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Introduction

Analytic metaphysics has come under fire from many directions under the rubric of naturalism. The irrelevance of analytic metaphysics for exploring the nature of ultimate reality is already at the level of household slogans: purportedly all it does is rest on armchair analysis consisting of linguistic intuitions. Yet analytic metaphysics even during its heyday was less uniform than the current slogans indicate. If analysis is or was the basis for its epistemology, then practice of analytic metaphysics leaves open not just how the process of analysis occurs, but also the objects of analysis themselves.

In this paper, I will consider a couple well-known debates in analytic metaphysics and explicate some of the features of their epistemology. These include Alexius Meinong's formulation of analysis and his conclusions concerning possible objects and subsistence as interpreted and supported by Roderick Chisholm in *Being and Nonbeing*; Russell's reformulation of propositional structure and his use of definite descriptions as presented and discussed by W.V.O. Quine in *On What There Is*; and trope theory proposed by D.C. Williams in *The Elements of Being* in which he substitutes the analysis of propositions which contain terms that represent the constituents of concrete objects (labeled 'abstract particulars') and their relations in place of propositions which contain terms that represent 'objects' and their relations – an approach used by Meinong and Russell. I will argue that some of these examples show some common epistemological criterion such as systematic use of conceptual simplicity or epistemic immediacy as their slogans. Yet I still maintain that the object of analysis differs. They analyze different representational systems based on their ontological commitments – not just their linguistic ones. Thus I will maintain that, like Carnap, we cannot have a uniform epistemology for metaphysics; and we cannot have a principled analysis based epistemology for all represented metaphysics.

The Fregean Influence

The analytic metaphysical tradition takes its roots from Frege's contributions of quantified predicate logic. The epistemology is unified through the practice of analysis which is a method for producing conceptual simplicity by isolating what is most fundamental in different forms of what is taken as given. The two most prevalent types of analysis in Frege's philosophy are decompositional analysis and function-argument analysis. Decompositional analysis is the process of resolving wholes into its parts. The linguistic form of this is *logical* decompositional analysis which looks analyze 'propositions' by way of their constituent terms. The more prevalent form of analysis in Frege's philosophy is function-argument analysis, which allowed him to develop quantification theory – a tool useful for mathematic as well as linguistic analysis. Function-argument structure replaces subject-predicate structure. The claims which make analytic metaphysics a metaphysical doctrine are 1) there are ontological commitments which depend specifically on the formal structure of the elements of analysis, 2) getting at the deepest structure of language (whether it be an ideal language, ordinary language, or an interpretation of ordinary language) is sufficient for getting at the deepest structure of reality, and 3) if the propositions being analyzed are accepted as true, terms which are imbedded in correctly structured propositions derive their meaning from their reference and therefore must represent some entity in reality. All the theories under discussion form a unity under these general epistemological motivations and the metaphysical toolkit provided by supposed power of the analysis of logical structure. A corresponding unity among the theories discussed is how the analysis of each representational system is *founded on* what each thinker preemptively believes to be true. The methods of analysis are reformatted accordingly. It will be shown how analytic metaphysics is a prime example of arguing for that which one already believes to be common-sense.

A Theory of Objects Beyond Being and Nonbeing

Roderick Chisholm presents and defends Meinong's theory of objects in *Beyond Being and Nonbeing.* "The fundamental theses of Meinong's theory of objects are (1) that there are objects which do not exist and (2) that objects which are such that there are *no* such objects are nonetheless constituted in some way or another and thus may be made the subject of true predication" (Chisholm, 1972). There are three main categories of objects; objects that exist, objects that do not exist but subsist, and objects which cannot be said to be at all. Objects that exist are located in space and time. Objects that subsist are not in space and time, but are taken to be no less real; i.e. the representational systems that employ their referential terms depend on those objects being taken as real. Examples include numbers in arithmetic systems as well as universals and attributes in our systems of ordinary language. Objects which are said to have no being whatsoever derive their status as objects from the ability for their referential terms to be used in meaningful ways, even though their 'being' is in no way real. Examples include golden

mountains, unicorns, and square-circles. Distinguishing this view from Platonist metaphysics may make differences in 'being' a bit sharper. A Platonist argues from "(P) Certain objects that do not exist have certain properties; and (Q) an object has properties if and only if it is real; to (R) there are real objects that do not exist." Meinong's theory accepts P as well as R but rejects Q and derives the conclusion "(S) the totality of objects extends far beyond the confines of what is merely real" (Chisholm, 1972).

