# On What There Is

. . .and on how they are

# Grounding before there was grounding. . .

- 'A Short History of Grounding'

  'For reasons of space, we are bound to comment on a highly selective choice of authors and issues here and we have to set aside many interesting sources.  One important victim of this policy is Aristotle.  His distinction between four different kinds of *aitiai*—or *becauses* as Hocutt (1974) calls them—arguably involves the recognition of grounding in the formal and material *aitiai*.  If this is correct, then his theory of aitiai, as well as his related distinction between proofs which demonstrate that something is the case and proofs that demonstrate why something is the case, are important historical sources for treatments of grounding.  But the interpretation of Aristotle's works is usually very controversial and we felt we lacked the space—and, frankly speaking, the confidence—to enter the discussion.' (Correia and Schnieder, Introduction to *Metaphysical Grounding* (CUP: 2012, p. 2)

# Two Forms of Dependence

- Aristotle adverts to dependency relations in at least two very different ways, or at least in two very different contexts, his categorialism and his hylomorphism:

  - Categorial: Privileged Ontology

  - Aitiological: Causal/Becausal Groundings

# Flat vs. Privileged Ontology

- A flat ontology

    - accepts being as binary and non-scalar

    - draws no MLI-categorial distinctions at the general level of being

        - As an example: universal mereological aggregation coupled with identity by aggregation

- A privileged ontology

    - may or may not accept the scalarity of being

    - accepts MLI-categorial distinctions at the level of being

        - As an example: Aristotle's categorialism

# Flat Ontology

- Basically Quinean in temperament:
  - The ontologist is a humble listkeeper of being.
  - The first and last question of ontology for the flat ontologist is refreshingly brief and direct: what exists?
  - The answer, to the delight of Quine, the maximal proponent of his own temperament, is briefer and more direct still: 'Everything.'
    - A corollary: Ontological Humility
      - What makes it onto the big list of everything?
      - That is not for the flat ontologist to say.
        - The listkeeper may venture that to be is to be the value of a bound variable, but must then apply to the nearest natural scientist to assemble her list.
          - The binders are given by the terms of our best theory, and our best theory is given by our best natural science.
            - There is really no more for the ontologist to do.

# Privileged Ontology I

- Basically Aristotelian in temperament:

  - Offers the ontologist a far wider remit.

  - If not the first, then the dominant question for the privileged ontologist is neither brief nor immediately refreshing: which kinds of things are basic relative to other kinds of things—because there are kinds of of things and of some of them are basic relative to others—and wherein does their basicness reside?

  - Already the privileged ontologist is engaged in a much more complex and multifarious task than the flat ontologist.

    - She is implicated in addressing a question whose answer demands high-level taxonomizing.

      - Plainly, in any event, her question will not admit of the Anglo-Saxon brevity so prized by Quine.

# Privileged Ontology II

- Scalar Version: Some things exist more—or more fully—than other things.

    - E.g. The *ens perfictissimum* exists more—or more fully—than some pond scum.

- Binary Version: Being is binary, but some beings are categorially primary relative other beings.

    - Some beings metaphysically depend upon other beings, where this dependence may, crucially, be non-causal (or, non H-causal):

        - Existential: y depends existentially on x $=_{df}$ (i) necessarily, if x did not exist y would not exist & (ii) possibly, x exists and y does not exist

        - Essential or Definitional: y depends essentially or definitionally on x $=_{df}$ (i) necessarily, any essence-specifying definition of y makes reference to the essence of x; and (ii) possibly, an essence-specifying definition x makes no reference to the essence of y

