

Metaphysics, Bullshit, and the Analysis of Philosophical Problems

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Abstract

Although metaphysics has made an impressive comeback over the past half century, there are still a great many philosophers today who think it is bullshit, under numerous precisifications of ‘That’s just bullshit’ so that it’s a negative assessment and doesn’t apply to most philosophy (so it singles out metaphysics as particularly worse off than most other fields of philosophy). One encounters this attitude countless times in casual conversations, social media, and occasionally in print (e.g. Ladyman and Ross, 2007). Is it true?

What would suffice to show that metaphysics is not bullshit?

Here is one answer: show that a large and diverse group of metaphysical problems aren’t bullshit. Then their good status would buttress metaphysics itself, at least to a significant degree. But what would suffice to show that a particular metaphysical problem isn’t bullshit?

An answer: show that there are no tame, dismissive solutions to the problem.¹ And we could show that there are no tame, dismissive solutions if we could offer an analysis of the metaphysical problem that showed that the problem itself *forces* one to embrace highly counterintuitive claims *no matter what position one takes on it*, assuming one doesn’t fool around but makes the effort to offer a thorough response. Hence, *if* we can prove that a given metaphysical problem forces one to accept highly counterintuitive claims *no matter what position one takes on it*, *then* we will have shown that that problem is not bullshit. And if we can show that a large and diverse group of metaphysical problems satisfy that antecedent, then we will have shown that metaphysics itself isn’t bullshit, to a significant degree. Can it be done?

In answering that question we will construct a particularly profitable way to analyze a philosophical problem.

The Problem of the Many is a typical metaphysical problem in that reflection on it generates bizarre philosophical views, such as the view that one thing can be numerically identical with many things, or the view that there are millions of ordinary trees where common sense says there is just one tree. One could easily suspect that it is a good example of a bullshit metaphysical problem. Anyone who talks to a diverse group of philosophers has heard the BS complaint many, many times.

¹ Previous attempts along this line include Schwitzgebel 2014, Frances 2019, and Frances 2021.

reasonably makes that notion precise. One can precisify it this way: a claim is philosophically counterintuitive at a time if and only if (i) if the claim is true, then a great many of our ordinary beliefs and/or a significant portion of our most confidently held ordinary beliefs or belief-dispositions are false, or (ii) if the claim is true, then key philosophical ideas held by a large portion of philosophers at that time are false. Thus put, 'philosophically counterintuitive' might not be the best term. 'Philosophically significant' and 'philosophically consequential' were considered. Set aside aptness of vocabulary.

P₁: It's not the case that there is at least one tree in my backyard.

It might seem obvious that P₁ is philosophically counterintuitive. Any ordinary person or botanist would swear on their life that there is a tree in my backyard; so, P₁ is about as counterintuitive as a claim can get. If P₁ is true, then due to the great number and variety of Problem of the Many applications, this will mean that an incredible number and variety of commonsensical claims aren't true (e.g. there won't be any people or cars either). Hence, if there aren't any trees in my backyard, then a great many of our ordinary beliefs, or a significant portion of our most confidently held ordinary beliefs or belief-dispositions, are not true.

There is, however, another possibility. Suppose P₁ is true in this article, so 'There is at least one tree in my backyard' isn't true as that sentence is used in this work of philosophy. Even so, perhaps tokens of that sentence type are true when used in ordinary discourse. And if P₁ is true in ordinary discourse, then its being false in philosophical discourse may not be nearly as counterintuitive; in addition, it won't follow, at least immediately, that a great many of our ordinary beliefs, or a significant portion of our most confidently held ordinary beliefs or belief-dispositions, are not true.

This type of situation is not unheard of. For instance, everyday discourse employing 'miracle', 'conscious', 'believe', and 'justified' might not match up with philosophical discourse using the same terms, since the two discourses often (not always) employ different relevant meanings (i.e. ones that change truth-value). The following sentences, appearing in philosophical discourse, should raise a red flag:

If her belief was not justified, then 'Her belief was justified' isn't true in ordinary discourse.

