**Easy Ontology and its Consequences**

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While Stephen Schiffer is best known for his work in the theory of meaning, his recent work in developing a pleonastic account of propositions (and other entities) also leads to major, game-changing results in both first-order ontology and meta-ontology. This paper aims to clarify what these consequences are and why they are so important.

Over the past several decades, there has been a great resurgence in debates about what exists. Quine was thought to have defeated Carnap and eliminated the threat of positivism, and a euphoric period of serious metaphysics has followed, in which debates about the existence of various entities have proliferated—encompassing not only traditional debates about the existence of God or free will, but new debates about whether common sense entities such as persons or artefacts exist, as well as debates about whether philosophical entities such as propositions, states of affairs, temporal parts, or mereological sums exist. Participants in these debates typically assume that their disputes are substantive, and insist that they cannot be addressed by conceptual or linguistic means. Yet they also deny that they can be resolved by straightforward empirical means—making them questions for philosophers, not scientists. Call ‘serious ontology’ the view that assumes that there are existence questions of this nature—which cannot be resolved either by linguistic/conceptual nor empirical means, and so are (in Theodore Sider’s words) ‘epistemically metaphysical’ (2011, 87).

In my view, the biggest threat to this metaphysical party comes from a view I have elsewhere called the ‘easy’ approach to ontology—a view prominently developed in Schiffer’s arguments for ‘pleonastic’ propositions, properties, fictional characters, states and events (1994, 1996, 2003). An earlier, and more localized, version of the approach appears in the neo-Fregean’s arguments for the existence of numbers (Wright 1983, Hale and Wright 2001, 2009). Taking off from Schiffer’s work, I have also made use of the approach in my arguments for fictional characters, social and cultural objects, and ordinary objects such as tables and chairs. Although details differ, the basic idea shared by these views is that questions about the existence of certain entities may be easily answered by trivial inferences from undisputed truths. So, for example, we may begin from the undisputed truth that this shirt is red, infer that the shirt has the property of redness, and so conclude that there is a property (namely, redness), answering the ontological question about the existence of properties.

I will begin by drawing out these three different forms of easy ontology, showing their interrelations, and then go on to discuss their consequences. In its initial development the approach was largely aimed at solving non-metaphysical problems: Hale and Wright were concerned largely with epistemic problems about our knowledge of mathematical and other abstract entities, while Schiffer applied the approach to address problems within the theory of meaning. But the approach also has major consequences for both ontology and meta-ontology. Where first-order ontology is concerned, the approach generally leads us to positive answers to the disputed existence questions, leading us to accept that numbers, propositions, properties, etc. exist. Both defenders and critics of the approach often assume that the entities we come to accept on the basis of trivial inferences are in some sense ‘cheap’ or ‘lightweight’, or that the existence claims should be taken as somehow deflated. I will argue, however, that this is a mistake: that the proper way of reading the first-order outcome of easy arguments is as giving us a straightforward, out and out realism about the entities in question. (Nonetheless, there remain differences between this realism and classical Platonist views).

Perhaps even more significant than the first-order consequences, however, are the consequences such an approach has at the meta-ontological level. For wherever debates about existence may be resolved so easily, serious ontologist’s endless debates about the subject must be confused, out of place. Thus the view leads to the conclusion that something is wrong with the serious ontological debates that have dominated metaphysics after Quine—not because the disputants are talking past each other or speaking nonsense, or because the questions have no answers, but rather because the questions can be so straightforwardly answered. I will close by arguing that while the approach may be the most important threat to serious metaphysics, it is also extremely promising as a way of dissolving mysteries and clarifying the epistemology of metaphysics.

1. **Three forms of easy ontology**

The idea that certain ontological debates may be easily resolved by way of trivial inferences from uncontroversial truths is familiar from certain debates in recent metaphysics—prominently, debates about numbers (Wright 1983, Hale and Wright 2001, 2009) and propositions (Schiffer 1994, 2003). But it is only recently that these diverse uses of trivial inferences have come to be seen as parts of a unified approach to ontological questions.[[1]](#footnote-1) As it has come to be recognized as a general approach, interest in and sympathy for the idea that existence questions may be answered easily has slowly been growing. Even many serious metaphysicians including Kit Fine, Ross Cameron, and Jonathan Schaffer, have begun to accept that existence questions, asked in ordinary English, may be answered easily in much the way that the deflationist suggests, and that as a result metaphysics must turn its attention to other issues.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The view has been developed in distinct ways by neo-Fregeans in philosophy of mathematics, by Schiffer in his discussions of various pleonastic entities, and by myself in defence of ordinary objects. In the philosophy of mathematics, neo-Fregeans (Wright 1983, Hale 1988, Hale and Wright 2001, 2009) have argued that the existence of numbers can be inferred from an uncontroversial truth that begins by making no use of the number concept, by simply making use of a conceptual truth (Hume’s principle: The number of ns=the number of ms iff the ns and the ms are equinumerous). So, for example, we may argue as follows:

Uncontroversial truth: The cups and the saucers are equinumerous

Conceptual truth: The number of ns=the number of ms iff the ns and the ms are equinumerous

Derived claim:[[3]](#footnote-3) The number of cups=the number of saucers

But since the derived claim is a true identity claim, they hold, we are entitled to conclude that the terms in it (‘the number of cups’ and ‘the number of saucers’) refer, and so that there are numbers. Thus we get a resolution to an ancient ontological problem by starting from an uncontroversial truth that does not make use of the disputed concept <number> or make reference to the disputed entities (numbers) at all.

The most important work in developing an easy route to answering various existence questions has been undertaken by Schiffer (1994, 1996, 2003), who also broadens the target entities to which it is applied, including such entities as propositions, properties, events, states, and fictional characters. In Schiffer’s terms, we can begin with undisputed truths, and then engage in pleonastic ‘something from nothing’ inferences, to reach a truth that is intuitively redundant with respect to the first, yet leaves us with (apparently new) ontological commitments to the disputed entities—again apparently resolving ontological questions by what he calls ‘something from nothing inferences’ from undisputed truths.