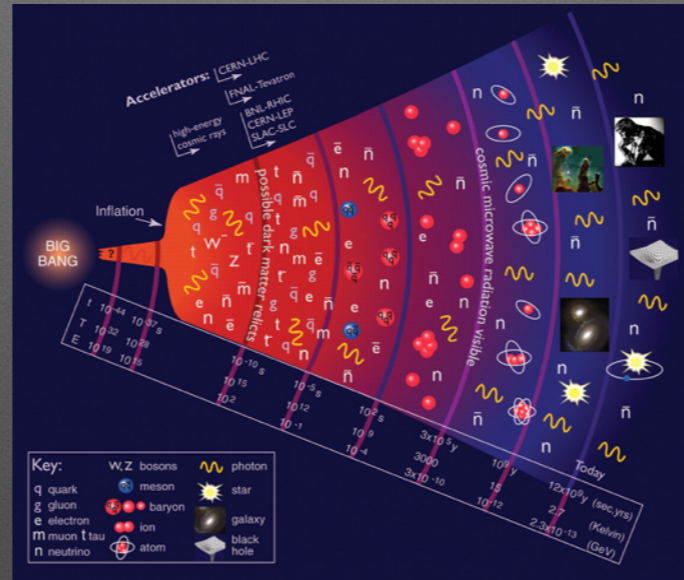# Non-categorial Dependence

- Here contrasted with causal (or H-causal) dependence.

- One might think—Hume and his adherents *do* think—that:

  - No cause/effect is existentially dependent on its effect/cause.

    - Indeed, this follows from the twin theses that causes and effects are events, while, possibly, any event *e* may exist without any other event *e\**.

- Put in these terms, metaphysical dependence is (perhaps *inter alia*) non-H-causal dependence.

- Some things which are are plausibly non-H-causally dependent upon other things: becoming an aunt on the birth of her nephew; a house on its parts and their relations; every mereological sum on its parts; the centre of gravity of a jeep; the widowing of Xanthippe; every Cambridge change on some non-Cambridge change; a smile upon a face
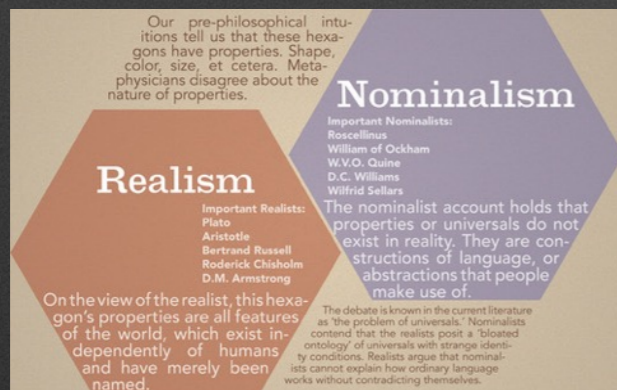
# Thinking Flatly: Claimants to Existence



Physical Objects?



Quarks?



Mary, the Mother of God?  God?



Universals?



Sets?



Numbers?

# An Easy Slide by McX

- Things named, must be. . .

  - . . .else we could not be talking about anything at all when we attempted to talk about them.

    - If we weren't talking about anything at all, we would be saying nothing.

      - Yet, we do manage to say *something*—something meaningful—when talking about the things we name.

        - Perhaps, then, things named just are the things we mean.

          - So, our naming discourse is made meaningful by the things we mean.  Things meant provide meaning to our naming discourse.

            - Why, things meant just *are* meanings.

              - So, there are meanings; and things named must be.

# The Structure of Quine's Discussion

- First: stare down the ontologically profligate:

  - Deny Meinongian objects, using Russellean techniques.

  - Decry universals, by lampooning one rather limp argument for their existence.

  - Appeal to Fregean senses in combatting movements to commitment (but then take it back. . .).

- Second: determine when and how and why a theory has ontological commitments.

- Finally: gesture towards selection criteria as between theories with competing ontological commitments.

