, Pihlström & Vilkkö, 2006).

Quine (1981b, p. 21) characterizes naturalism as the recognition that it is within science itself, and *not* in some *prior philosophy*, that reality is to be identified and described, thus seemingly pointing directly towards antimetaphysical scientism. The impression is only strengthened by Quine’s (*ibid.*, p. 72) even more succinct formulation of

⁵ In talking of the prospect of a ‘*naturalized metaphysics*’, Lowe (2002, p. 6) writes that on this view, there is no question that metaphysics is equipped to answer which isn’t properly in the domain of some natural science – either the fundamental science, physics, or one of the special sciences, if these are not ultimately reducible to physics. It should be noted that in this context, Lowe uses the term ‘special science’ *not* in the Aristotelian sense I have adopted, but in contrast with the fundamental science of physics.

naturalism as the *abandonment* of the goal of *first philosophy*. Does this not, then, constitute a very clear and outspoken denial of the compatibility of metaphysics with naturalism? Beyond initial appearances, however, the real issue in this case is *terminological*, for Quine does not mean by ‘first philosophy’ what Aristotle does. Therefore, Quine’s denial of first philosophy is also *not* directed against metaphysics as the study of being *qua* being, but rather against the *epistemic* aspiration towards some kind of absolute certainty or a supra-scientific tribunal (cf. Hookway, 1992). As Lowe (1998, p. 23, n22, pp. 26-27; 2006, p. 5) has sensibly pointed out, however, metaphysical study may perfectly well be conducted in a *fallibilist* spirit, without any mistaken pursuit of incorrigibility. Hence, the denial of first philosophy *in Quine’s sense*, need not in itself lead into any rejection of metaphysics. As an example of a metaphysician who has integrated both naturalism and first philosophy in identifying and describing reality within science itself, we could mention someone like David Armstrong (cf. e.g. 1978, pp. 126-127).⁶

In fact, Quine himself does seem to understand the term ‘science’ broadly enough to leave room, in principle, for the abstract and general issues of metaphysics (cf. Koskinen, 2004). It seems that he also regards the move from a natural-language linguistic FOMP like ‘Socrates is wise’ to the more complex ideal-language construction in canonical notation as a *necessary prerequisite* for the whole ontological enterprise because, as he (1981b, p. 9) puts it, the common man’s ontology is vague and untidy, and a fenced ontology is just not implicit in ordinary language. According to Quine, ontological concern is not a correction of a lay thought and practice, but foreign to the whole culture, though an outgrowth of it. In his (*ibid.*) view, the idea of a boundary between being and nonbeing is a philosophical one, an idea of technical science in a broad sense. The problem with respect to anything worth dignifying by the name ‘metaphysics’ then is that even if true, this in itself does not necessarily get us any further than back to the uninspiring task of bookkeeping for the special sciences.

In Quine’s case, the utter poverty of his own ontological apparatus means that despite his (1980, p. 1) recognition of disagreement over cases, there is scarcely a more interesting answer to the question ‘What is there?’ to be had than the ‘Everything’ that he mentions. At most, it seems, Quine (cf. e.g. 1960) can have something like *physical*

⁶ Whether a metaphysician wishes to be a naturalist or not is, of course, another matter. Quine and Armstrong both willingly subscribe to the doctrine (although in different versions) whereas Lowe (2008, p. 187) explicitly states that he is *not* a naturalist.

objects and *classes* as his two categories of being and the *epsilon-relation* of set-membership as his sole formal ontological relation, although even their status as such might be contested (cf. Lowe, 2006, p. 35). Because of his tendency to substitute quadruples of real numbers for physical objects, however, even this desert landscape ontology is in constant danger of collapsing into a Pythagorean universe of pure set theory. The lack of room in Quine's view for categorial differentiations in any ontologically serious sense leads Lowe (2006, pp. 47-48; 195-198) to criticize him for having, in effect, a *no-category* ontology. As a consequence, Lowe (*ibid.*, p. 198) ends up talking about Quine's *amorphous lump* conception of reality, and "the annihilating acid of his anti-realism". This anti-realist inclination is of course already discernible in the way we saw Quine analyse the names and predicates of simple linguistic FOMPs. Hans-Johann Glock (2003, p. 55), for example, takes Quine's conclusion that ontological questions do not arise for singular predicative sentences as a *reductio ad absurdum* of his position.⁷ I tend to agree with this judgment, although at the same time, I would strongly emphasize that taking 'first philosophy' seriously means that the important issues are seen to reside *not* in the referentially or ontologically committing functions of singular and general *terms*, but on the side of ontic FOMPs, and the fundamental structure of extra-linguistic reality.