Meinong's acceptance of such an unusual ontology is underwritten by his choice of ontological pursuit. Similar to all analytic metaphysical theories, simplicity is the motivating factor. Simplicity is achieved for Meinong through the analysis of what he takes to be true propositions. Every subject term in a true proposition is determined to refer to a real object. The set of all existing entities is thus referred to by the set of subject terms of his representational system. The truth of this conclusion rests on the partial transformation of an assumption mentioned above; namely that one can come to know the structure of reality through the structure of language (true propositions in this specific case). Note that both the formal structure of the proposition and the truth-value determination depend on the ontological commitments that the thinker is willing to accept as a part of his/her representational system. Meinong, following Frege, is willing to accept the reality of mathematical entities as he takes their necessary 'subsistence' is an integral part of arithmetic representational systems. The acceptance of 'objects of which it is true that there are no such objects' follows from his analytic guidelines. Because such subject terms as 'unicorn' or 'square-circle' must necessarily be meaningful terms in his representational system, and the proposition 'unicorns do not exist' is determined to be true, 'unicorns' must refer to an object – but only one which has no kind of being. Accepting such an outcome is not a motivation for Meinong, but a necessary result of his analytic metaphysics.

A Nominalist Reaction Through Definite Descriptions

In *On What There is* Quine looks to react to the problem posed by Meinong; namely that of including terms in propositions that make negative existential claims without including them in ones ontology in some way. Quine calls it the old Platonic riddle of non-being and aptly nicknames it "*Plato's beard*: historically it has been proven tough, frequently dulling the edge of Ockham's razor" (Quine, 1948/49). Quine's motivation for simplicity is obvious, for he wants to dissolve this problem. The problem arises for propositions such as "Pegasus does not exist." According to Meinong, if 'Pegasus' does not refer to an object, one is not talking about anything when he/she uses the word, and therefore it would be nonsense to even say Pegasus is not. Because the denial of Pegasus cannot be maintained, Meinong concludes that Pegasus is. To avoid this problem, Quine introduces Bertrand Russell's Theory of Definite Descriptions. Quine surely has in mind that it was Russell, whose early writings indicate that he was a proponent of Meinong's theory and was indebted to him for early success, who was

motivated by this very problem to develop the theory of definite descriptions – a theory which an important item of any analytic metaphysician's repertoire after Russell. The riddle of non-being is dissolved by representing all proper names and singular terms as singular descriptions. Expanding 'Pegasus does not exist' into 'There does not exist an x such that x is winged, is a horse, is magical, etc.' allows Quine to shift the reference from 'Pegasus' to the variable x. Note that the ontological commitment has dissolved, for reference to the variable is reference to any existing entity. The ontological commitment only arises when one states that "There exists an x such that…" where the ellipses represents a description of that variable. The use of fictive descriptions forces one to accept fictive entities into his/her ontology. Quine provides a quick refutation for those who counter with the claim that there must be a reason that certain predicates were chosen and therefore the description includes reference to non-existent objects or such things as meanings which is the same class of entity as attributes or universals. Quine's rebuttal involves simply refusing to admit meanings into his ontology, for he needs not therefore concede that terms and propositions are not meaningful.

