Existence, Fundamentality, and the Scope of Ontology

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Abstract

A traditional conception of ontology takes existence to be its proprietary subject matter—ontology is the study of what exists (§ 1). Recently, Jonathan Schaffer has argued that ontology is better thought of rather as the study of what is basic or fundamental in reality (§ 2). My goal here is twofold. First, I want to argue that while Schaffer's characterization is quite plausible for some ontological questions, for others it is not (§ 3). More importantly, I want to offer a unified characterization of ontology that covers both existence and fundamentality questions (§§ 4-5).

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1. Ontology as the Study of Existence

Textbook presentations of what ontology is virtually always characterize it in terms of existence questions. This is true of both 'classic' and more recent presentations. Recall the opening sentences of Quine's (1948: 21) "On What There Is":

> A curious thing about the ontological problem is its simplicity. It can be put in three Anglo-Saxon monosyllables: 'What is there?'

More recent presentations by leading metaphysicians agree in essence. Here is van Inwagen (1998: 16):

One very important part of metaphysics has to do with what there is, with what exists. This part of metaphysics is called ontology. Ontology, that is, is the part of metaphysics that deals with metaphysical statements having general form like 'An X exists' and 'There are Ys'.

And here is Sider (2007: 4):

Thus, we have very general ontological questions (existence questions) about objects… Other ontological questions include the question discussed above of whether properties exist, the question of whether numbers exist, and even the 'metaontological' question of what it means to investigate whether objects of a certain sort 'really' exist.

On this view, the goal of ontology is to produce a list of all things, in the broadest possible sense of 'thing'—all entities, all quantifiabilia, all ontoids.

The thesis that the subject matter of ontology is existence is thus quite entrenched. One question is what sort of thesis it is supposed to be. It *could* be construed as a *stipulative* statement about how the term 'ontology' is to be used. Typically, however, it is meant as a *substantive* claim. One substantive interpretation of it might be as a *sociological* claim: that people calling themselves ontologists tend to work on existence questions. But again, the thesis seems meant as more interesting than that. The idea rather seems to be that there is a class of questions that seem to belong together—a 'natural' class of questions[1]—and that the deep commonality among those is that they concern existence. It is something like this claim that Schaffer (2009) has recently contested.

2. Ontology as the Study of Fundamentality

According to Schaffer, a closer examination of the relevant natural class of questions reveals that the deep underlying commonality among them pertains not to existence but to basicness or fundamentality.

Consider nominalism about properties. It is possible to interpret nominalists as not really denying the very existence of properties. After all, they do not deny that there are *ways* concrete particulars are—that the table is rectangular, is brown, is wooden, and so on. Rather, what they deny the existence of are certain abstract objects (universals) that some identify properties with. Instead, nominalists claim that the table's rectangularity consists in its belonging to a specific class or collection of exactly resembling concrete particulars; that the table is brown *in virtue of* belonging to another collection of exactly resembling concrete particulars; and so on.[2] That is, they insist that properties are *nothing but* collections of particulars—that a thing's having a property is *grounded* in its

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[1] Here the notion of 'naturalness' is that developed to handle various forms of (alleged) semantic indeterminacy—the notion worked out (e.g.) by Lewis (1984) and Sider (2011).
[2] Two comments are in order here. First, one way of understanding what a 'collection' is casts is as an abstract entity as well, though not a universal but a set. However, there are ways of construing 'collection' so that it is not abstract—say, if one used it the way the notion of 'plurality' is used in mereology. Secondly, I am focusing here on so-called resemblance nominalism; there are other versions, of course. Also, in most versions of nominalism the set is taken to include all *possible* exactly resembling particulars, not just all *actual* ones.

membership in such a collection.[3] The view, so understood, is that there *are* properties, but their existence is grounded in that of particulars, which are therefore the more fundamental entities.