In each case, an undisputed claim in which there is no mention of an entity of type J (and no use of the concept J or any supposed to be co-referential with it) may be combined with an analytic or conceptual truth that functions as what Schiffer calls a ‘transformation rule’, to give us a derived claim that apparently entails the existence of Js (numbers, propositions, events, possible worlds…)—thus settling what seemed like serious disputed ontological questions easily. So for example (making the intervening steps somewhat more explicit than Schiffer (2003) does), we can move from:

* Undisputed claim: Snow is white
* Conceptual truth: If P then <that P> is true.
* Derived claim: <That snow is white> is true
* Ontological claim: There is a proposition (namely <that snow is white>).

Or from:

* Undisputed claim: Jane was born on a Tuesday
* Conceptual truth: If P was born on D, then P’s birth occurred on D
* Derived claim: Jane’s birth occurred on a Tuesday
* Ontological claim: There is an event (namely of Jane’s birth)

There is one important variation to point out here: while, in the above cases, the undisputed claim is an empirical truth, in other cases one may make the relevant inferences from a conceptual truth. So, for example, Schiffer argues that we may move from ‘Necessarily, there are dogs or there are not dogs’, to ‘Necessarily, there are things that have the property of being a dog or there are not things that have the property of being a dog’, and from there to ‘Necessarily, the property of being a dog is or is not instantiated’, to ‘Necessarily, the property of being a dog exists’ (cf. Schiffer 2003, 66)—but in this case the inferences seem to rely on no empirical truth. The fact that one may come to legitimately infer the existence of certain entities regardless of the empirical facts in the world (relevant to whether such a sentence is true or false) suggests a reason such entities are often thought of as independent from the empirical world—and suggests a deflated way of understanding that intuition.

While the pleonastic and neo-Fregean views have much in common, there are also some notable differences between them. One perhaps superficial difference is that the neo-Fregeans employ an equivalence principle, Hume’s Principle, in reaching their ontological conclusions, whereas Schiffer’s pleonastic inferences take the form of S🡪 Ex(Fx) [[4]](#footnote-4), only requiring one-way entailments from the uncontroversial premise to the derived claim. This makes it clear that we can formulate easy ontological arguments even where we do not have available an equivalence principle (as we might not in cases where the candidates for S may be diverse and not fully enumerable). Nonetheless, the neo-Fregean only makes use of the right-to-left direction of the equivalence principle (“If the ms and ns are equinumerous, then the number of ns=the number of ms”) in reaching the ontological conclusion, so there seems no reason to think that the neo-Fregean relies on there being an equivalence principle rather than a simple one-way entailment in order to reach the ontological conclusion.

Secondly, the derived claim of the neo-Fregean has the form of an identity statement, and it is because it has the structure of an identity statement that Hale and Wright insist that the terms in it must refer, and thus that we are licensed to say that numbers exist. By contrast, Schiffer’s derived claims do not have to take the form of an identity statement, and he makes no use of that idea in reaching the ontological conclusion that there are the disputed entities.[[5]](#footnote-5) Instead, the introduced singular term may figure in other kinds of sentence in the derived claim, e.g. the singular propositional term ‘<that snow is white>’ figures in the derived claim “<that snow is white> is true”, and the singular event term ‘Jane’s birth’ appears in the true derived claim “Jane’s birth occurred on a Tuesday”—and both singular terms (as Schiffer insists) seem guaranteed to refer. Thus from these derived claims it seems we are still licensed to make the inferences to the ontological conclusions that there are propositions and that there are births. Given these differences, it seems that a Schifferian can easily accept the neo-Fregean’s trivial transitions from ‘the cups and saucers are equinumerous’ to ‘the number of cups=the number of saucers’ to ‘there is a number’. But it is not so clear whether or not a neo-Fregean would be equally happy to accept all of Schiffer’s arguments to ontological conclusions—many of which don’t go by way of a true identity statement. I will leave those differences to the side for the present, though they will come back into view later as we consider objections to each view. In any case, Schiffer’s pleonastic approach can be seen as a generalization of the neo-Fregean approach in the sense that he can accept their arguments for the disputed entities and capture them in his terms, though it is not clear whether a neo-Fregean would accept all of Schiffer’s arguments.[[6]](#footnote-6)

In much the same way, the easy approach to ontology I have developed and defended elsewhere may be seen as a third route to getting easy answers to ontological questions, which generalizes Schiffer’s approach. First, it generalizes it by showing that it may be applied to resolve debates about the existence of ordinary concrete objects as well.[[7]](#footnote-7) The question ‘Are there tables’, for example (I have argued (2007a)) may be straightforwardly answered by beginning from a claim that is not a point of controversy between realists and eliminativists:

* Uncontroversial claim: There are particles arranged tablewise.

But the following seems to be a conceptual truth:

* Conceptual truth: If there are particles arranged tablewise, then there is a table

That is, where there is what eliminativists would call a situation in which particles are arranged tablewise, that seems sufficient to guarantee that the application conditions for the ordinary concept <table> are met. Thus we can, by trivial inferences move to:

* Derived/ontological claim: There is a table

In short, those who have mastered the ordinary concept of <table>, as well as the philosophical concept of <particles arranged tablewise> are entitled to make the inference from the undisputed truth “there are particles arranged tablewise” to the ontological claim that there are tables.[[8]](#footnote-8) In this way, ontological debates about the existence of concrete objects may be settled just as ‘easily’ as debates about disputed abstracta, events, etc.—by a generalization of the same method.

The form of easy approach that I have defended also broadens the applicability of the approach in another sense. While all three forms of easy ontology accept that at least some existence questions may be answered by making trivial inferences from uncontroversial truths, I allow that in some cases we do not even need an uncontroversial truth to begin with in order to easily answer an existence question. According to the deflationary approach to existence questions I have argued for elsewhere (2007a, 2008, forthcoming [meta-semantics]), it is a fundamental rule of use for the term ‘refers’ (as a monadic predicate) that a sortal concept <K> refers iff Ks exist. Sortal terms and concepts, as I have argued, are associated with application conditions: “Ks exist” is true just in case the application conditions for <K> are fulfilled. Application conditions are among the semantic rules of use for the terms we master, which enable competent speakers to evaluate actual and hypothetical situations as ones in which the associated concept <K> would or would not be properly applied. As a result, existence questions of the form “Do Ks exist?” can be addressed by determining whether the application conditions for <K> are fulfilled.

