

Being and Almost Nothingness

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1. Introduction

I am attracted to *ontological pluralism*, the doctrine that some things exist in a different way than other things.¹ For the ontological pluralist, there is more to learn about an object's existential status than merely whether it is or is not: there is still the question of *how* that entity exists. By contrast, according to the ontological monist, either something is or it isn't, and that's all there is say about a thing's existential status.

We appear to be to be ontologically committed to what I will call *almost nothings*. Examples of almost nothings include *holes*, *cracks*, and *shadows*; almost nothings thrive in the absence of 'positive' entities such as donuts, walls, and sunlight. Let's focus on holes, since the literature on them is voluminous.² We quantify over holes, and even count them: we say, for example, that there are some holes in the cheese, seven to be precise. We ascribe features to them and talk as though they stand in relations: that hole is three feet wide, much wider than that tire over there. Holes apparently persist through time, as evidenced by the fact that my sweater has the same hole in it as the last time you saw me wear it. We even talk as though holes are causally efficacious: my ankle was badly sprained because I stepped in that hole in the sidewalk.³ It seems then that we believe in holes. If our beliefs are true, holes must enjoy some kind of reality.

This puts the ontological monist in an uncomfortable position. According to her, everything that there is enjoys *the same kind of reality*, which is the kind of reality enjoyed by full-fledged concrete entities such as ourselves. She is committed to the unpleasant claim that *holes are just as real as concretia*, a claim that is apt to be met with incredulous stares by those not acquainted with contemporary metaphysics. Roy Sorensen (2008, p. 19) notes the tension almost nothings generate for ontological monists: '... it feels paradoxical to say that absences exist—but no better to say that absences do not exist'. And

later (p. 189) he writes, ‘... holes do not sit any more comfortably on the side of being than of nonbeing.’

It is intuitive that holes and other almost nothings, although real, are not real in the same way as concrete objects. Moreover, it seems that the kind of reality enjoyed by holes is in some sense *degenerate* or *less robust* than the kind of reality enjoyed by ‘positive’ entities. In fact, it is hard to see what could be meant by claiming that holes and other ‘absences’ are in any sense ‘absences’ if the kind of existence they enjoy is the same as the kind of existence of ‘presences.’ The fact that every ‘absence’ necessarily exists only if some ‘presence’ exists does not suffice to ensure that these labels are appropriate: maybe every concrete object necessarily depends on the existence of a God, but this would not make it the case that we are absences while God is a presence. Nor does the fact that every ‘absence’ necessarily excludes some ‘presence’ suffice to ensure that these labels are appropriate, for ‘presences’ might also necessarily exclude each other.⁴

The ontological pluralist has it easier: since she believes that there are different modes of being, she is under no pressure to hold that almost nothings exist in the same way as presences. But questions still remain. First, what mode of being do almost nothings have? Second, in what sense is this mode of being degenerate or less robust? The task of this paper is to address these questions.

In the next section, I will provide a brief account of ontological pluralism and explain the meta-ontological presuppositions of the preferred formulation. In section 3, I articulate and motivate the thesis that the mode of being of almost nothings is *being-in*, a mode of being also exemplified by attributes. Although it is somewhat plausible that the mode of being of almost nothings is being-in, there are reasons to be not fully satisfied with this thesis. I discuss several theses that connect the notion of a way of being to the notion of a *degree of being*. I then present a view that implies that almost nothings have a lesser degree of being than attributes, which in turn have a lesser degree of being than substances.

The accounts of degrees of being discussed in section 3 depend on the idea that certain modes of being are relational modes. Some will find this idea even harder to swallow than the idea that there are modes of being. Fortunately, there is a second way to articulate the idea that some entities are less than fully real. In section 4, I articulate and motivate the thesis that the mode of being of almost nothings is something I will call *being-by-courtesy*, which as we shall see is a truly degenerate way to be.

In section 5, I explore whether other putatively possible entities are plausibly thought of as enjoying being-by-courtesy. In section 6, I end this paper by discussing how the notions of ontological reduction and being-by-courtesy might be connected, and whether things that enjoy being-by-courtesy are capable of exemplifying fundamental features.

In what follows, I do not defend the intuition that holes and other almost nothings exist but are less than fully real. The goal of this paper is to develop a plausible account of degrees of reality that can be used to explicate the intuition that almost nothings are less than fully real. If you do not share the intuition that motivates this project, there is almost nothing I can do to make you have it. But it will still be worthwhile to see the extent to which the accounts offered here are plausible, since the questions discussed pertain to fundamental issues in metaphysics.