Schaffer's claim is that this diagnosis applies generally to ontological debates. Nominalism in mathematics is better understood not as the claim that there are no numbers, but as the claim that numbers are grounded more fundamental entities (perhaps collections of collections of particulars—3, for example, is but the collection of all three-object collections).[4] The bundle theory of objects is better thought of not as denying the existence of objects but as grounding it in sets of co-instantiated properties, while the trope bundle theory grounds objects in sets of compresent tropes. Conceptualism about properties or numbers is the claim that properties or numbers are grounded in ideas, or idea types, in the minds of suitably engaged subjects. In general (2009: 347):

> Metaphysics so revived does not bother asking whether properties, meanings, and numbers exist. Of course they do! The question is whether or not they are fundamental.

On this conception, the goal of metaphysics is not to produce a list of all entities. Rather, it is to identify the *ungrounded grounders* of reality: the primitive entities that do not exist in virtue of—are not grounded in—any other entities, but instead serve to ground the existence of others.[5]

Schaffer's case for this is threefold. First, he outlines an induction from several central ontological debates. Secondly, he argues that existence questions are trivial whereas fundamentality questions are nontrivial. Thirdly, he argues that the methodology standardly used to resolve ontological disputes cannot answer existence questions without also answering fundamentality questions. I will not rehearse the entire case here, but it is worth pausing to appreciate the second consideration (regarding triviality). Schaffer (2009: 357-9) notes that there are straightforward, indeed all too facile, arguments for the existence of numbers, properties, composite particulars, and fictional objects. We can reason that since there are prime numbers greater than 7, there are numbers; that since there are properties that people share, there are properties; and so on. The only nontrivial questions in the area are whether numbers, properties, composites, and ficta are fundamental and ungrounded or on the contrary grounded in other entities.

One compelling feature of the fundamentality conception of ontology is that it makes sense of central modes of argumentation in ontological texts.[6] There are many examples of this, but perhaps the clearest pertains to the role of indispensability arguments in contemporary ontology, starting from Quine's

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[3] Here the notion of grounding is construed as the antisymmetric relation canonically designated by the 'in virtue of' location—the kind of notion worked by Fine (2001), Sider (2011), and others.

[4] For details of how this might work, see Maddy (1980).

[5] It is conceivable, though somewhat improbable, that there should be ungrounded entities that do not in turn ground any others. Identifying those would be part of ontology's task as well.

[6] This too is a reasoning pertaining to the methodological underpinnings of ontology, but it is not the methodological argument Schaffer presents. Schaffer's argument is rather than the standard Quinean approach to resolving ontological disputes implies pervasive appeal to fundamentality considerations.

(1948) and Putnam's (1956) argument for mathematical entities. The claim is that we ought to believe in numbers because citing them is explanatorily and/or predictively indispensable to our best theory of the world. Setting aside wider issues regarding the epistemic status and merit of such arguments, observe that they can only be used to establish the existence of *fundamental* entities. Non-fundamental, grounded, 'derivative' entities could not be 'detected' by the indispensability test, since all the explanatory/predictive work they do is already done by the entities that ground them.[7]

It may be claimed that the most important mode of ontological argumentation—namely, from parsimony—tests for existence rather than fundamentality. Schaffer (2009: 361) rejects this, however, claiming that of the various parsimony principles we might wield in ontological debates, the most important is not "Do not multiply entities without necessity" but "Do not multiply *basic* entities without necessity." This is because the multiplication of merely derivative entities is ontologically innocuous, since such entities are an ontological 'free lunch'. This is not the place to consider whether non-basic entities are indeed ontologically gratis—that would take us too far afield. But note that *if* they are, and *if* the relevant parsimony principle is the one Schaffer cites, *then* certainly parsimony tests for basicness rather than existence.