With that much in place, we can see the trivial inferences used in making easy ontological arguments as cases in which, given the rules of use for the sortal concept in question, the application conditions for <K> are *guaranteed* to be fulfilled given the truth of some other sentence not involving <K> or any co-referring concept. On the easy approach we can say that the conceptual truths made use of in the trivial arguments are articulations of rules of use for the introduced noun term (‘number’, ‘property’, ‘event’…) that guarantee that the application conditions for the introduced noun are fulfilled, provided that the uncontroversial claim is true. That is why the truth of the uncontroversial sentence licenses us to infer ‘there is a K’. This enables us to see, in all of these cases, how competent speakers may make use of their conceptual mastery, often combined with empirical knowledge (whether that arrived at by looking around the restaurant, by knowing that snow is white, that Jane was born on a Tuesday, or that the cups and saucers are equinumerous) to arrive easily at the conclusions that there are things of the relevant sort. In cases in which we can infer the existence of the relevant entities from a conceptual truth, rather than an empirical truth, we may say that the application conditions for the new term are null; they are guaranteed to be fulfilled *simpliciter*. Or, if it seems awkward to even speak of these terms as having application conditions (given that they are guaranteed to refer), we can instead speak of these terms merely as having introduction rules rather than application conditions. (Terms such as ‘property’ and ‘proposition’ may have distinct meanings even if both have null application conditions, given differences in their inferential role—including differences in their introduction rules.) In the other cases, in which a term has substantive application conditions (not guaranteed to be fulfilled), we can say that the general introduction rule is expressed in the conceptual truth that guarantees the truth of the ontological claim *provided the application conditions are met* (which in turn is guaranteed provided the uncontroversial claim—not itself a conceptual truth—is true).

This deflationary approach to existence questions then leaves us with two important results: first, we can gain a general view of why the inferences that seem so trivial are indeed valid—since the truth of the uncontroversial claim guarantees that the application conditions for the introduced noun term are fulfilled. Secondly, we can see that in some cases we may easily answer existence questions (by making use of empirical work and conceptual competence) even without making use of an uncontroversial truth to begin from in making a trivial inference. For example, while I have argued that ontological debates about the existence of tables may be resolved by trivial inferences from the uncontested truth that particles arranged tablewise exist, we need nothave mastered the concept of <particles arranged tablewise> to make the inference and conclude that tables exist. Someone who lacks the concept of being <arranged tablewise> (or of <particle>) of course could not use the above uncontroversial claim to infer the existence of tables. But it seems that anyone who possesses the concept of *table* is entitled, upon veridically perceiving my dining room, to conclude that tables exist—even if she does not begin from a separate uncontroversial truth in making an inference to that conclusion. On the generalized version of the view, we can accept that a competent speaker is no less entitled, using her conceptual competence, to infer ‘there is a table’ from veridically observing my dining room than she is to infer ‘there is a property’ from knowing the truth of ‘Beyoncé’s dress is red’.

Generalizing the approach in this way enables us to see how existence questions may be easily answered even in cases in which there is no ‘uncontroversial truth’ that we can state in terms omitting the concept P (or any co-referring concept) and from which we can make the trivial inference. This also brings other advantages. For if we require the truth of an uncontroversial claim as the basis for resolving the ontological dispute, then there is some hazard that more serious minded metaphysicians will take the uncontroversial claim to be the only one which is ‘really true’ or which properly matches the ‘logical structure of the world’ and the like (this is a move that Hale and Wright reject in any case (2009)). But if we do not require that we start from an uncontroversial truth (stated in terms that don’t involve the concept *K* (or any co-referring concept)), we do not foster any illusion that there is a more basic, more ontologically apt way of *describing* the situation that might encourage the thought that ontological claims expressed using the newly introduced noun can be viewed as a mere manner of speaking or something other than straightforward and literal truths.

Each of these three easy ontological positions thus relies on less in making easy ontological arguments than the view that came before it. While the classic neo-Fregean position makes use of a true identity statement in arguing that the terms refer, and so that there are the relevant entities, Schiffer does not require a true identity statement. But while he doesn’t require that the statement we begin from be an *identity* statement, he does (like the neo-Fregean) start from an uncontroversial true statement (S) (not involving the disputed concept or a co-referential one) to use in the trivial inference that takes us to the ontological conclusion. By contrast, I do not even require that there is any true conceptually distinct statement in order to easily arrive at the disputed ontological conclusion making use just of our conceptual competence and (sometimes) empirical skills. Nonetheless, all may still be classified as ‘easy’ approaches insofar as they allow that we may answer ontological questions using trivial inferences from uncontroversial truths. Perhaps more importantly, all forms of the view hold that we need nothing more than conceptual work and (sometimes) empirical knowledge to resolve the questions of ontology to which they are applied—nothing ‘epistemically metaphysical’ is required.

**2. First-order result: simple realism**

Making use of the easy approach to ontology (in whatever form) leads directly to first-order consequences about what we say exists: typically, it leads to affirming the existence of the disputed entities. For in most of the hotly disputed cases, uncontested truths may lead us via pleonastic or trivial inferences to conclude that the controversial entities (numbers, propositions, properties, etc.) exist.

But it is often thought that if we can arrive at ontological conclusions via these trivial inferences, the objects we now say exist can’t themselves be very substantial: they must be somehow reduced in ontological standing, mere shadows of language, or else the existence claim itself must be reduced in standing from more serious existence claims. Schiffer himself often talks this way, speaking of the ontology that results—an ontology of what he calls ‘pleonastic’ entities—as a kind of ‘cheap’ ontology (1994, 304), and suggests that the entities we become committed to are ‘ontologically shallow’ (1994, 304), ‘thin and inconsequential’ (2003, 62). In acknowledging their existence, he writes, we are “merely playing along with the language games that introduce these notions”; their existence should be treated in a ‘suitably deflationary, or minimalist, manner’ (1994, 305).[[9]](#footnote-9) Propositions, for example, are mere ‘shadows of sentences’ (1996, 153), and are said to be “not as ontologically and conceptually independent of us as rocks and electrons, that there is a sense in which they’re products of our linguistic or conceptual practices, a sense in which properties and propositions are mind- or language-created entities” (1996, 153). Hofweber paraphrases Schiffer’s view as holding that these are “second-class entities, whose existence is guaranteed merely by talking a certain way” (2007, 5).