If there are no miracles, then 'There are miracles' isn't true in ordinary discourse.

When I argued above that P₁ is philosophically counterintuitive, it's at least arguable that I tacitly employed a similar premise in my argument:

1. If P₁ is true, then 'It's not the case that there is at least one tree in my backyard' is true in the discourse I am using right now in this article.
2. If that sentence is true in the discourse I'm using right now in this article, then it's true in ordinary discourse.
3. If it's true in ordinary discourse, then a great many of our ordinary beliefs, or a significant portion of our most confidently held ordinary beliefs or belief-dispositions, are not true.
4. Hence, by (1)-(3) if P₁ is true, then a great many of our ordinary beliefs, or a significant portion of our most confidently held ordinary beliefs or belief-dispositions, are not true.

Sure enough, if premise (2) is true, then P_1 is philosophically counterintuitive (since (1) and (3) are true and $\{(1)-(3)\}$ entails (4), as the conditionals are material). But is (2) true?

There are five good reasons for thinking that (2) is true. First, there aren't any problematic terms here similar to 'miracle' or 'justified'; hence, that particular reason to be suspicious of (2) fails to apply. Second, I am explicitly saying—right now, if you like—that I am using, in this article, ordinary English—unless, of course, I *supplement* it with philosophical jargon, which clearly doesn't appear in the Cs. Third, there are good reasons, offered by Timothy Williamson (forthcoming; cf. van Inwagen, 2014), for thinking that philosophers are using ordinary English in their discussions of the ontology of the everyday world. Fourth, even if there is a language typically used in the "ontology room" that makes 'There are trees' express a proposition truth-conditionally different from the one it expresses in ordinary English, I am explicitly saying I'm not using that philosophical language and I am using ordinary English—and such a proclamation should shift the linguistic interpretation as appropriate. Fifth, there doesn't seem to be anything *preventing* me from using 'There is at least one tree in my backyard' with its ordinary meaning. In short, there is little good reason to think (2) isn't true, and there is excellent reason to think it is true.

But what if I simply am *unable*, in this article, to use ordinary English in my analysis of the Cs no matter what I say or do? Amazingly enough, it doesn't matter! Suppose the arguments of the previous paragraph are unsound and (2) isn't true, so 'There is at least one tree in my backyard' has different truth-values in ordinary discourse and in this article, despite the fact that C_1 is a sentence of perfectly ordinary English (however one wants to spell that out) and I have insisted that I am using ordinary English. Well, that would mean that we have been wildly wrong about linguistic interpretation—a philosophically counterintuitive result.

Hence, I am *not* claiming or even faintly suggesting that (2) is true, although that's what I suspect is the case. Instead, I'm saying that we have a philosophically counterintuitive result whether or not (2) is true.

In sum, here's my argument, with symbolization guidance regarding the entailments:

- a. If P_1 is true in ordinary discourse, then a great many of our ordinary beliefs and/or a significant portion of our most confidently held ordinary beliefs or belief-dispositions are false. ($A \supset Z1$)
- b. If (i) P_1 is not true in ordinary discourse but (ii) P_1 is true in this article, (iii) I have instructed that tokens of P_1 in this article belong to ordinary English (even if they could belong to another language), and (iv) P_1 does not contain any philosophical jargon not in ordinary English, then key philosophical ideas held by many contemporary philosophers are false. [$(\sim A \ \& \ B \ \& \ C \ \& \ D) \supset Z2$]
- c. I have instructed that tokens of P_1 in this article belong to ordinary English (even if they could belong to another language), and P_1 does not contain any philosophical jargon not in ordinary English. ($C \ \& \ D$)
- d. Hence, by (a)-(c), if P_1 is true in this article, then either (i) a great many of our ordinary beliefs and/or a significant portion of our most confidently held ordinary beliefs or belief-dispositions are false, or (ii) key philosophical ideas held by many contemporary philosophers are false. $B \supset (Z1 \vee Z2)$

- e. Hence, by (d) and the definition of ‘philosophically counterintuitive’, P_1 is philosophically counterintuitive.