3. Existence Again

Schaffer's treatment of ontology may be quite plausible for many typical ontological debates. But to some it does not apply very smoothly. When Romans came to believe that the frequency of rain did not depend on the whims of Jupiter, and in fact Jupiter did not exist, their new view was emphatically not that Jupiter turns out to supervene upon, or be grounded in, the chemical processes leading to rain. When as children we were told that there are no ghosts and no monsters, and that Santa Claus does not exist, again the news our parents broke to us was not about grounding and fundamentality. Likewise, when early modern scientists came to believe that the best explanation of life does not appeal to *élans vitals*, that the best explanation of disease does not appeal to miasma, and that the best explanation of combustion does not appeal to phlogiston, their ensuing beliefs were that there existed no *élans vitals*, miasma, or phlogiston—not that these putative entities turn out to be 'derivative'. Thus ontological claims about Jupiter, Santa Claus, ghosts, *élans vitals*, miasma, and phlogiston are very hard to interpret as claims about fundamentality; much more plausibly, they are claims about what they seem to be about—existence.

Some of these claims are not typically made by self-styled ontologists. But there are a host of debates in which self-styled ontologists do make claims that seem to belong to the same natural class of claims. Perhaps the clearest case is the debate over the existence of God. Atheists do *not* maintain that God trivially exists but is grounded in a certain collection or combination of ungodly entities.[8] They hold that God's ontological status is the same as that of ghosts and mias-

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[7] For example, the conceptualist would have to admit that the relevant ideas explanatorily preempt mathematical entities, rendering them dispensable. Yet this conceptualist need not deny the existence of mathematical entities because of that—only their fundamentality.

[8] An objection from Schaffer will be considered at the end of this section.

ma. Part of the reason for this is that, arguably, the very notion of God, or even *a* god, as existing in virtue of some ungodly, naturalistically kosher entities—subatomic particles, say—may be incoherent. Arguably, it is part of the *very notion* of God (and of a god) that He (it) somehow transcends the natural world. This is why Spinoza seems to us to *change the topic* in his pantheistic defense of God, and why Meletus in the *Apology* claims that Socrates denies the godly status of the sun and moon on the grounds that Socrates (allegedly) claims they are made of stone and earth (respectively).

This sort of 'conceptual' consideration—a consideration to do with the *very notion* of some putative existent—is almost universally appealed to by eliminativists in various areas. In the indented quote above, Schaffer mentions three putative entities whose existence is trivial: properties, meanings, and numbers. We have seen above that there are reasonably plausible ways of recasting ontologically skeptical claims about properties and numbers as claims about fundamentality rather than existence. However, the case of meanings is trickier. Ontological skeptics about meaning are often explicitly eliminativists—see Stich (1983) and Schiffer (1987)—and not merely due to confusion on their part regarding the real insight behind their reasoning. Such Eliminativists argue that there are two features that are (i) essential to meanings but (ii) nothing instantiates simultaneously. First, it is part of the very notion of meaning that meaning determines reference. Secondly, it is part of the same notion that meaning governs (the right) behavior. The meaning eliminativists argue that certain considerations about the nature of causation and relational properties suggest that nothing can have *both* these properties. So upon closer examination, the very notion of meaning entails, against the background of the relevant considerations about causation and relational properties, that there are no meanings.

The philosophy of mind has involved several ontological debates that concern existence questions proper—questions that, again, do not easily support reinterpretation as fundamentality questions. Opponents of Cartesian dualism genuinely deny the existence of an immortal soul; they do not simply argue that such a soul is grounded in brain processes. Eliminative materialists extend the same treatment to the mental at large. Part of their argument is that the dualist is right to deny the reducibility (or grounding) of the mental. Again, the reason for this is often partly conceptual: the *very notion* of the mental is claimed to involve features that nothing in fact exhibits. Rorty (1965), for example, argues that the mental is by definition private, but since nothing is in fact private in the relevant sense, nothing is mental. This is different from claiming that the mental is nothing but the cerebral. In fact, it involves using the principle of identity of indiscernibles to deny any such reduction or grounding claim: the mental is by definition F (private) whereas the cerebral is not-F.