I have argued elsewhere (2001) against saying that the entities to which we become committed are in any sense mind or language-created or dependent, and Schiffer himself, at the end of the day, seems to want to avoid commitment to this—he explicitly denies the conceptualist view that ‘properties are creations of our conceptual or linguistic practices’, since properties exist in every possible world, whereas the same is not the case for our conceptual and linguistic practices (2003, 66).

But I also think there is more to be said here. Despite my admiration for Schiffer’s work in showing how trivial inferences may lead us to ontological commitments, I think we should not suggest that the entities to which we become committed via trivial inferences are in general ‘thin and inconsequential’ ‘ontologically shallow’, or that their existence is somehow to be understood in a deflationary manner. Instead, we should simply say that such entities exist—full stop—and adopt a simple realist view of them. Let me explain.

Schiffer’s claims that so-called pleonastic entities have a diminished ontological status seem to come from three observations:

1. Epistemology: such entities have a ‘diminished epistemological status’ in that to learn of the existence of properties, propositions, or states, one need only be inducted into the language games involving these terms; whereas the same is not the case for cats, trees or volcanoes (2003, 62).
2. Causality: pleonastic entities are said to be inconsequential in the sense that adding the relevant concepts to a prior theory merely ‘conservatively extends’ that theory, and “does nothing to alter that theory’s take on the pre-existing causal order” (2003, 63).
3. Modality: the natures of pleonastic entities are determined by our linguistic and conceptual practices, in such a way that there is no more to their natures than is determined by our practices; they have no “hidden nature for empirical investigation to unearth” (2003, 66).

In each case, Schiffer writes as if there is an important difference between the ‘shallowness’ of pleonastic entities to which we may become committed via such trivial inferences, and the ‘depth’ of ‘more robust’ natural entities like trees. In the epistemological case, he contrasts pleonastic and non-pleonastic entities on grounds that learning of the existence of physical entities such as electrons requires substantive discovery, while, to learn of the existence of propositions, for example, it is necessary and sufficient simply to adopt the relevant language game that takes us from, e.g. “The apple is red” to “That the apple is red is true” (Schiffer 1994, 307).

But on my view the contrast here is misleading. For—depending on what uncontested truths we have to start from—we may be able to answer questions about the existence of trees no less easily than questions about the existence of events or properties. If we began in a metaphysical debate from the uncontested truth that certain particles were arranged tree-wise, we could go on to make use of our conceptual competence that entitles us to accept that if there are particles arranged tree-wise, there is a tree, and from there infer the existence of trees. The fact that we may come to know of the existence of certain things by undertaking trivial inferences does not show that the entities themselves are in any way epistemically diminished or ontologically shallow—or that there is some crucial difference between them and regular old concreta like trees. In each case one may move from knowledge of an uncontested truth that doesn’t make any use of the new concept (or any concept supposed to be co-referential with it) to easily acquire knowledge of the existence of the new kind of entity.

Regarding causality, Schiffer again suggests that there a contrast between concepts like <property> or <proposition>, and concepts like <wishdate>, or presumably like <person>, <volcano> or <electron>. For the former are causally inconsequential—their addition conservatively extends a theory, but the latter are not. But again I think that this is, at the least, misleading. The question of whether a given concept is a conservative extension is a *relative* matter: relative to the prior theory accepted. Once we have a thing-language that enables us to say that the notebook is red, we may indeed conservatively extend it by adding the notion of a property; and in general, all that Schiffer says about the notions of property, proposition, etc. being conservative extensions of our language as considered without their introduction stand. But as I have argued, we can also use trivial inferences to acquire commitment to tables and trees, if we start (in a metaphysical dispute) from an undisputed claim such as ‘there are particles arranged volcanowise’—because (to alter Schiffer 2003, 52) ‘to have the practice [of using the term ‘volcano’] is to have the *concept* [<volcano>], and *it is a conceptual truth—*a truth knowable a priori via command of the concept—*that the existence of* **volcanoes** is guaranteed whenever there are particles arranged volcanowise’. The concept of <volcano> would not conservatively extend a prior theory that had no grip on exploding lava-filled peaks, but it would conservatively extend a prior theory that made empirical claims couched in the language of particles being arranged volcanowise. And the same could be said for other concepts of concreta. This undermines the claimed contrast, and perhaps more importantly, provides a reminder that the fact that a term conservatively extends a prior theory does not show that the entities referred to by the term are ‘inconsequential’ in the sense of *lacking* causal powers: it doesn’t show anything about the causal/ontological standing of the entities referred to. Instead, it only shows that the addition of the relevant concept is inconsequential to the theory’s *standing empirical commitments*, whatever those may be.

The modal case requires a bit more discussion. Schiffer draws a similar contrast regarding the natures of the objects concerned: to learn about the natures of electrons or trees one must undertake substantive investigations into the things themselves. By contrast, he says, to learn all there is to know about the nature of propositions, properties, or other pleonastic entities one must only study the language games by means of which they are deposited in our ontology (Schiffer 1996, 159). Thus, pleonastic entities are said to have “no hidden and substantial nature for a theory to uncover” (cite); “there is nothing more to the natures of these things than these little language games determine” (1994, 305)—a point that is supposed to contrast them with more ‘robust’ physical or concrete entities (Johnston 1988, 38).

But as I have argued elsewhere (2007b) (but cannot separately argue for here), the point about the natures of entities are determined by our linguistic or conceptual practices is one that applies quite generally—not just to entities such as properties and propositions. In each case (as I have argued) talk of the *most basic* modal features determining the ‘natures’ of the entities to be referred is the object-language correlate of rules of use for the term, and the route to discovering these basic modal features goes via conceptual competence, not deep metaphysical investigation. Whether we are talking trees, persons, or propositions, the most basic modal facts (I have argued (2007b)) are object-language correlates of the rules of use for the term.

It seems then in general that there are no across the board differences to be drawn between entities the existence of which we may infer from trivial inferences from an uncontroversial truth and those we cannot. Whether we may infer the existence of a given sort of entity K via trivial inferences depends to a great extent on what language or theory, and what uncontested truths stated in that language, we have from which we may make the relevant inference. So, for example, it is true enough that <tree> and <table> are not pleonastic concepts in our actual (non-philosophical) English language, and if we do not have terminology such as ‘particles arranged tablewise’ we may (depending on what other terms or concepts we have) not be able to trivially infer that tables exist from any uncontested truth stateable in that language without the concept <table>. If we add the terminology of n-wise arrangements, however, we may make the trivial inference. But whether we have such terms as ‘particles arranged tablewise’ in our language cannot make a difference to what ontological standing *tables themselves* have—to whether tables are in any sense ‘shallow’ entities or not. So we should not be looking for a difference in ontological standing of entities that we can versus cannot (or do versus do not) become committed to by trivial inferences. We may be able to distinguish which concepts are pleonastic additions to a given language, and which are not, but there seems to be no absolute answer to whether or not the entities referred to by a given concept are pleonastic.