We will encounter other premises like (2). Each has the form ‘If ‘S’ is true in the discourse I’m using right now, then it’s true in ordinary discourse’. I will call them *bridge premises* since they purport to bridge the alleged gap between my sentences in this article and ordinary discourse. The philosophical discourse need not belong to ontology, as other paradoxes come from other areas of metaphysics as well as other subfields of philosophy.

P_2 : It’s not the case that every tree in my backyard is exhaustively composed of chemical atoms.

If P_2 is true in this article, then ‘It’s not the case that every tree in my backyard is exhaustively composed of chemical atoms’ is true in this article. But if that is true in this article, then it’s true in ordinary discourse. If it’s true in ordinary discourse, then we have a philosophically counterintuitive result, as any scientifically informed person could tell you. And if it’s not true in ordinary discourse, because the relevant bridge premise is false, we still have a philosophically counterintuitive result for the same reason we had one in the case of P_1 .

P_3 : It’s not the case that for every tree in my backyard that is exhaustively composed of chemical atoms, there is a group of chemical atoms that composes it.

If P_3 is true in this article, then a tree in my backyard is exhaustively composed of chemical atoms but there is no group of atoms that composes it. If so, that is philosophically counterintuitive, as it goes firmly against key philosophical ideas held by many philosophers, if not natural scientists. A toy airplane is composed of Legos and there is a group of Legos that composes it (those 345 Legos that were in the box from the store); whereas a tree is composed of atoms but there is no group of atoms that composes it. That’s the oddity.

P_4 : It’s not the case that for every group of chemical atoms that composes a tree in my backyard, there is a group of chemical atoms with at least some distinct chemical atoms that composes a tree in my backyard.

If P_4 is true in this article, then there is a group of chemical atoms, G , that composes a tree in my backyard—call that tree T_G —but there is no distinctly-membered group of atoms that composes a tree in my backyard. Clearly, G has got to have something like 10^{30} chemical atoms (give or take a few orders of magnitude) in order to compose a tree in my backyard, as atoms are very small compared to ordinary trees in backyards. So, now take groups G_1 - G_{million} , each of which contains the atoms in G plus or minus exactly one borderline case chemical atom. Given the way ordinary trees are, with enormous numbers of borderline cases of atoms, it’s clear that these million G s exist provided G exists. If P_4 is true, then none of G_1 - G_{million} compose a tree in my backyard. Hence, *there are over a million perfectly ordinary treeish groups of atoms that are literally 99.9999999999999999999999999999% overlapping but only one of which composes a tree in my backyard.*

P_4 is not saying that those other G s fail to compose T_G specifically. Instead, it’s saying that those other G s fail to compose any tree at all (clearly, if they don’t compose a tree in my backyard, they don’t compose one elsewhere). Either those other G s don’t compose anything at all—but how is G so

magical compared to them that it composes something while they don't?—or they do compose things but those things aren't trees—but how could those things not be trees if the thing exhaustively composed by virtually identical G is a tree? This means that a perfectly ordinary use of 'tree in my backyard' is stupefyingly, staggeringly precise, favoring G over G_1 - G_{million} despite their virtual identity. But how on earth did 'is a tree in my backyard' *acquire* such an amazingly discriminating meaning? No one has offered even the faintest plausible story, and there is good reason to think none is forthcoming.

Obviously, one could offer a *stipulation* regarding 'is a tree in my backyard' so that under the resulting interpretation P_4 is true and not philosophically counterintuitive. This would be similar to choosing a sharp cutoff for 'is rich'. However, that fact doesn't suggest for an instant that the sentence *already*, in the actual world prior to our possible stipulation, has an accurate interpretation with that consequence.