The motivation to dissolve this problem stems from Quine's nominalism, which brings with it the epistemological and metaphysical criterion of simplicity. The unit of analysis, instead propositions in subject-predicate form analyzed through decomposition taken to be true, is a reformulated proposition – a proposition taken from ordinary language and transformed via function-argument analysis. This new structure is taken by Quine and Russell to be a more accurate representation of reality. Thus Quine famously states, "to be is to be the value of a bound variable" (Quine, 1948/49). One can know what he/she is ontologically committed to simply by what he/she asserts. Existence is thus determined in assertoric existential propositions which are taken to be proven true. It is Quine's previously held beliefs influenced by his nominalism that drives him to adopt a representational system that allows him to speak meaningfully about non-existent entities without therefore having to accept them into his ontology. By altering the method of analysis as well as the object of analysis, the supposed uniformity among analytic metaphysical theories has dissolved. The ontological commitments play more of an initial role in the determination of an adequate representational system.

Chisholm and the Propositional Attitudes

Chisholm's defense of Meinong involves a reformulation of his theory as a reaction Russell's theory of descriptions. He offers five truths in which a Russellian paraphrase would fail to adequately represent. Where Chisholm thinks that Meinong's theory fares the best is with propositional attitudes. Discussing this argument provides an opportunity to tease out the epistemology of propositional attitudes and its specific to analytic metaphysics. The statement 'John fears a ghost' appears to have a relation between John and a non-existent object. A paraphrase must refer only to 'John' and 'fears a ghost' must be a description of him. But *how* would a paraphrase adequately

contribute 'ghost' to a description of John. Surely it wouldn't be to say that John is a ghost, or John's thought is a ghost – for these are certainly false but 'John fears a ghost,' let's suppose, is true. Quine's reply to this would be simply to say that 'John fears *ghostly*,' which describes the way in which John fears and thus, describes John. Leaving this rejoinder aside, let us grant that the intentional statement 'John fears a ghost' lacks an adequate paraphrase, for maybe we are not ready to abandon the reality of meanings. Chisholm argues that function-argument analysis is not adequate to represent intentional phenomena for any proposition in intentional form. If this is actually the case, we are left with the conclusion that intentional attitudes do countenance non-existent entities, and it will be worthwhile to develop a representational system in which non-existent play a significant role.

The underlying epistemology of this theory strikes a chord with both analytic metaphysical theories discussed above. Whereas the simplicity achieved by Meinong and Quine stemmed from their analysis of the structure of propositions which carried with them ontological commitments, Chisholm's simplicity is achieved by analyzing intentional propositions in which the fundamental elements are attitudes or beliefs that have been formalized into a new representational system. The objects of analysis are now the objects of beliefs. How we should determine what entities we accept is a product of the assumption that thought processes are immediate and inherently meaningful. That 'John fears a ghost' is taken to be immediately true to John (at least), and formalizing this belief into a representational system allows for the analysis and seeming explanation of different beliefs and attitudes John has. The analysis of intentional attitudes may allow for an (metaphorical) explanation of the beliefs, actions, and desires that John has; but that intentional propositions carry with them existential determinations is certainly controversial. The reification of all subject terms that we saw in Meinong has taken on a new form in Chisholm – instead of analyzing propositions that have been determined to be true, Chisholm is now analyzing intentional propositions that are taken to be immediate and inherently true. The underlying assumption, again, is that a true proposition (in which its imbedded terms get their meaning from their reference) must represent reality in a meaningful way.

Trope Theory: Finding the True Elements of Being

Trope theory, developed by D.C. Williams, is another theory that is developed in the analytic tradition and looks to solve a similar problem to the ones we have seen above; i.e., seemingly referencing abstract entities without admitting them into one's ontology. D.C. Williams develops a representational system in which terms refer not concrete objects as wholes, but the qualities of concrete objects as they appear to the senses. This metaphysical theory argues that the true 'elements of being' are just those qualities that are perceptible. Assuming that one accepts only the existence of material bodies, there is a seeming problem of how one comes to know these material bodies and how one discusses them and relates them according to their perceptible qualities. The problem is

that one who is unwilling to accept universals or attributes is left with the difficult task of relating e.g. the color of one object with the color of another; for it is intuitively obvious that both objects which have been covered with paint from the same can have the same color. The problem is that accepting colors into one's ontology is accepting abstract universals.