None of this is to deny that there may be important epistemic, modal, and causal differences between, say, trees and propositions—indeed Schiffer may have put his finger on some crucial differences between entities of these sorts. But the difference to be drawn is not one in ontological ‘shallowness’ versus ‘depth’ of those entities we may/may not infer the existence of through trivial inferences. Instead, the significant contrast seems to be between entities the existence of which we may infer given the truth of an undisputed *empirical truth*, and entities the existence of which we may infer from a *conceptual truth*.[[10]](#footnote-10) For in the first case, it does require some empirical work to discover the existence of the relevant entities: we must know that some uncontroversial empirical claim that can be fed into the rule is *true* to know that the entities exist (e.g. we must know that some particles are arranged volcanowise to infer the existence of volcanoes). In the latter case, by contrast, no empirical work is required (we may infer that the proposition <that snow is white> exists, regardless of whether or not “Snow is white” is true).

Regarding causation, we may again suspect that where the existence of the questioned entities must be inferred from an *empirical* truth, the entities may have causal impact; where it may be inferred from a mere conceptual truth, they do not. Event concepts such as <heart attack> are supposed to be pleonastic concepts: we may infer the existence of heart attacks from an empirical truth as follows: from “Smith’s heart stopped beating” we are licensed to infer “Smith had a heart attack” and so that there are events (namely of heart attacks). But while <heart attack> may be conservatively extend a prior theory that only made reference to hearts and their beating, we should not conclude that heart attacks lack causal efficacy or are causally inconsequential in any other sense. So even if entities such as numbers, properties, and propositions, the existence of which we may infer from a conceptual truth, entirely lack causal impact, we cannot assume that the same holds true of those entities the existence of which we infer trivially from an empirical truth.

We can find a similar contrast where modal features are concerned. If we must begin from an empirical truth to make the relevant inference to the existence of the new entities, then while the most *basic* modal features of the entities to be referred to are object language correlates of the rules of use for the relevant terms, talk of their natures may also be deferential to the world in ways that enable us to fill in the details of more particular modal properties via empirical investigation. So, for example, it may be knowable simply to anyone competent in use of the term ‘paper’ that a piece of paper cannot survive being burned to ashes, but we may go on to discover exactly what temperatures lead paper to burn, and thus lead to its destruction—thereby learning more about the ‘nature’ of paper. There doesn’t seem to be any comparable empirical role of learning about the natures of those entities whose existence we may infer from a conceptual truth. As a result, there may indeed be less to learn about the natures of propositions and properties than about the natures of volcanoes, trees or tigers; and what is learned in the first case may be learned by purely conceptual means, whereas in the latter case empirical work is involved.

I have argued that we can infer no difference in the ontological standing of entities the existence of which we do, versus do not, become committed to via trivial inferences. Whatever differences do arise between particular cases (say, those of trees versus propositions) are better attributed to differences between those cases in which one requires an empirical truth versus merely a conceptual truth to infer their existence. But in any case we should deny that the entities we are committed to (by either of those sorts of inference) are ontologically deflated or exist in some second-class way. The conceptual truths that underwrite the trivial inferences should be seen as articulations of rules of use for the concept in question.[[11]](#footnote-11) We may think of them as if they were rules to introduce the new concept to a language that began without any co-referring concept (though of course that is merely as-if, and not to make actual claims about etymology. As Schiffer says, it is as though someone introducedthe relevant notions in part by giving us these something from nothing transformations (1994, 306)). If we take seriously the idea that the conceptual truths that enable us to make the trivial something-from-nothing inferences are object-language articulations of rules of use for the sortal term ‘N’ used in the conclusion, then we should not say anything less than that Ns exist (in the only sense that ‘N’ has) in the conclusion. As long as the terms <property> or <number> are being used in their standard sense, we may easily answer the internal existence question in the affirmative—and simply say that these things exist, full stop. But then we end up in each case being realists about the questioned entities by affirming that there are properties, propositions, numbers, etc. not in some reduced or quasi-sense, but rather *in the only sense these terms have.* This is thus a straightforward, out and out, realism about the entities in question. And so, properly understood, the view should be characterized not as the position that the *entities* accepted are deflated or have some ‘second-class’ status. What is deflated instead is the *ontological debates* about the entities (more on that below). Thus, to be clear, I call the first-order position that results from the easy approach ‘simple realism’, and the meta-ontological position that results ‘deflationism’.[[12]](#footnote-12)

I have argued above that we should retain pleonastic arguments for the existence of disputed entities, but give up the idea that they exist in some reduced, deflated, or quasi- sense, affirming instead a simple realism about each of the entities in question. If we go that route, what do we give up? Some might be attracted to the idea that these disputed entities are ‘shallow’ or exist in only some ‘deflated’ sense because they think that will sit more easily with a naturalistic ontology. But that does not seem to be Schiffer’s own motivation—his motives instead come from concerns within the theory of meaning, particularly the need for a theory of propositions that would treat them as unstructured and fine-grained, and knowable a priori through conceptual means. We lose none of this, however, by giving up the rhetoric of treating them as entities with a second-rate, ‘deflated’ ontological status or sort of existence. For example, Schiffer uses the pleonastic conception to defend the idea that we can avoid treating propositions as compositionally determined. For the practices determine all there is to know about the natures of propositions, and the “practices determinative of their nature determine, in the trivial way sketched, that our sentences express propositions, but they do not determine, and are consistent with its not being the case, that those propositions are compositionally determined” (1994, 308).[[13]](#footnote-13) That motive, however, is not at all undermined by the amendments suggested below. For although on this view we should simply say that propositions exist (full stop—not that they exist in some deflated sense), it remains the case that all there is to their natures is determined by our linguistic and conceptual practices. If, as Schiffer argues and as seems plausible, these practices leave open the issue of whether propositions are compositionally determined, then we may retain the suggested solution to the paradox of meaning, and similarly retain the other benefits sought by treating propositions as pleonastic entities.