If you accept P_4 , then you surely have to wonder what shocking falsehoods there are about language and thought that you have hitherto presumed in all your work. Perhaps you have grown comfortable with accepting many other comparably outrageous epistemicist ideas, such as the idea that a perfectly ordinary token of 'The restaurant is a short walk from here' goes from true to not true in the space of a yoctometer (10^{-24} m). It's great that you have managed to accept linguistic miracles: it's impressive that you have gotten over your *previous* discomfort with some radical claims. But then why think your *continuing* discomfort with any other radical claim isn't misguided as well?

There are two points here, worth distinguishing. First, there's the one is just made: if there can be over a million perfectly ordinary treeish groups of chemical atoms that are literally 99.9999999999999999999999999999% overlapping but only one of which composes a tree in my backyard—if our ordinary words and thoughts have such incredibly exact meanings—then I could be wrong about a great many commonsensical claims about meaning.

Second, the grounds of meaning are made positively magical. Shifting over to the restaurant case for the sake of variety: who would have thought that if one puts all the factors that help fix linguistic meanings into one pot, that pot would give a perfectly ordinary utterance token of 'The restaurant is a short walk from here'—an utterance token made in certain highly specific circumstances, so we avoid speaker contextual issues—a truth condition that can distinguish two situations a yoctometer apart? If someone who used 'short walk' in the distant past had, counterfactually, farted during their utterance, or had a sore little toe that made him not want to make the walk to his favorite restaurant, would the true/untrue cutoff for the restaurant sentence token ended up at $10^{26} + 117.11111$ ym instead of $10^{26} + 117.11112$ ym? No one has the slightest remotely plausible idea *how* perfectly ordinary token utterances of ordinary sentences such as those could ever *acquire* such utterly miraculous discriminating truth conditions. The alternative idea that these sharp cutoff facts are marvelous yet brute, so there is no pot of things that fix meanings, would show, once again, that we are wildly wrong about meaning and thought (there may be brute facts, but the sharp cutoff facts for tokens of 'There is a pumpkin by the tree' and 'The restaurant is a short walk from here' aren't among them).

To be sure, I'm *not* suggesting that P_4 or any of the other seven disjuncts is false! (Regarding my commentary on P_4 , see Horgan, 1997 and Williamson, 1997a, 1997b.) There's no adequate argument

here for or against epistemicism, dialethism, compositional nihilism, or anything else. I've argued only that P_4 is philosophically counterintuitive since it is inconsistent with key philosophical ideas held by many contemporary philosophers.

P_5 : It's not the case that no tree in my backyard is exhaustively composed of distinctly-membered (in chemical atoms) groups of chemical atoms.

If P_5 is true in this article, then there are at least two distinctly-membered groups of atoms that both compose (at a time) the very same tree in my backyard. Since the groups differ in atom membership, there is chemical atom in one but not the other; call such an atom A . Hence, it appears that at a particular moment the tree is partially composed of A and not partially composed of A . Unless we have made a truly fundamental error in how to think of composition at a time, we have a contradiction (millions of them, for other Problem-of-the-Many cases). In any case, the result is philosophically counterintuitive since it goes against key philosophical ideas held by many contemporary philosophers.

P_6 : It's not the case that there is at most one tree in my backyard.

If P_6 is true in this article, then there are at least two trees in my backyard—despite the fact that any non-philosopher or botanist would swear on their life that there's just one tree there. I omit the standard comments on the relevant bridge premise.

P_7 : $C_1 \ \& \ C_2 \ \& \ C_3 \ \& \ C_4 \ \& \ C_5 \ \& \ C_6$ & there is no truth-preserving derivation to a contradiction.

If you gaze at C_1 - C_5 , you'll be able to work out how to infer $\sim C_6$ from them using just four elementary inferences. If P_7 is true, then at least one of the four is not truth-preserving (or the inference from P and Q to $(P \ \& \ Q)$ isn't truth-preserving). Here are the four inferences:

I1: From

C_1 : There is at least one tree in my backyard

C_2 : Every tree in my backyard is exhaustively composed of chemical atoms

To

There is at least one tree in my backyard that is exhaustively composed of chemical atoms.