3. The Truth of Linguistic FOMPs and the Relevance of Ontic Structure

In addition to the *scientism* that we encountered above, Lowe (1998, pp. 3-8; cf. 2002, p. 4ff.) has three further positions on his list of more or less explicitly antimetaphysical trends. The positions themselves are not totally unrelated (cf. e.g. Lowe, 1998, pp. 7-8), and it seems that Quine is a good candidate for exemplifying all of them. *Semanticism* is the view that metaphysical questions can in principle be resolved by recourse to (and *only* by recourse to) the theory of *meaning*. Lowe (*ibid.*, p. 8) also calls this the *linguistic* approach, and on the basis of Quine's aptitude for semantic ascension towards linguistic FOMPs, we may quite justifiably count him as a representative of this type of strategy. Lowe's third antimetaphysical position is called *neo-Kantianism*. According to this view, metaphysics does not and cannot tell us anything about objective reality as it is in itself, but it *can* tell us something about certain fundamentally necessary features of our *thought*

⁷ Glock, (2003, p. 41) also writes that Quine's criterion of ontological commitment wrongly sets aside singular terms in favour of quantification, and ignores the existential implications of predicates.

about reality (*ibid.*, p.6). For Quine, of course, thought can only be studied through language, and this connects semanticism and neo-Kantianism in Quine's position. A fourth antimetaphysical trend mentioned by Lowe is *relativism*, which often comes in cultural or historical varieties, and in Quine's case, is combined via his sentence-based semantics and epistemology to the two previously mentioned antimetaphysical positions.⁸

We already saw how Quine tends to rely on semantic ascent and to focus on linguistic FOMPs instead of grappling more directly (e.g. in Armstrongian fashion) with ontic structure. After climbing to the linguistic level and playing down the ontological significance of predicates and names, to complete his severance of linguistic and ontic FOMPs, Quine emphasizes the semantic and epistemic primacy of *true sentences*. In Quine's thought (cf. e.g. 1974, p. 38), there is a very close connection between semantics and epistemology. Language and theory are identified with each other because they are both built on the same foundation of *holophrastic observation sentences* which are taken to be just true or false simpliciter. Since reference is always performed by sub-sentential elements,⁹ the primacy of the *truth* of linguistic FOMPs has the startling implication that (although we might naturally think that a central cognitive function of language is to *represent* the extra-linguistic reality) the means by which language comes into contact with the world is *not* referential to begin with. As Peter Hylton (2004, p. 122) has phrased this general Quinean idea, acceptance of sentences is prior to reference, and truth is prior to existence.

Considerations thus based on the primacy of true sentences lead Quine to his position of *ontological relativity* (1969, pp. 26-68; cf. 1981b, pp. 1-23) or *global ontological structuralism* (1992b). Objects then become mere neutral nodes in the logical structure of our theories, and as a result, even Quine himself (1998, p. 115) no longer sees reference, reification and ontology as a goal of science at all, but rather as a spin-off of quantification and the variables, these being in turn a mere technical aid in forging logical links between observation *sentences* and theoretical *sentences*. Here we may truly observe the annihilating acid of Quine's anti-realism burning away the last remaining link between words and objects.¹⁰

⁸ For more on the justification Lowe gives for classifying *scientism*, *semanticism*, *neo-Kantianism*, and *relativism* as antimetaphysical positions, see his (1998, pp. 3-8; 2002, pp. 4-9).

⁹ In Quinean terminology, *denotation*, or reference by general terms; *designation*, or reference by singular terms; and in the case of the analysed version in the canonical notation, *the taking of values by variables*.