But if we do allow that the easy approach to ontology typically leads to a simple realism about the disputed entities, not to a view on which these things are some sort of second-class entities or exist in some sort of deflated sense, another question arises. How does the simple realist view that results really differ from traditional Platonist views, if both accept that the disputed entities exist?

While the realism we typically get about entities such as properties, propositions, artefacts, organisms, and the like resembles traditional realism on the surface, there is also a sense in which the form of realism that results differs importantly from standard realisms, such as Platonism regarding numbers or properties. The sort of realism the easy approach leaves us with says there are the disputed objects alright, but does not treat them as ‘posits’ or as ‘explanatory’ of our talk, the truth of our sentences, our knowledge, or anything of the sort. To mark the difference I will call the first ‘simple realism’, and the second ‘explanatory’ or ‘heavyweight’ realism.

The motivations for realisms vary, but especially among those post-Quinean metaphysicians who see themselves as building a best ‘theory’, the motivations typically include the claim that ‘positing’ the relevant entities provides some ‘explanatory’ benefit.[[14]](#footnote-14) The Platonist, for example, invokes numbers to help us explain our number talk, its objectivity, its usefulness in science, and the like. The heavyweight realist about properties holds that the existence of properties may ‘explain’ what it is that two things may have in common, and so on. But while the simple realist accepts that there are such entities, she denies that these are deep explanatory ontological posits; instead, the existence of the entities in question is a trivial consequence of the truth of other (uncontroversial) sentences.

Not only does the simple realist not appeal to explanatory power or the like to justify her acceptance of the relevant entities, she *cannot* do so. Any attempt to do so would yield only a dormitive virtue explanation. Consider the classic dormitive virtue explanation from Moliere: Q: ‘Why do poppies make us sleepy?’ A: ‘Because they have the dormitive virtue’. Now, if saying that something has the dormitive virtue is just a fancy way of saying they make us sleepy, it may be perfectly true to say that poppies have the dormitive virtue. The joke lies in the fact, however, that if A is just a fancier way of restating the fact that poppies *do* make us sleepy and so is redundant, it clearly cannot (as it purports to do) provide any *explanation* of the relevant fact—it just restates it in different terms. Put more precisely, and cohesively with the prior observations, if an existence claim is derived by trivial inferences from an uncontroversial claim, it cannot contribute any *more* explanatory power than we got from the uncontroversial claim itself. So either ‘poppies make us sleepy’ or ‘poppies have the dormitive virtue’ may explain other facts—such as ‘Why did Dorothy fall asleep after walking through that field?’ And similarly, either ‘Particles arranged baseballwise hit the window’ or ‘A baseball hit the window’ may explain why the window shattered. But in neither case do we gain explanatory power by shifting from the first expression to the second (which contains a new noun term).

So similarly, on the simple realist’s view (as contrasted with the explanatory realist view), we can move from ‘The house is red’ to ‘there is a property, redness, that the house has’. But we cannot use the latter to *explain* why the house is red—it is just a redundant way of restating the former (introducing a new noun term for a property), and so cannot be used to explain anything (not even to provide a ‘metaphysical explanation’ of property possession). So on the simple realist view, there are the disputed entities all right, but these are not ‘posits’ that are parts of ‘theories’, the inclusion of which is justified by their explanatory power. Instead, we can simply see that there are guaranteed to be such things given the truth of an uncontroversial sentence.[[15]](#footnote-15)

And since (unlike the earlier versions developed by Schiffer and neo-Fregeans) this is an across-the-board view, that also means that in general, the easy ontologist cannot embrace any kind of truthmaker theory according to which we *posit* a certain ontology (as opposed to rival ontologies) in order to *explain* what it is that makes our sentences true. On the deflationary approach, trees or electrons, say, can no more be thought of as ‘posits’ used to ‘explain’ what makes a sentence like ‘there is a tree in the courtyard’ or ‘an electron was emitted’ true than properties can be used to explain what makes ‘the house is red’ true. This is of course not to deny the equivalence: that ‘there is a tree in the courtyard’ is true iff there is a tree in the courtyard; it is only to deny that it is *explanatory.* Nor is to deny that other sorts of explanation involving appeal to trees or electrons are perfectly legitimate, e.g. we may explain why there are leaves all over the courtyard by saying that there is a tree there suffering from a disease; we may explain why an atom changed its charge by saying that it emitted an electron. And the rejection of a certain kind of heavyweight truthmaker theory of course is not to deny that the world makes our sentences true or false all right—and were it different the sentence would be false. The point is merely that we should not think of claims in philosophical ontology as theoretical posits to explain the truth of our sentences: philosophical ontology, on this view, is not theoretical in any sense that involves *explanation*.

The view above may also be seen as distinct from typical Platonist views of *abstract* entities in another sense: the heavyweight Platonist thinks of numbers or properties as discoverable entities that may have discoverable modal properties (Schiffer 2003, 65). But on the above view, this is also mistaken, for talk of the modal properties of these entities (the existence of which we may infer from a conceptual truth) is seen as just an object-language reflection of the rules of use for the term, and there is (as Schiffer insists) no more to discover about the natures of numbers, properties and other entities whose existence we may infer from conceptual truths than may be acquired through analysing our linguistic and conceptual practices.

**4. Second-order result: Metaontological deflationism**

The easy approach to existence questions not only leads to a first-order simple realism about most disputed entities; easy ontological approaches of any kind also lead to the controversial meta-ontological position that something is wrong with many of the *serious* ontological debates that have been earnestly engaged in over the past fifty years or so.

As mentioned at the outset, serious ontology assumes that there are existence questions that are ‘epistemically metaphysical’ in the sense of being neither resolvable by conceptual/linguistic nor straightforward empirical means, and that must be approached through substantive metaphysical debate. The biggest threat to serious ontology has long been thought to lie in the idea (popularized by Hilary Putnam and Eli Hirsch) that the quantifier does, or could, vary in meaning in such a way that the disputants in debates about what exists are merely speaking past each other—rendering the apparent debate a merely verbal dispute.