I2: From

There is at least one tree in my backyard that is exhaustively composed of chemical atoms

C_3 : For every tree in my backyard that is exhaustively composed of chemical atoms, there is a group of chemical atoms that composes it

To

There is at least one group of chemical atoms that composes a tree in my backyard.

I3: From

There is at least one group of chemical atoms that composes a tree in my backyard

C_4 : For every group of chemical atoms that composes a tree in my backyard, there is a group of

chemical atoms with at least some distinct chemical atoms that composes a tree in my backyard

To

There are groups of chemical atoms that are distinctly-membered (in chemical atoms) and that both compose trees in my backyard.

I4: From

There are groups of chemical atoms that are distinctly-membered (in chemical atoms) and that both compose trees in my backyard

C₅: No tree in my backyard is exhaustively composed of distinctly-membered (in chemical atoms) groups of chemical atoms

To

~C₆: It is not the case that there is at most one tree in my backyard.

It is very difficult to see how any of these four inferences fails to be truth-preserving, which is what the truth of P₇ requires. To say this is *not* to assume or imply that first-order logic can “capture” the logical form of each of C₁-C₆, whatever ‘capture’ means here. Even if first-order logic cannot “capture” at least one of the C_s, it would be philosophically counterintuitive to learn that one of I1-I4 isn’t truth-preserving. The significance of P₇ comes from its disjunctive consequences: either the inference-types are truth-preserving but we have badly misunderstood the meanings of the C sentences (so the rules are fine but don’t apply to at least one of the C_s), or we have understood the meanings of the C sentences but the inference-types aren’t truth-preserving (the meanings are fine but the rules aren’t). (Or *both* the rules and meanings aren’t fine.) Hence, the truth of P₇ would have profound implications for either (a) how we understand linguistic meaning, since the C_s are quite simple sentences but we don’t understand them or (b) how we understand logic, since the inferences are quite simple and seemingly truth-preserving. And recall the point made earlier: there is an enormous number and variety of instances of the Problem of the Many, so (a) and (b) go far beyond the six C_s. Hence, P₇ is philosophically counterintuitive.

P₈: C₁ & C₂ & C₃ & C₄ & C₅ & C₆ & there is a truth-preserving derivation to a contradiction.

If P₈ is true, then two things follow. First, C₆ isn’t true (because P₈ says the obvious derivation to the contradiction (C₆ & ~C₆) goes through), which is philosophically counterintuitive for the reasons given for P₆. Second, C₆ is both true and not true, which is philosophically counterintuitive as well—especially since none of the C_s is even a paradoxical sentence, such as those from the Liar and other semantic paradoxes.

Since there is an enormous variety and number of cases that fit the Problem of the Many template, if we think the one I’ve used above regarding the tree in my backyard reveals a pair of true contradictory claims, then an enormous variety and number of other pairs of contradictory claims are true too (even if we adopt a paraconsistent logic, so that it’s not the case that everything follows from just the contradiction in the backyard tree case).

My arguments regarding the obvious, immediate philosophical consequences of the individual P disjuncts, plus the logically true premise that at least one P disjunct is true, show that at least one of the following is both true and philosophically counterintuitive:

(not claims).

Def: R is *philosophical paradox* = R is a plurality of claims C_1-C_n such that upon consistent disambiguation (i) each C_i comes from the same philosophical problem, (ii) each C_i is individually highly plausible, (iii) it is highly plausible that there is a truth-preserving derivation from the Cs to a contradiction, and (iv) no proper sub-plurality of R satisfies (i)-(iii).

