

**Francesco Berto** and **Matteo Plebani**. *Ontology and Metaontology: A Contemporary Guide*. Bloomsbury Academic 2015. 264 pp. \$109.80.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9781441191953); \$32.36 USD (Paperback ISBN 9781441182890).

I loved reading this book. It has been said that metaontology is the new black. If this is so then Berto and Plebani provide their readers with a highly fashionable, very well written, and good introduction and guide into the world of contemporary debates on ontology and metaontology.

In the introductory chapter Berto and Plebani set the stage by positioning ontology and metaontology in a broader perspective. Ontology is defined along Quinean lines as the study of what exists. Metaontology is defined as the study of the nature of ontology. The main concern of ontology is supplying an answer to the question 'What is there?' The main questions concerning metaontology are 'What do we mean when we ask "What is there?"' and 'What is the correct methodology of ontology?' The remainder of the introduction is used to explain the relations, differences and commonalities between ontology and metaontology on the one hand and metaphysics, science, and common sense on the other hand.

The rest of the book is divided into three parts. The first two parts are on metaontology. The first part comes with the title Quinean Metaontology and has three chapters: (1) On Denoting, (2) 1948: On What There Is, and (3) The Standard View. The second part, Alternative Metaontologies, is divided into five chapters: (4) Ontological Pluralism and Neo-Fregeanism, (5) Carnap's View of Ontology and Neo-Carnapians, (6) Fictionalism, (7) Meinongianism, and (8) The Grounding Approach. The third part of the book with the title Ontology is divided into six chapters: (9) Abstract Objects I: Numbers & Co., (10) Abstract Objects II: Linguistic Types, Propositions and Values, (11) Possible Worlds, (12) Material Objects, (13) Fictional Objects, and (14) Beyond Particulars: Properties and Events. Each of these fourteen chapters has the same structure. There is a chapter outline, which is the table of contents of that chapter, followed by an introductory paragraph giving a summary of what to expect in the remainder of that chapter. Each chapter ends with some suggestions for further reading.

Part 1, consisting of the chapters 1-3, deals with the mainstream Quinean approach to contemporary metaontology. Chapter 1 explores the field with a discussion of Bertrand Russell's King of France problem that can be found in 'On Denoting'. In doing so they provide a useful insight into some of the terminology used in later chapters. Chapter 2 has its main focus on Quine's seminal paper 'On What There Is'. Starting off with the simple question put forward by Quine 'What Is There?' and his at first glance even simpler answer 'Everything' we get acquainted with Quine's criterion of ontological commitment wherein by means of quantification and paraphrase strategies is revealed the existence of what entities one must be committed to given a certain discourse. Chapter 3 finishes part 1 by discussing some key elements of Quinean metaontology such as different paraphrase strategies, different concepts of being and existence (univocal vs. equivocal), and criteria for identity captured in the Quinean slogan 'no entity without identity'.

Part 2 is concerned with alternatives to mainstream Quinean metaontology. Chapter 4 deals with ontological pluralism and neo-Fregeanism. With ontological pluralism the univocal approach of chapter 3 is left behind and replaced with the view that there is more than one way of being and existence. Ontological pluralists agree with the Quinean view that being and existence are captured by the quantifier while at the same time believing that quantificational expressions can have more than one meaning and that multiple quantifiers are needed to do justice to this belief. The part on neo-Fregeanism deals mainly with abstraction principles as a means to prove the existence of things and with the relationship between language and reality. Chapter 5 is on Carnapian and neo-Carnapian

metaontology. After a short introduction on linguistic frameworks the focus turns on the distinction between internal and external questions to support Carnap's view that in general ontological questions are meaningless. Carnap held that ontological questions only make sense when asked as internal questions within a linguistic framework. The chapter continues with two recent neo-Carnapian approaches to metaontology, Eli Hirsch's quantifier variance, broadly saying that ontological disputes are nothing over and above verbal disputes originating in the fact that people are speaking different languages with different quantifiers, and Thomas Hofwebers' distinction between internal and external roles of the existential quantifier. Chapter 6 provides an introduction to fictional approaches to ontology wherein talking about ontology is compared to talking about Sherlock Holmes. Ontological claims are not believed to be true *per se* but are only true according to a certain fiction. Different fictional approaches and their problems are discussed and applied to discussions about possible worlds, numbers and properties. The chapter on fictionalism together with the next chapter on Meinongianism (chapter 7) are, for me, the most outstanding chapters in the part of the book that deals with metaontology. Meinongianism is defined as the view that it is not existence that is captured by the quantifier but rather that it is the quantifier that captures being. What this gives us is an ontology (the Meinongian jungle) inhabited by various kinds of non-existent objects (fictional objects, possible objects, things that currently lack existence) of which we still say that they are making it possible to say that there are numbers but that these numbers do not exist. The remainder of this chapter is used for a discussion on the viability of Meinongianism. Part 2 ends with a chapter on grounding (chapter 8). In a sense this chapter turns to what was once considered to be the proper role of metaphysics. Concerning itself not with just the question of what there is but with the question to what is fundamental to existence. Ontological objects are characterized by a hierarchical structure of dependence relations that goes on until the most fundamental entities are reached.

In part 3 attention turns to ontology. It starts with two chapters on abstract objects. Chapter 9 begins with an explanation of the difference between abstract and concrete objects, followed by a discussion of numbers. The main question here is whether we should be Platonist about numbers and accept that they really exist or whether we should be nominalist about them and deny their existence. In chapter 10, also dealing with abstract objects, the main topic under discussion is propositions. Arguments pro and contra the acceptance of propositions are presented. This discussion is followed by an application of Thomas Hofwebers' metaontological distinction between internal and external roles of the existential quantifier to the discussion on propositions. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of ontology in relation to ethics, focusing on the existence or non-existence of entities like values or obligations. The subject of chapter 11 is possible worlds, specifically the question of whether there really exist such things as possible worlds, and if so, what exactly they are. There is an explanation of David Lewis' (genuine) modal realism, treating possible worlds as concrete objects, followed by an explanation of actual realism, treating possible worlds as abstract objects. The chapter ends with two non-standard alternatives to these realist views, fictionalism and Meinongianism. Material objects are the topic of chapter 12. We learn how seemingly unproblematic objects like everyday tables and chairs are food for very interesting ontological debates. First there is an explanation of part/whole relations, followed by a discussion of the issue of composition and decomposition. The chapter ends with the subject of spatial identity or co-location and of temporal identity. Chapter 13 deals with the status of fictional objects such as Sherlock Holmes. The mainstream Quinean approach, realist abstractionism, where fictional objects are treated as real, is discussed first, followed by a discussion of two anti-realist views, namely fictionalism and Meinongianism. The last chapter of part 3 is the chapter on properties and events, discussing the existence of properties and universals and the relationship between them.

Berto and Plebani have delivered a recommendable introduction to metaontology and ontology covering a lot of different views and subjects. That this abundance of discussed views and subjects sometimes leads to less explanation than could be expected is probably inevitable given the size of the book. What is lacking is a relation between the first two parts and part three, which makes it difficult to make a connection between ontological subjects and metaontological views.

When Bloomsbury announced this book as ‘a clear and accessible survey of ontology, focusing on the most recent trends in the discipline ... making it suitable for both undergraduates and postgraduates looking to better understand and apply the exciting developments and debates taking place in ontology today,’ they were absolutely right in doing so. Berto and Plebani themselves, in the last paragraph of the introduction, quote Bertrand Russell saying: ‘If any student is led into a serious study ... by this little book, it will serve the chief purpose for which it has been written.’ In my opinion this book serves this purpose in an outstanding manner.

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