# Plato's Beard

- 'It is some such line of thought that leads philosophers like McX to impute being where they might otherwise be quite content to recognize that there is nothing. Thus, take Pegasus. If Pegasus were not, McX argues, we should not be talking about anything when we use the word; therefore it would be nonsense to say even that Pegasus is not. Thinking to show thus that the denial of Pegasus cannot be coherently maintained, he concludes that Pegasus is.' —Quine (1948, 1)

# Plato's Beard's Argument

- Arguing with McX is a mug's game:

  - To say of any *x* 'x does not exist' is already to say something about *something*, viz. *x.*

  - So, one may argue:

    1. One may say meaningfully of any *x* that 'x does not exist'. [Negative existentials are meaningful.]

    2. One says something meaningful of *x* only if one successfully refers to *x.*

    3. One may successfully refer to *x* only if *x* exists.

    4. Hence, one says something meaningful of *x* only if *x* exists.

    5. Negative existentials say something meaningfully of *x,* namely that *x* does not exist.

    6. So, negative existentials say meaningfully of *x* that *x* does not exist only if *x* exists.

    7. So, negative existentials are bound to be self-undermining: to say of any *x* that *x* does not exist is already to presuppose the existence of *x.*

# What?!  Pegasus Exists?

- Well, Pegasus exists, but as an idea and not as a physical object.

- 'McX cannot, indeed, quite persuade himself that any region of space-time, near or remote, contains a flying horse of flesh and blood. Pressed for further details on Pegasus, then, he says that Pegasus is an idea in men's minds. Here, however, a confusion begins to be apparent. We may for the sake of argument concede that there is an entity, and even a unique entity (though this is rather implausible), which is the mental Pegasus-idea; but this mental entity is not what people are talking about when they deny Pegasus.' —Quine (1948, 1)

# A Hidden Multiplicity?

- No, Pegasus is not an idea; and yet Pegasus does not exist *as ordinary horses exist.*

- Instead, Pegasus exists in some other way: some things *subsist*. So, we can in a way maintain:

  - (3) One may successfully refer to *x* only if *x* exists.

- It is just that some of the things which exist are unactualized possibiles.

  - We deny *actualism*, the thesis that what exists is coextensive with what is actual.

# Quine's Complaints

- 'Exists' is perfectly univocal.

    - We are not embroiled in a lexical quibble here.

- Wyman's view is unseemly from an aesthetic point of view.

    - It offends the sensibilities of those preferring desert landscapes.

- It takes us into the realm of *de re* modalities, whereas we should restrict ourselves to the more felicitous *de dicto*.

    - We may happily say, 'Necessarily, nine is greater than five.' but we must abjure saying 'Nine is necessarily greater than five.'

        - Or, if you like: 'Possibly, horses fly.' but please *not* 'There are possible flying horses.'

- In any case, impossible objects offer a reductio of this entire approach.

# Quine's (Russell's) Way Out

- 'Russell, in his theory of so-called singular descriptions, showed clearly how we might meaningfully use seeming names without supposing that there be the entities allegedly named. The names to which Russell's theory directly applies are complex descriptive names such as 'the author of Waverley', 'the present King of France', 'the round square cupola on Berkeley College'. Russell analyzes such phrases systematically as fragments of the whole sentences in which they occur. The sentence 'The author of Waverley was a poet', for example, is explained as a whole as meaning 'Someone (better: something) wrote Waverley and was a poet, and nothing else wrote Waverley'. (The point of this added clause is to affirm the uniqueness which is implicit in the word 'the', in 'the author of Waverley'.) The sentence 'The round square cupola on Berkeley College is pink' is explained as 'Something is round and square and is a cupola on Berkeley College and is pink, and nothing else is round and square and a cupola on Berkeley College'.'

- $\exists x(Wx \ \& \ Px \ \& \ \forall y(Wy \rightarrow y=x \ ))$

- The meaning of a name is its description-theoretic content.