In the background of many contemporary ontological debates in philosophy of mind and other areas is a commitment to a naturalistic worldview. It is this commitment that produces much of the dialectical pressure against souls, God, ghosts, etc. Yet this very commitment is best understood in terms of the denial of the very existence, and not just fundamentality, of certain entities—namely, supernatural entities.

I conclude that while for some existence questions there is a reasonably plausible interpretation that casts them as targeting fundamentality (numbers and properties being perhaps good examples), for many there is not (God, meaning, mind, and naturalism *inter alia*). This appears to undermine Schaffer's

inductive support for the fundamentality conception of ontology. Furthermore, while some ontological methods (e.g., the appeal to indispensability) fit well in a fundamentality conception, it is not clear how that conception accommodates the role of conceptual analysis; whereas, as suggested above and argued more fully in the next section, a more inclusive conception of ontology might.

This leaves the issue of triviality. Recall that Schaffer's case for the fundamentality conception relied in part on the ready availability of 'trivial inferences' for existence (e.g., the inference from "There are prime numbers greater than 7" to "There are numbers"). In fact, suggests Schaffer, such inferences are available in virtually every ontological dispute. Discussing the debate over the existence of God, Schaffer (2009: 359) remarks: "I think even this is a trivial yes (and I am an atheist). The atheistic view is that God is a fictional character." What makes this 'a trivial yes', according to Schaffer, is that there are trivial inferences to the existence of ficta—e.g., an inference from "There are several existentially disoriented (fictional) characters in Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*" to "There are (fictional) characters." Similar moves could be made for meaning, mind, etc. The fundamentality conception might be thus defended on the grounds that such trivial inferences demonstrate the triviality of existence questions. Since ontological questions are often nontrivial, they must concern something other than existence after all.[9]

My response has two parts. First an impression: the treatment of the ontological question surrounding God as not an existence question simply feels much less natural, and much more forced, than the parallel treatment of the ontological questions surrounding properties and numbers. On the face of it, the debate over God's existence is in the main *not* a debate over the existence of a fictional character. On the contrary, it is precisely a debate over whether God is fictional or not (read: real or unreal). Theists believe that God is no more fictional than Napoleon—both make an appearance in various texts, including works of fiction, but both exist text-independently. By contrast, atheists, often motivated by naturalistic considerations, believe that there is no God *period*—the whole thing is a piece of fiction.[10] Furthermore, if we accept the trivial inference to the existence of ficta, then anything we conceive of automatically comes to exist—as a fictional object.[11] This is a remarkable power for us to have. It is also a limitless power: since we can conceive of impossible objects, those exist as well. (Consider: "There are some seriously cool impossible objects in M.C. Escher's paintings," therefore "There are impossible objects.") The first part of my response is simply to record the impression that something feels forced and unnatural about the interpretation of certain ontological questions as fundamentality rather than existence questions (through appeal to these trivial inferences)—while for other ontological questions that interpretation feels illuminating and instructive.[12]

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[9] Thanks to Jonathan Schaffer for pressing me on this.

[10] The view that God exists *as* a fictional character is of course an epistemically possible option (as Schaffer notes, atheists are not committed to rejecting fictional characters), but there is nothing *trivial* about the view that this is a coherent view.

[11] Thanks to Carolina Sartorio for drawing my attention to this.

[12] It should also be noted that just as there are forced moves that can remove existence from the second group, so there are artificial moves that can remove fundamentality from the first group. Schaffer (2009: 365) considers such a move, one that packs information

The second part of my response is to infer that there appears to be some underlying dissimilarity among two types of ontological question here. Recall the status of the thesis that fundamentality rather than existence is the proper subject matter of ontology: it is not a stipulation and not a sociological claim, but a claim about an underlying deep commonality among ontological questions. The discussion in this section seems to suggest that there is no immediate commonality to begin with. There are, in fact, two very different types of ontological questions: those which can be reinterpreted as concerning fundamentality only through the use of 'trivial inferences', and those for which such interpretation does not rely *only* on those inferences. Once we conceive of ontological questions as dividing into (at bottom) two separate and quite different varieties, it is extremely natural to conceive of one variety as *fundamentality* questions and the other as *existence* questions. It is probably *coherent* to treat them as two different types of fundamentality question, or for that matter two different types of existence question, but there is little point in doing so.