Williams certainly does not wish to accept abstract universals (in the normal sense of abstract), so he develops a theory of abstract particulars. Abstract here is meant as simply *partial, incomplete, or fragmentary*. Examples of tropes are the color of an individual material entity, the wisdom of Socrates, the posture of a person, or the sweetness of piece of chocolate. The color of a different material entity would be a different trope and the same with the wisdom of Solon, etc. Relating the properties of individuals has now been taken to the level of their individual tropes. Socrates and Solon are similar insofar as their wisdom tropes are similar. Concrete particulars are thus constituted from their abstract particulars. These abstract particulars, as it is argued, are actually the true elements of being. Accepting the existence of independent concrete particulars is not unusual, but, according to Williams,

> …to claim primacy for our knowledge of concrete things is 'mysticism' in the strict sense, that is, a claim to such acquaintance with a plethoric being as no conceivable stroke of psychophysics could account for. What we primarily see of the moon, for example, is its shape and color and not at all its whole concrete bulk. If now we impute to it a solidity and an aridity, we do it item by item quite as we impute wheels to a clock or a stomach to a worm.
>
> (Williams, 1953)

This proposed theory has plenty of intricacies and metaphysically interesting facets, but for the purpose of this discussion, all is needed to recognize that this theory is similarly motivated by ontological commitments and the constructed according to the strictures of its logical formalization. We have seen that the logical analysis of true proposition may lead one to think that ontological commitments follow. We have also seen that the method of analysis and objects of that analysis change according to acceptable ontological commitments. In this case, there is a problem of the relation between perceptible properties that take the form of color terms in a representational system. Seemingly, to relate color terms is to relate entities. Williams argues that one not need to countenance abstract color universals for propositions which include color terms to be meaningful. One *is* referencing colors, but only individual colors. The question of whether or not the process led from a metaphysical thesis to its formalization – in which color terms can have adequate reference; or from the recognition that terms that seem to reference universals is problematic to altering the reference of color terms to abstract particulars and thus being lead into a metaphysical theory in which those terms

have a proper counterpart in reality, is left open. The development of this paper emphasizes the latter.

Concluding Remarks

It has been shown that the tradition of analytic metaphysics emphasized the advantages of achieving simplicity through their methods of analysis. It was proposed by Wittgenstein in the early 20th Century that all philosophical problems are problems of language. Because the stripping the exterior of any language leaves one with an artificial formal language, all problems of philosophy can be resolved by analyzing those formal languages. But we have seen that there are many methods of analyzing these formal languages. There are also many ways in which a formal language can represent. There is a glaring problem that relying on simplicity through analysis leaves us; i.e., this purported unity and simplicity diffuses according to proposed representational systems. How is one to relate Meinong's representational system which is laden with terms that refer to a myriad of objects to Quine's representational system which has had a close shave by Ockham's razor? How do we address more recent theories such as Williams' trope theory?

Rudolph Carnap proposed the idea that developing frameworks is the most crucial project in philosophy. He distinguishes between questions that are internal and external to conceptual frameworks. Questions internal to the framework are trivially true, for to ask e.g. 'are there abstract objects?' internal to Meinong's theory would be necessarily true. Questions external to frameworks are meaningless, for the ask Meinong's representational system to answer the question "But are there *really* abstract objects" cannot be approached but through the system itself. Therefore, it must be maintained that the types of questions asked, the foundational epistemology, metaphysically relevant conclusions must only be approached from within the framework itself and according to ontological commitments that one is willing to accept. Perhaps this is not enough to raise metaphysics or epistemology into a 'first philosophy,' but it is still a worthwhile activity. The exploration of the relationship between representational frameworks' existential commitments establishes historical continuity in the discipline of philosophical metaphysics. For what else was the early modern study by classical empiricists (Locke) and rationalists (Descartes) then the exploration and development of the metaphysical possibilities and ramifications of different versions of the 'new' theory of ideas – not to mention its center piece, the new geometry?

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