¹⁰ Quine (1981b; 1992b) does try to reconcile his ontological relativism and robust realism with the help of naturalism, and by claiming that the relativist semantic considerations belong *not* to *ontology* but to the methodology of ontology, and thus to *epistemology*. I myself, however, remain highly skeptical of the *ad hoc*

Quine (1981b, p. 20) mentions the predecessor of F. P. Ramsey as urging the point that structure is what matters to a theory, and not the choice of its objects. With respect to the relationship between linguistic and ontic FOMPs, it is indeed also interesting to note how Ramsey (1925) tries to problematise the postulation of the ontic structure of *universals* and *particulars* on the basis of an argumentation based on a certain kind of relativity in the subject-predicate structure of linguistic FOMPs. As his examples, Ramsey (*ibid.*, p. 404) uses the two linguistic FOMPs

- (i) ‘Socrates is wise’ and
- (ii) ‘Wisdom is a characteristic of Socrates’

noting that while these undeniably are two distinct sentences (or in my terminology, FOMPs), they nevertheless assert the same fact, express the same proposition, and have the same meaning. In (i) ‘Socrates’ is the subject and ‘is wise’ the predicate, while in (ii), ‘Wisdom’ is the subject and ‘is a characteristic of Socrates’ the predicate. The way these linguistic roles of subject and predicate are distributed is taken to depend merely on which particular FOMP we wish to use, for one pragmatic reason or another, and to have nothing at all to do with the logical nature of Socrates or wisdom.

After noting that with a sufficiently elastic language, any proposition can be so expressed that any of its terms is the subject, the conclusion Ramsey (*ibid.*) draws from such linguistic relativity is that it throws doubt upon the whole basis of the distinction between particular and universal *as deduced from* that between subject and predicate, which is one thing. Only a bit later on, however, he (*ibid.*, p. 405) seems to draw a much stronger conclusion according to which the whole theory of particulars and universals is due to mistaking for a fundamental characteristic of *reality* what is merely a characteristic of *language*, and this, clearly, is entirely another matter. One may perfectly well accept the former point while denying the latter, because even if it were the case that the universal-particular distinction *cannot* be founded on that between subject and predicate, this does *not* imply that it could not have any *other kind* of foundation.¹¹ In their exclusive focus on linguistic FOMPs as well as in their problematic attitude towards ontic ones, there is an

appearance of such a move as well as the very possibility of combining within the same position an epistemology and an ontology pointing to such radically opposing directions.

¹¹ Cf. e.g. Armstrong (1978, p. xiv), who explicitly states that only if we first develop a satisfactory theory of universals can we expect to develop fruitfully the further topic of the semantics of general terms. Moreover, he points out that philosophers have all too often tried to proceed in the opposite way. See also e.g. Moreland’s (2001) discussion of the problem(s) of universals.

analogy between the approaches of Quine and Ramsey, and I would claim that in this respect, both provide unfortunate examples of what happens when we fail to take ‘first philosophy’ with full seriousness, and let the ontic ball slip out of our reach. In Herbert Hochberg’s (2003, p. 7) discerning phrase, the focus on the world, as what words are about, is often lost as analytic philosophers concentrate on language itself.

Lowe (2006, p. 101), on the other hand, clearly states that he has no inclination whatever to contend that ontological distinctions can be founded upon syntactical ones or, more generally, that metaphysical distinctions can be founded on linguistic ones. In fact, in his *properly ontological* solution to Ramsey’s problem (see *ibid.*, pp. 101-118), we have a very useful systematic example of how to counter the antimetaphysical semanticism of both Quine and Ramsey. As stated before, the basic idea is to give an explicit priority to the characteristic problems and terminology of metaphysics, and to seriously treat it as first philosophy. What this means in the present case is that one should decidedly focus on the most general categories of being and the formal ontological relations that characterize those categories and their mutual relationships. It also helps considerably if one has a sufficiently rich theoretical apparatus to work with. In this respect, too, we saw that there is reason to suspect Quine’s desert landscape ontology of providing metaphysically inadequate resources. But if one decides, in Strawson’s (1955, p. 229) words, to make with Roman ruthlessness a solitude in which to quantify peacefully over lumps of rock, then perhaps such insufficiency is only to be expected.