4. Toward an Inclusive Approach

The philosophy of mind is a particularly instructive area, since debates between reductivists and eliminativists have often been explicit. The reductive materialist countenances the mental but denies the dualist view that it is fundamental; on the contrary, she claims that mental facts are grounded in (hold in virtue of) physical facts. The eliminative materialist takes herself to say something stronger: that there are no mental facts. The debate can be appreciated through a simple inconsistent triad of antecedently plausible theses:

(1) The mental is not physical.
(2) Something is mental.
(3) Everything is physical.

Accordingly, there are three main positions in the debate: reductive materialism denies only (1) in this triad, eliminative materialism denies only (2), and dualism only (3). (So-called nonreductive materialism is based on separating the cases of tokens and types, or states and properties, rejecting (1) for the tokens/states and (3) for types/properties.)

My suggestion is that such a triad characterizes all typical ontological debates. In such a triad, there is always a reductive option, an eliminative option, and a primitivist option. Consider the ontology of objects:

(1) Objects are more than just bundles of properties.
(2) There are objects.
(3) Everything is 'made up of' (grounded in) properties.

In his discussion of different versions of the bundle theory, Van Cleve (1985) ends with an articulation of an eliminative version that denies the existence of

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about grounding into the description of putative entities. For example, instead of asking whether numbers exist (a simple existence question) or whether numbers are fundamental (a fundamentality question), we can ask whether fundamental (i.e., ungrounded) numbers exist (a sophisticated existence question). Schaffer offers two responses, but neither contests the feasibility of such a move, only the lessons we might want to draw from it.

objects altogether, *replacing* them with property bundles rather than *reducing* them thereto. The standard versions he discusses, however, are clearly reductive. These versions deny only (1) in the above triad. The more radical version he finally articulates denies only (2). More realist approaches to objects that posit them as fundamental existents deny only (3): they are primitivist about objects.

Similar treatments can be given to other central ontological debates. The debate over properties could be understood in terms of the following triad:

(1) Properties are more than just collections of particulars.
(2) There are properties.
(3) Everything is grounded in particulars.

The reductive nominalist denies (1), the eliminative nominalist denies (2), and the proponent of universals (the 'realist') is a primitivist who denies (3). Likewise for numbers:

(1) Numbers are irreducible to (collections of) collections of particulars.
(2) There are numbers.
(3) Everything is grounded in particulars.

At the same time, the debate over the existence of God can be framed in the same way:

(1) God is not grounded in natural phenomena.
(2) God exists.
(3) Natural phenomena exhaust reality.

Schaffer's view that God exists as a fictional character would involve rejecting (1) here. The more standard atheist view involves rejecting (2). The theist view rejects (3).

The same treatment applies to ontological debates not discussed above. Debates on color tend to be torn between a variety of potential reductions (to reflective and refractive properties, dispositions to elicit experiences, categorical bases of such dispositions, etc.), denial of the very existence of colors (e.g., Maund 1995), and a primitivism about colors (e.g., Campbell 1993). Debates over causation involve a choice between Humean reduction to (broadly speaking) regularity relations (Lewis 1973), denying the very existence of causation (Russell 1913), and primitivist approaches that embrace a 'secret connexion' (Strawson 1989). Likewise, in addition to various reductive treatments of events (in terms of property exemplifications, trope pairs, etc.), there is the option of denying the existence of events altogether (Horgan 1978) or posit them as fundamental (Davidson 1967). Many other illustrations are possible.