# That Way Out

- 'We commit ourselves to an ontology containing numbers when we say there are prime numbers larger than a million; we commit ourselves to an ontology containing centaurs when we say there are centaurs; and we commit ourselves to an ontology containing Pegasus when we say Pegasus is. But we do not commit ourselves to an ontology containing Pegasus or the author of Waverley or the round square cupola on Berkeley College when we say that Pegasus or the author of Waverley or the cupola in question is not. We need no longer labor under the delusion that the meaningfulness of a statement containing a singular term presupposes an entity named by the term. A singular term need not name to be significant.'—Quine (1948, 5)

# Let Us Turn to Universals

- 'Now let us turn to the ontological problem of universals: the question whether there are such entities as attributes, relations, classes, numbers, functions. McX, characteristically enough, thinks there are. Speaking of attributes, he says: "There are red houses, red roses, red sunsets; this much is prephilosophical common sense in which we must all agree. These houses, roses,and sunsets, then, have something in common; and this which they have in common is all I mean by the attribute of redness." For McX, thus, there being attributes is even more obvious and trivial than the obvious and trivial fact of there being red houses, roses, and sunsets. This, I think, is characteristic of metaphysics, or at least of that part of metaphysics called ontology: one who regards a statement on this subject as true at all must regard it as trivially true. One's ontology is basic to the conceptual scheme by which he interprets all experiences, even the most commonplace ones. Judged within some particular conceptual scheme—and how else is judgment possible?—an ontological statement goes without saying, standing in need of no separate justification at all. Ontological statements follow immediately from all manner of casual statements of commonplace fact, just as—from the point of view, anyway, of McX's conceptual scheme—"There is an attribute" follows from "There are red houses, red roses, red sunsets."' —Quine (1948, 5-6)

# McX's Argument

1. Mother Theresa is humble.

2. Muhammed Ali is humble.

3. So, there is something MT and MA share, viz. humility.

# Two Observations

- McX: Do not saddle me with a confusion between naming and expressing: these predicates express rather than name the universal *humility.*

    - They are meaningful—and so have meanings.

- Quine: Do not infer 'has a meaning' from 'is meaningful'—not, at any rate, if you you're going to reify meanings.

    - We are committed only to those entities whose putative existence cannot be paraphrased away.

        - It is meaningful to say 'The average Swedish couple as 1.7 children.'

            - We do not thereby incur a debt to the existence of a 1.7 child.

# Paraphrase Tests

- 'We may say, for example, that some dogs are white and not thereby commit ourselves to recognizing either doghood or whiteness as entities. "Some dogs are white" says that some things that are dogs are white; and, in order that this statement be true, the things over which the bound variable "something" ranges must include some white dogs, but need not include doghood or whiteness. On the other hand, when we say that some zoological species are cross-fertile we are committing ourselves to recognizing as entities the several species themselves, abstract though they are. We remain so committed at least until we devise some way of so paraphrasing the statement as to show that the seeming reference to species on the part of our bound variable was an avoidable manner of speaking.' —Quine (1948, 7)

# Where does Quine's way out leave us?

- Do we have a ready understanding of the paraphrase test?

    - A paraphrase is successful when and only when a paraphrase is:

        - truth-preserving;

        - meaning-preserving; and

        - of the same modal profile as its targeted sentence.

    Crucially: what is our motivation for indulging in paraphrase?

        - Quine's Quip

        - Methodological parsimony?

# Seeming Privilege

- If we think that we can simply paraphrase all potential categories of being, then we're deluded.

- Consider the following very simple thoughts:

  - Some beings seem *dependent* and others *independent*.

  - Some beings seem able to *persist* through time whilst remaining numerically one and the same and others not

  - Some beings seem *predicable* and others not.

  - Some beings seem to be *unities* of a, well, privileged sort and others not.

# These seemings. . .

- . . . may track genuine divisions among beings, or may be simple seemings to be explained away.

- . . .may indeed be somehow be present in the manifest image, but yet not correspond to any distinctions in the scientific image, or, more broadly, the investigated image.

- . . .may yield to paraphrase which makes no reference to them, or may not.

- . . . or may, generally, like some other seemings not be the seemings they seem to be.

# A Presumption of Privilege

- The Principle of Phainomenological Conservatism:

- If it appears (φαίνεται) to a subject S as if p, then, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, S has grounds for accepting p.

- Two features:

  - Positive:  Phainomena look beyond themselves to the way things are, to beings (onta) rather than seemings

  - Negative: (PPC) is self-limiting in that phainomena qualify as evidentiary but are not thereby guarantors of the truth