I claimed earlier that Lowe is much better equipped and more adequately focused to play the ontological game than Quine. In the present instance, this would also seem to apply to Ramsey, as Lowe (2006, p. 57) explicitly states that the only legitimate way to found the universal-particular distinction, or any other putative distinction between ontological categories, is to provide a well-motivated account of how the existence and identity conditions of putative members of the one category differ quite generally from those of putative members of the other. I take this to be a clear expression of *better focus*. The part about being *better equipped* becomes obvious when we turn to the way in which Lowe, after having pointed out that the natural home of the universal-particular distinction is in the context of a *substance* ontology (*ibid.*, p. 109), then proceeds to show how various other entities can be taken to depend for their existence and identity upon these ontologically independent entities.

In Lowe's (2006) Aristotelian (cf. *Cat.* 2) four-category framework, the fundamental categories of being are substances (or more generally, objects), kinds, attributes, and modes. Each *mode* depends for both its existence and its identity upon some specific substance, with many different modes depending in this way on the same substance, but no single mode depending in this way on two different substances. Each *kind* depends for its existence, but *not* for its identity upon a number of different substances. Each *attribute* also depends for its existence, but not for its identity upon a number of different modes (cf. *ibid.*, p. 109). To give more substance (excuse the pun) to this sketch and the example it provides, we should note that Lowe (2005) defines the central notion of substance with the help of identity-dependence in the following manner:

[SUB] x is a substance =_{df} x is a particular and there is no particular y such that y is not identical with x and x depends for its identity upon y .

To get a more detailed understanding of the distinctive existence and identity conditions of the categorial elements in the four-category framework, we then need to add to this definition of substance the following definitions of *identity-dependence* [ID] (Lowe, 1998, p. 149), *rigid existential dependence* [RED] (Lowe, 2006, p. 34) and *non-rigid existential dependence* [NED] (*ibid.*):

[ID] The identity of x depends on the identity of y =_{df} Necessarily, there is a function F such that it is part of the essence of x that x is the F of y .

[RED] x depends rigidly on y =_{df} necessarily, x exists only if y exists.

[NED] x depends non-rigidly on the y s =_{df} for some F , the y s are the F s and, necessarily, x exists only if there is something z such that z is an F .

With the help of these definitions, we can then construct a four-category ontology, where each category is unambiguously identified (cf. *ibid.*, p. 117) via notions that are characteristically *metaphysical*, and *not* linguistic or epistemic in nature. The identification proceeds by noting that modes are both identity-dependent and rigidly existentially dependent upon substances or objects more generally. The same conjunction of [ID] and [RED] holds between kinds and attributes, in that order. Objects, on the other hand, are

rigidly existentially dependent upon kinds, while kinds are only non-rigidly existentially dependent upon objects. In a similar fashion, [RED] and [NED] apply to the relationship between modes and attributes.

As a result of such construction, we get a system where kinds are *instantiated* by objects and attributes by modes. Kinds, on the other hand, are *characterized* by attributes and objects by modes. The dependence relations described above reveal an Aristotelian or immanent conception of universals which come in the two varieties of kinds and attributes. Particulars also are of two types, namely objects and modes. Since there are two fundamental categories of both universals and particulars, these turn out in effect to be *transcategorical* or *disjunctive* notions (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 110; 115). Nevertheless, the main point is that their foundation is properly ontological. The framework itself constitutes, of course, just one possible categorial system, but it *does* provide a very useful example of where the focus of a metaphysician should be, and how ‘first philosophy’ should be taken seriously. It is then a further issue whether the four-category framework is a plausible one, but at least disagreement on such matters focuses on properly ontological issues.