In some cases, this way of organizing a debate may be *instructive*. For some contemporary debates have fragmented into several sub-debates concerned with different facets of the same subject matter. Thus, mereological debates revolve around (i) the scope of composition or (ii) whether composition is identity. But they could also be reunified through the following triad:

(1) Composites are not identical to fusions of simples.
(2) There are composites.
(3) Everything exists in virtue of the simples.

Mereological non-nihilists (universalists and restrictivists) who deny that composition is identity reject only (1) in this triad; non-nihilists who maintain that composition is identity reject only (3); nihilists reject only (2).[13]

In all these triads, two types of entity are involved. One type concerns the entity in whose ontological status we are interested—the subject matter of the relevant debate. (This is the entity that shows up in the first and second propositions.) The other type of entity is one tentatively designated as fundamental, at least *more* fundamental—the type of entity that might potentially ground our subject matter. (This entity shows up in the first and third propositions.) The general form is thus as follows:

(1) E is not grounded in $E_1,\ldots,E_n$.
(2) There exists E.
(3) Everything is grounded in $E_1,\ldots,E_n$.

Call this the *generalized triad* for ontology. My claim is that every ontological dispute can be represented by an instance of the generalized triad. The ontological debate forces on us a choice between grounding the subject matter, eliminating it, or positing it as ungrounded primitive.

It might be objected that I have run together a number of different ontological relations: grounding, reduction, identity, in-virtue-of, nothing-but, nothing-over-and-above, etc. In response, I plead guilty. My view is that the interrelations among all these notions is at present totally unclear, but the natural resemblance among them is clear. Accordingly, we can consider that there is a generic relation of ontological dependence of which they are all species. I entreat the reader to read the various expressions used above as informal glosses on ontological dependence. The generalized triad for ontology should forsooth be framed as follows:

(1) E is not ontologically dependent upon $E_1,\ldots,E_n$.
(2) There exists E.
(3) Everything is ontologically dependent upon $E_1,\ldots,E_n$.

A full development of this would require an account of the ontological dependence cited in (1) and (3), but also of the existence cited in (2).

5. The Scope of Ontology

With this general characterization at hand, we can put in place an idealized (and doubtless somewhat simplified) procedure for generating coherent and stable ontological theories. To a first approximation, the procedure is this. In Step 1, we produce a comprehensive inventory of *putative* entities. In Step 2, we feed each item in this inventory into the generalized triad just described, with that item serving as a substitution instance of E and all other items functioning as $E_1,\ldots,E_n$; Going through each of these triads, we attempt to establish which values of E are such that the primitivist position is the most plausible for them. This produces a first outcome: a list of all ontological primitives. That is, it divides the set of all putative entities into two subsets: the primitive ones and the non-primitive ones. Moving now to Stage 3, we feed each member of the non-

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[13] This does leave a further question of how to choose between universalism and restrictivism as two different kinds of anti-nihilism.

primitive subset into a new triad in which $E_1,...,E_n$ are given by the members of the primitive subset; here we attempt to establish which values of E are such that reductivism is more plausible than eliminativism for them. This produces a second outcome: a list of all 'ontological derivatives'. That is, it divides the non-primitive subset into two further subsets: the derivative ones and the non-existent ones. The overall outcome is a structure that divides all putative entities into three classes. We might describe this structure as $(S_1,(S_2,S_3))$, where S_1 = the set of all ontological primitives, S_2 = the set of all ontological derivatives, and S_3 = the set of all *mere putatives*.[14]

As noted, this is only a first approximation. Various complications arise that make the procedure messier. One complication concerns guidelines for and constraints on what makes it into the initial list of putative types of entity. A deeper challenge concerns how reality as a whole is to be carved into putative entities (and entity types) to begin with. A third issue concerns the relationships between determinable entity types and their determinates within the overall structure. These complications, and others, underline the status of the procedure as (over)simplified and idealized.