But the easy approach to ontology gives us a view on which something is wrong with ontological debates, and “there are no questions that are fit to debate in the manner of the ontologists” (Sider 2009, 386), but which does not say that disputants are talking past each other, each uttering truths in their own language, or engaging in “different—and equally good—ways to talk” (Sider 2009, 386). For although given the easy approach the disputed existence questions are meaningful and answerable (generally in the positive), they turn out to be answerable so trivially that the ‘serious’ debates about these issues that have so exercised metaphysicians in recent decades seem misguided and pointless. Thus the easy approach to ontology presents a threat to serious metaphysics that is quite distinct from the threat presented by quantifier variance, and while serious metaphysicians have focused on defending their work by attacking quantifier variance (van Inwagen 1998, 2009; Sider 2009), those arguments do nothing to defend serious metaphysics against the idea that ontological questions may be answered easily.

Given the threat that the easy approach presents to ongoing debates in ontology, it is no surprise that it has been subjected to a great many objections. Unfortunately there is not space here to respond to the objections, but it may be useful to mention briefly where the main objections—and responses to them—may be found. Some hold that such views involve commitment to ‘too many objects’ or magically defining things into existence.[[16]](#footnote-16) Worries have been raised that the trivial inferences used are in ‘bad company’ with other inferences that lead to obvious problems, such as conflict with known facts or contradiction.[[17]](#footnote-17) Others raise suspicions against the idea that there are the conceptual truths needed to underwrite the trivial inferences.[[18]](#footnote-18) Still others hold that the inferences do not give us serious ontological conclusions because either they are to be read as implicitly in the context of a pretense operator[[19]](#footnote-19) or because they involve a distinct use of the quantifier from one that is genuinely ontologically committal (Hofweber, 2005a, 2005b, 2007; for response see my unpublished, Chapter 6).

**5. Clarifying the epistemology of metaphysics**

Although the easy approach to ontology may be felt as a threat by serious ontologists and faces a number of challenges, working to show how it may overcome those challenges is well worth the effort. For the approach also brings great attractions that can be best seen by those without commitment to the debates of serious metaphysics. Most crucially, it shows great promise for resolving various epistemic mysteries.

One epistemic attraction that has been much discussed by neo-Fregeans is the ability to demystify our knowledge of numbers and other abstracta. As Hale and Wright put it, the view is motivated by its ability to “tackle directly the question how propositional thought about such objects is possible and how it can be knowledgeable” (2009, 178). For given the trivial inferences that take us to claims about abstracta, we can see how speakers may acquire knowledge of these things by knowing the uncontroversial truths and mastering the rules of use for the terms that entitle them to make inferences from those uncontroversial truths to the existence of numbers and the like. We can thus avoid the epistemic problems the traditional Platonist faces in saying how we can ‘come into contact with’ and thereby come to acquire knowledge of abstracta. The view also enables us to accept that there are the relevant entities without the ontological difficulties incurred by Platonists who treat them as explanatory posits (see also my 2007a (especially Chapters 9 and 10) and 2009b).

Even more important is its ability to clarify the epistemology of ontology itself. For serious metaphysics faces an epistemic crisis. The debates undertaken and positions defended have proliferated at an alarming rate, with nothing like convergence on the truth to show for the efforts of the best minds in metaphysics, nor even any agreement about how such debates could be resolved. The serious metaphysician insists that ontological questions cannot be directly resolved empirically, and indeed most ontological views are empirically equivalent (and however apparently counter-intuitive their position is, serious ontologists typically emphasize that their ontology does not conflict with any empirical facts or observations). But the disputants also insist that ontological questions cannot be answered by linguistic or conceptual means—that is what is supposed to make the questions serious metaphysical questions. Thus serious ontology leaves us with an epistemic mystery about how exactly we could possibly come to know who was right in these ontological debates, or what the answers to our existence questions are. Some metaphysicians seem little concerned with this. So, for example, Sider writes:

The epistemology of metaphysics is far from clear; this any metaphysician should concede. For what it’s worth, as a general epistemology of metaphysics I prefer the vague, vaguely Quinean, thought that metaphysics is continuous with science. We employ many of the same criteria—whatever those are—for theory choice within metaphysics that we employ outside of metaphysics. Admittedly, those criteria give less clear guidance in metaphysics than elsewhere; but there is no harm in following this argument where it leads: metaphysical inquiry is by its nature comparatively speculative and uncertain. (2011, 12).

But this response is far too blithe: Unlike in the case of most scientific theories, most metaphysical theories are empirically equivalent. Moreover, the differing theories often involve simply trading one theoretical virtue for another, and so cannot be resolved by appealing to whichever theory has the most theoretic virtues. The difficulties here are formidable indeed, and have led to increasing debates at the metaontological level about whether these first-order disputes are merely verbal, somehow ill formed or unresolvable.

The easy approach to ontology enables us to lay to rest seemingly endless debates about the existence of entities of various sorts, and to clarify the methodology of metaphysics (at least that part of it that is concerned with existence questions). For we are able to answer existence questions in ways that cohere with what we want to say in the ordinary business of life, but in answering them we need rely on methods no more mysterious than straightforward empirical and conceptual methods. Wherever the easy approach to existence questions may be applied, we have room to defend the view that those existence questions that are meaningfully asked may be answered straightforwardly by conceptual and (often) empirical work, and involves nothing ‘epistemically metaphysical’ nor any distinctively *philosophical* enterprise of figuring out *what really exists.* Empirical work may be needed to know the answer to the undisputed truth, but that is non-mysterious, and in any case it is usually not very fancy empirical work. (It may be as simple as seeing that the shirt is red, and sometimes—when the undisputed truth is a conceptual truth—empirical work is not even required). In other case (where the inference may be made from a conceptual truth) we needn’t even undertake empirical work, but only exploit our conceptual competence and reasoning ability to come to know the ontological truth.

So while the easy approach may be a threat to serious metaphysics, it is extremely promising as a way of resolving the epistemic difficulties of metaphysics: it is a view that retains the ‘epistemic high-ground’ (in the words of Sider) over the more mysterious epistemology of serious metaphysics.[[20]](#footnote-20) Thus the impact of the easy approach to ontology pioneered by Schiffer has impact far broader than in the theory of meaning: it may not only easily resolve a great many first-order ontological debates; it also may present the biggest threat to serious ontology, and the greatest hope for clarifying the epistemology of metaphysics.