To get back to the two Ramseyan linguistic FOMPs of (i) ‘Socrates is wise’ and (ii) ‘Wisdom is a characteristic of Socrates’, we may observe that from the perspective of the four-category framework, the latter can be interpreted in two different ways. On the one hand, it can be taken as saying that Socrates is characterized by a mode of the attribute of wisdom, while on the other, it might be taken to be saying that Socrates instantiates a kind such as *philosopher* which is characterized by the attribute of wisdom. It turns out that Ramsey’s pair (i) and (ii) of linguistic FOMPs can either be *stipulated* to have the same meaning or else (ii) has to be interpreted in the context of *some specific categorial framework* like the one provided above. In the first case, nothing of significance can be inferred from the stipulated equivalence, and in the second, the interpretation has to be based on a categorial account derived independently of the subject-predicate distinction. In any case, the universal-particular distinction cannot be seen as a mere product of the misunderstanding of a purely grammatical distinction (*ibid.*, p. 113). Regarding the linguistically distracting tendencies of Quine and Ramsey, then, I would suggest that they should both be answered precisely in this way by decidedly focusing on metaphysical problems and terminology, not letting ourselves be distracted by linguistic matters having to do, for example, with the truth of holophrastic *sentences* or the *grammatical* subject-predicate distinction.

4. Categories of Being and Languages of Logic

The contrasting priorities of Quine and Lowe become very clearly visible also in connection with their expressed attitudes towards logic. Whereas for Quine (1987, p. 158), all of austere science submits pliantly to the Procrustean bed of predicate logic, for Lowe (2006, p. 63), one's *ontology* imposes constraints on what will serve as a perspicuous logical syntax in which necessary connections internal to that ontology may be reflected adequately in formal relations between propositions. [...]

(A) Problems with the Quinean approach (in addition to the ones already registered in connection with predicates, names, ontological bookkeeping and relativity):

- Paraphrase is a *symmetrical* relation (cf. Lowe, 1998, p. 8), which means that if p is paraphrasable as q , then q is also paraphrasable as p .
- Even if we accepted Quine's (1960, §53) views concerning philosophical analysis or explication, there are *inherent problems in the very idea of a canonical notation* (cf. Varzi, 2002): in choosing a particular way of explicating or regimenting a fragment of discourse, we already have to have an ontological cause to fight for.

(B) Lowe's views on the syntactical *distortions* imposed by the Frege-Russell logic, and the *remedies* of sortal logic:

- According to Lowe (2006, p. 62), modern first-order predicate logic with identity – that is, Quine's canonical notation – is patently inadequate to the representational requirements of the four-category ontology.
- Cf. formal *logic* / formal *ontology*. Lowe (2006, p. 48): “Ontology is in no sense a branch of logic. Beings, or entities, we may say, provide ontological content. But all beings also have ontological form. The ontological form of an entity is provided by its place in the system of categories...”
- Linguistic and ontic FOMPs: the representational inadequacies of the canonical notation.
- ‘*Fa*’ as a (formal / ideal) linguistic FOMP that is unable to distinguish between [...]
- These distortions can be eliminated by simple syntactical amendments to the canonical notation: (i) two different types of individual constants and variables; (ii) a sign for instantiation; (iii) a notational convention distinguishing between *occurrent* and *dispositional* predication.

5. Metaphysics after the Linguistic Turn

- The *language / world / reality* distinction...

- Cf. the definitions given in Section 3 and the possibility of interpreting them according to an *exclusively linguistic conception* of metaphysics (as having to do with certain features of a specific linguistic framework). → As a result of the linguistic turn, our understanding and articulation of this kind of position has certainly improved.

- However, holding on to metaphysics as an autonomous scientific discipline requires that we take ‘first philosophy’ seriously, and give an explicit priority to its characteristic problems and distinctive terminology. With a *world-oriented conception* of metaphysics we stand a better chance of keeping our eye on the ontic ball, and thus of consistently playing the metaphysical game.

- Within a world-oriented conception, we can also usefully integrate the role of *observations* and *empirical scientific theories* into our overall vision of the nature of metaphysical knowledge.

- Do the *language-oriented* and *exclusively linguistic* conceptions of metaphysics constitute slippery slopes towards *antimetaphysical linguisticism*? ...

- The linguistic turn focused its attention on ordinary and ideal languages. This attention resulted in improved *methods* that can be applied in the service of a world-oriented conception of metaphysics which understands the discipline as the systematic study of the most fundamental structure of reality. Both formal and ideal languages are then primarily *used* to talk about the categories of being and their formal ontological relations. This means that basically, language serves the same kind of role in metaphysics as it does in other fields of scientific inquiry.

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