Still, the basic idea here is that all typical ontological disputes involve a choice among a reductive, an eliminative, and a primitivist option. The important feature of the procedure, for present purposes, is that it addresses both existence and fundamentality questions: it involves both a choice between eliminativism and non-eliminativism and a choice between reductivism and non-reductivism (primitivism). With this in mind, call this the 'inclusive conception of ontology'. Put in terms of natural classes of questions, the present thesis is simply this: there is a class of questions that seem to belong together 'naturally', such that the deep, underlying commonality among them is that they concern choice between a reductive, an eliminative, and a primitivist take on some putative entity.

Note that both the existence and fundamentality conceptions construe ontological questions as demanding a choice between *two* options: 'exists' or 'does not exist' in one case, 'is basic' or 'is grounded' in the other. The inclusive framework suggested here demands a choice among *three* options: 'exists fundamentally', 'exists non-fundamentally', and 'does not exist'. There is no way, nor need, to insist on factorizing this into several two-option ontological questions. The three-option questions address *both* existence and fundamentality. Thus what the inclusive conception contends is that there is a natural class of three-option forced-choice questions that collectively delimit the domain of ontological inquiry.

In considering Schaffer's case for the fundamentality conception, I have focused on triviality considerations and methodological considerations. Having discussed triviality in §3, let me end with a methodological consideration. I want to agree that some methods of ontology go to the choice between reductivism and primitivism—including, as we have seen, the appeal to indispensability arguments. Other methods, however, seem to go to the choice between reductiv-

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[14] Presenting this procedure has the unfortunate feature that we are quantifying over non-existents. Arguably, however, any kind of ontological theorizing has to start with *putative* existents, and would thereby be forced to speak of what may potentially turn out to be non-existents.

ism and *eliminativism*. In particular, this appears to be the central role of *conceptual analysis* in ontological debates.

Recall that the main eliminativist move in the debates considered in §3 was to argue that the very notion of *x* (say, God) is such as to exclude its grounding in the *y*s (say, subatomic particles). The only way to substantiate such claims about what flows from the very notion of an *x* is through conceptual analysis. This is precisely the role conceptual analysis is accorded by Frank Jackson (1998), through his 'entry by entailment' thesis: conceptual analysis helps us find a place ('location') in the world for non-fundamental entities. It does so by identifying analytic conditionals whose antecedents use exclusively terms for fundamental entities but whose consequents also use terms for non-fundamental entities. The goal of conceptual analysis is to determine whether such conditionals exist. If for some *x* they do not, eliminativism about *x* recommends itself.[15] If they do, reductivism does. This is not the point to launch a defense of conceptual analysis so characterized. My present point is simply this: the fundamentality conception makes no room for conceptual analysis in ontological methodology; the inclusive conception does. (Doubtless this will be seen by some as a *strength* of the fundamentality conception, but for those of us who take conceptual analysis to be a genuine and central part of legitimate ontological theorizing, this recommends adopting the inclusive conception.)

Conclusion

Schaffer's critique of the existence conception of ontology strikes me as overdue: in many areas of ontology, the central choice is between a reductive and a primitivist account of a certain putative entity. The existence of that entity is not really in question. Limiting ontology to existence questions would leave an enormous blindspot at the heart of the discipline. At the same time, moving away altogether from existence to fundamentality questions also misrepresents the structure of ontological debates. A correct conception of ontological debates, I have suggested, would be more inclusive. For such debates are typically three-dimensional and involve choosing at once among three options, not two: a reductive or grounding option, an eliminative option, and a nonreductive or primitivist option.[16]

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[15] In some rarer contexts, conceptual analysis may combine with other assumptions to produce a *prima facie* case for primitivism. If an ontologist has independent reasons to believe in entity E, but there are no analytical conditionals from recognized primitives to E, then that ontologist will have obtained a *prima facie* reason to be a primitivist about E. Granted, though, in this case some other considerations must conspire with conceptual analysis, namely, those that make the ontologist fairly certain of E's existence to begin with.

[16] For comments on a previous draft, I would like to thank Carolina Sartorio and Jonathan Schaffer.

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