I include the bit about disambiguation in order to make sure that a philosophical problem that fits the four conditions isn't a pseudo-problem. For example, the three sentences, 'We have mental processes', 'If something is mental, then it's not physical', and 'We are entirely physical' each have interpretations in non-philosophical contexts that are highly plausible. For the sake of a clean example, pretend that outside of philosophical discourse, occurrences of 'mental' sometimes (not always) have a truth-conditional contribution such that 'x is mental' requires the truth of 'x isn't physical' (so in this scenario 'mental' is unlike terms such as 'hydrogen', for which deference to experts is prevalent). Pretend also that in philosophical discourse 'mental' has no such connection to 'not physical'. The three sentences fail to generate a paradox because upon consistent disambiguation—so we interpret 'mental' univocally in the first two sentences—at least one of the Cs is highly contentious, to say the least. So, clause (ii) of the stipulation is not satisfied.

I add clause (iv) in an attempt to make sure R doesn't include anything irrelevant to the philosophical problem it is intended to capture (e.g. we should not add 'Trees are made of molecules' to C_1-C_6 , since the six Cs are all that's needed to produce the derivation to a contradiction). As an alternative to (iv), we could just say "Do not include anything irrelevant in R".

I intend that many if not all of the traditional metaphysical paradoxes satisfy the stipulation's four conditions. This is part of the beauty of metaphysics: it's frequently the case that metaphysical problems are formulated in such a way as to satisfy (i)-(iv)—a feature that is not true of discourse on many other philosophical problems.

Def: C is a *component of philosophical paradox* R = C is exactly one of R.

Def: X is the *Disjunctive Analysis, DA, of philosophical paradox* R = X is the disjunction of: the negation of each component of R, the conjunction of the components of R plus the claim that there is a truth-preserving derivation from R to a contradiction, and the conjunction of the components of R plus the claim that there is no truth-preserving derivation from R to a contradiction.

For the Problem of the Many, the DA is the disjunction of the eight Ps. More generally, if there are n components of paradox R, then there are $(n + 2)$ disjuncts of R's DA. DAs are disjunctive logical truths and serve as stepping stones to other key disjunctive truths:

Def: X is a *Consequence Disjunction, CD, of philosophical paradox* R = X is a disjunction of obvious, immediate philosophically relevant consequences of all the disjuncts of the Disjunctive Analysis of R.

For the Problem of the Many, one CD is the disjunction of the nine bullet points preceding these four

definitions. I can't think of any good reason for the idea that a given R must have *just one* CD, although in order to be sure of the truth of the CD we restrict ourselves to the *obvious, immediate* consequences of each disjunct of the corresponding DA (as illustrated by my arguments leading to the CD above).

Consider these five theses:

T₁: The Problem of the Many has a true Consequence Disjunction, given above.

T₂: Each disjunct of that CD is currently philosophically counterintuitive in the sense articulated earlier.

T₃: If a philosophical problem generates a CD each disjunct of which is philosophically counterintuitive, then that problem is not bullshit.

T₄: Many other metaphysical problems generate CD disjunctions that make T₁ and T₂ true.

T₅: If T₁-T₄ are true, then metaphysics isn't bullshit.

My arguments regarding the obvious, immediate consequences of each of the Ps, with the conclusions of those arguments summarized in the CD, are clearly sound, as they were so unambitious. So, T₁ is true. Moreover, even a casual appreciation of the nine disjuncts of the CD is enough to see that each is philosophically counterintuitive (this is a sociological fact, not a normative one). Hence, T₂ is true too.

Since T₃ is a universalized conditional, in order to cast doubt on it one has to make a strong case that there are bullshit philosophical problems that under consistent disambiguation have a CD each disjunct of which is currently philosophically counterintuitive. If my experience in philosophy is any guide, most BS philosophical problems *once put in paradox form* (which includes being stripped of relevant disambiguations) inevitably have a component claim that is highly contentious. Indeed, most BS philosophical problems are so hopeless that one cannot put them in paradox form at all.

One might object to T₃ on the grounds that disputes about the CD disjuncts are "merely verbal". However, the arguments for the counterintuitiveness of the CD disjuncts addressed questions of interpretation, so platitudes about the prevalence of context dependence and other linguistic shenanigans are useless here. In addition, the use of 'merely' is crucial. Even if disputes about the CD disjuncts (all nine of them? Seriously?) are "verbal", that does not, at all, mean they are "merely verbal". Even if the disputes about each of the CD disjuncts were really about language in some deep sense, there isn't the slightest reason to think they all have the import of disputing 'Does that ridiculous drink count as a martini?' (cf. Bennett 2009).