1. For a characterization and defense of the general approach see my (2007, 2009a, 2009b). The approach is also given a general characterization and criticized in Yablo (2001, 2005) and Hofweber (2005, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Kit Fine accepts that many existence questions may be trivially answered, for example: “Thus given the evident fact that there is a prime number greater than 2, it trivially follows that there is a number” (2009, 158), and says that “the question of whether there are numbers is a mathematical question… that is to be settled on the basis of purely mathematical considerations and the question of whether there are chairs or tables is an everyday matter that is to be settled on the basis of common observation” (2009, 158). Fine concludes that the Quinean quantificational approach to ontology is ill conceived, and that primary question for ontology should not be ‘what exists’ or ‘what is there’ but rather ‘how do things stand in reality’ (2009, 172). Ross Cameron (2010) accepts that a sentence like ‘tables exist’ may be made true, for example, by simples properly arranged. But he suggests that metaphysicians may address a deeper question: what is there *really,* where what *really* exists is only whatever entities serve to ground the truth of our English sentences (2010). Finally, Jonathan Schaffer (2009) endorses easy ontological arguments, accepting that debates about the existence of numbers, properties, mereological sums and the like “are *trivial,* in that the *entities in question obviously do exist”* (2009, 357). But he argues that the proper question for metaphysics are what is fundamental, and what grounds what. I will not examine these alternative suggestions here. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. By calling this a ‘derived claim’ I do not mean to suggest that such claims could not be arrived at directly, without inference, by competent speakers. I only mean to point to the fact that it may be derived from the uncontroversial claim combined with the conceptual truth. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. More fully and properly, Schiffer says that S🡪Ex(Fx) is a something from nothing f-entailment claim iff “(i) its antecedent is metaphysically possible but doesn’t *logically* entail either its consequent or any statement of the form ‘Ex(x=a)’, where ‘a’ refers to an F, and (ii) the concept of an F is such that if there are Fs, then S🡪 Ex(Fx)” (2003, 56-57). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Schiffer also makes it explicit that pleonastic concepts for Fs may be introduced without there being any non-trivial criterion of identity for Fs. (2003, 63n. 14) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This hinges on whether neo-Fregeans would be willing to accept existential entailments from derived claims that do not take the form of identity statements. They do make use of the fact that theirs is an identity statement in arguing that we are licensed to infer that the terms in it refer, for they treat identity statements as paradigmatic reference-demanding statements (2009, 202). But of course this does not mean that they are the *only* sort of reference-demanding atomic statements. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Hale (1988, 11) notes that the argument form is general and that the procedure may apply to concrete as well as abstract objects, but does not elaborate or go on to apply the approach to concreta. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Importantly, tables are not *identified with* particles arranged tablewise—so we do not have a co-referential concept in the undisputed truth. Particles arranged tablewise cannot be identified with tables: first, it seems inappropriate to identify a plurality with an individual; second, even if we shifted to a collection of particles arranged tablewise, these would have different identity conditions from tables. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. This way of speaking has also led some to think that the ontological commitments we get out of the trivial inferences are in some sense merely fictional or pretenseful (as we ‘play along with’ the relevant language game) (Yablo 2002, 2005). I have argued elsewhere (forthcoming [Mind paper]) that this is a mistake. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. In terminology I used earlier, the difference is between those concepts that are *relatively* minimal versus *absolutely* minimal. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Carnap similarly emphasizes that it is the rules that introduce the concept or term <property> or <number> that license us to make the trivial inferences to the ontological conclusion (1950, 208-210). Schiffer himself makes a similar point, arguing that we can get knowledge of things like properties that exist independently of a linguistic or conceptual practice merely by engaging in that practice “Because to engage in the practice is to have the concept of a property, and to have the concept of a property is to know a priori the conceptual truths that devolve from that concept” (2003, 62). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. That is not to say, however, that the easy approach to existence questions leaves us accepting the existence of purported objects of absolutely any kind, including such (putative) things as phlogiston and witches. See Schiffer (1996, 152) and my (cite\*). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. And by avoiding the view that propositions are compositionally determined, we may hope to resolve the paradox of meaning that arises from accepting:

    1. That-clauses refer to propositions
    2. The reference of a that-clause is determined by its syntax and the references its words have in it
    3. There is no tenable account of the compositional determination of that-clause reference consistent with (1) and (2) (1994, 279)

    For we may reject the commitment to compositionality expressed in (2). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Even I talked this way sometimes in *Fiction and Metaphysics* (1999)*.* I hadn’t yet become reflective about metaontology, and so was participating in the dominant game. I take it all back. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. This of course is not to deny that talk of propositions may *figure in* causal explanations—or even that the ability to engage in proposition talk may be crucially important in explaining our behaviour or knowledge by testimony (see Schiffer 2003, Chapter 8). But the role of propositions in explanations of behaviour may, as Schiffer suggests, be like the role of numbers in scientific explanations (2003, 334). We may say that Sally went to the mall because she thought her friends would be there, or that the bridge collapsed because the maximum number of tons it could hold was 250. But in neither case does ‘positing’ the existence of propositions or numbers ‘explain’ the observed fact in the way that positing the presence of mice in my attic would explain the holes chewed in my camping gear (assuming one did not already posit particles arranged mouse-wise!). The use instead may, as McCracken (2009, Chapter 4) argues, be a pragmatic usefulness of proposition-talk or number-talk in our explanations (from which we may legitimately infer the existence of propositions or numbers). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See Yablo (2000b), Bennett (2009). For responses see my (2007, Chapter 3) and (2009b). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Linnebo (2009a) gives a good overview. Versions of the bad company objection are raised by Field (1984) and Eklund (2006a). For replies see Hale and Wright (2001), Schiffer (2003), and Linnebo (2009b). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. The most influential criticisms of the idea that there are analytic or conceptual truths are found in Quine (1951/1953), and in Williamson (2007). For replies to Quine see Strawson and Grice (1956) and my (2007, Chapter 2). For replies to Williamson see my (unpublished, Chapter 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See Yablo (2001, 2005); for response see my (forthcoming) [Mind]. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Sider (2011) argues that although the easy ontologist aims for the epistemic high ground, she cannot retain it, for she too is committed to a serious ontological position: that the world lacks a certain kind of structure. I respond to this line of argument in my (forthcoming [phil methods]). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)