In addition, thesis T₄ (defended next) entails that there are a great many disjuncts, from CDs generated from other metaphysical problems. It's hardly plausible that the disputes about *every* disjunct from *every* metaphysical CD are merely verbal.

Regarding T₄: similar proofs of other true CDs can be constructed in the same fashion using materials from other metaphysical chestnuts such as the Statue-Clay problem, the Ship of Theseus problem, the Tibbles-Tib problem, van Inwagen's argument for incompatibilism, paradoxes about color tokens,

the Sorites paradox, etc. This is not to say that the CD disjuncts in question are, in each case, as philosophically counterintuitive as those for the Problem of the Many. They aren't, but that hardly matters to the truth of T_4 . Further, some of those problems are a mixture of metaphysics and other fields such as the philosophy of language, mind, or logic, but that hardly matters either: many philosophical problems having nothing to do with metaphysics are a mix. If the philosophical significance of metaphysics lies *mainly* in the philosophy of language and logic, well, that is fine: that hardly suggests that metaphysics is bullshit.

Roughly put, what is needed to prove a surprising CD is this: a philosophy problem that under consistent disambiguation generates a set of highly intuitive claims such that when subject to highly intuitively truth-preserving inference rules, can be used to derive the negation of a highly intuitive claim. Those conditions are satisfied for problems in other fields of philosophy as well, thereby showing that those problems aren't bullshit either: Curry's Paradox, the Grelling-Nelson paradox, the No-No paradox, the Paradox of the Knower, Fitch's paradox, the Surprise Exam, the St. Petersburg paradox, the Suspense paradox, Russell's paradox, Yablo's paradox, the Dogmatism paradox, the Liar paradox, the Preface paradox, the argument for skepticism, the relativity of simultaneity paradox, etc.

One could object to T_5 on the grounds that the proofs of the CDs do nothing to *solve* any controversial philosophical problem. For instance, even after accepting the proofs we don't thereby come to know whether dialetheism is true, whether epistemicism is true, whether the simple inference rules in question are truth-preserving, whether trees are composed of chemical atoms, etc. I agree. But that fact fails to suggest that T_5 is false. The theses show that metaphysics isn't bullshit; they aren't intended to solve any philosophical problem other than the metaphilosophical one of 'Is metaphysics bullshit?'

A much better objection to T_5 is that even though I'm right that there are a bunch of non-bullshit problems in metaphysics, much of its unique jargon is so ill-defined that many discussions using that term are hopelessly muddled. The key terms in the objection are 'much' and 'many', since using 'some' would hardly distinguish metaphysics from other areas of philosophy. To be clear, there is nothing in this article that rules out the possibility that the problem of jargon-muddle is significantly worse in metaphysics than other areas. However, the onus is on the critic to make the comparative point. That would be a large project.

Finally, I'm not merely saying that metaphysics has some philosophically important problems. I'm saying that (i) starting from *several* classic metaphysical problems we can construct (ii) *proofs* that (iii) establish the existence of *philosophically counterintuitive truths*—although the oddity, as we have seen, is that we aren't sure which philosophically counterintuitive disjuncts of the CDs are the true ones. That should go a long way in showing, by concrete examples, that metaphysics isn't bullshit. It might not be a shining city on a hill, filled with nothing but lovely, morally upstanding problems and issues, but it's not the slum many have accused it of being. Although I have not argued for the thesis here, I think that since metaphysics has (i)-(iii) going for it, and some other areas of philosophy do not (that's the bit I haven't argued for), metaphysics is, to a certain extent, *further* from being bullshit than those other areas of philosophy. Metaphysics deserves our admiration, and not our mere tolerance.

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