2. Ontological Pluralism Formulated: Quantification and Naturalness

The formulation of ontological pluralism makes use of two concepts: the concept of a *semantically primitive* restricted quantifier and the concept of a *natural expression*.⁵ I begin with the former.

I assume that ordinary English (and other natural languages) is equipped with a genuinely unrestricted quantifier, one that quantifies over everything there is regardless of kind or type.⁶ There are also restricted quantifiers in ordinary English, ones that range over only some of what there is. Many of these restricted quantifiers are semantically complex: they are definable in terms of the unrestricted quantifier and other terms, such as predicates or sentence-operators. But we can also envision what semantically simple, i.e., undefined or primitive, restricted quantifiers would be like. They would have the same inferential and syntactical roles as the unrestricted quantifier, but would in virtue of their meaning be capable of ranging over only some of what there is. Perhaps English is not equipped with such semantically primitive restricted quantifiers – although I am not at all certain that it is not – but we can easily imagine languages that possess them.⁷

Some expressions are more *natural* than others. Natural expressions are those that *carve reality at its joints*. To borrow an expression from Hawthorne (2006, p. viii), natural expressions mark the needed veins in the marble of reality.

The notion of a natural expression should not be confused with the notion of a physical expression, where physical expressions are those that necessarily apply only to physical objects. Presumably, some physical expressions will be natural expressions – perhaps ‘is negatively charged’ is such an expression – but not all natural expressions need be physical expressions. If there are, for example, Cartesian Spirits, then presumably some natural but non-physical expressions will apply to them. Note also that the acquisition of natural expressions needn’t occur temporally prior to the acquisition of unnatural ones: perhaps we acquire some natural expressions only as the result of lengthy inquiry.

Although the notion of naturalness is somewhat obscure, we understand it well enough to form intuitive judgments about which expressions are natural. Consider the predicates ‘is blue’ and ‘is grue.’⁸ The former expression is

more natural than the latter, which is a ‘gerrymandered’ or ‘merely disjunctive’ expression. “is an electron” carves nature at the joints far closer than “is contemplated by Brad Pitt”. Moreover, the notion of naturalness earns its keep: it has been employed in plausible accounts of core philosophical concepts, such as *intrinsic* and *extrinsic properties*, *causation* and *laws of nature*, and *meaning* and *reference*.⁹

A predicate might be ‘gerrymandered’ or ‘merely disjunctive’ in the intended sense even though it is semantically primitive. The following case illustrates this point. First, note that ‘is grue’ is *not* semantically primitive in our language. Rather, it is a semantically complex expression. ‘is blue’ and other basic color predicates do seem to be semantically primitive in the intended sense, i.e., there is no non-demonstrative, non-circular definition of ‘is blue’. Imagine now a linguistic community much like ours except that their language contains predicates such as ‘is grue*’, ‘is bleen*’, etc., which are necessarily equivalent to our ‘is grue’, ‘is bleen’, etc., but are nonetheless semantically primitive. In their language, they have predicates such as ‘is blue*’, ‘is green*’, etc., which, although necessarily equivalent to ‘is blue’, ‘is green’, etc., are explicitly defined in terms of ‘is grue*’ and ‘is bleen*’. In their language, ‘is grue*’ is semantically primitive, but intuitively, this predicate does not ‘carve nature at the joints’: grue* things are not metaphysically distinguished merely by being grue*. ‘is grue*’ is still a ‘gerrymandered’ expression even though it is semantically primitive. So we shouldn’t conflate an expression’s being semantically primitive with its being natural: an expression can be the former without being the latter.¹⁰

Are natural expressions natural in virtue of some further fact? One possibility is that naturalness of expressions is to be explained by appeal to *entities* to which these expressions correspond: for example, perhaps the greater naturalness of ‘is blue’ is to be explained by the fact that the property of being blue is a more natural property than the property of being grue. On this view, the naturalness of an expression derives from the naturalness of the entities to which it corresponds.¹¹ Alternatively, perhaps the notion of an expression’s being natural is simply a primitive fact about that expression, and an expression can be more natural than others even though neither expression stands for, represents, or corresponds to any genuine entities. Even someone who denies that predicates correspond to any entities, such as universals or collections of tropes, should recognize that there is an important metaphysical difference between ‘is blue’ and ‘is grue*’. On this view, ‘is natural’ is a primitive predicate that applies to other expressions.¹² To use the jargon of Quine (1951), ‘is natural’ would belong to the *ideology* of the nominalist.

Theodore Sider (forthcoming) articulates an important insight: there is no reason to restrict the notion of a natural expression to predicates. Perhaps some sentence operators (such as the standard modal or tense operators) are natural operators, whereas ‘Someone knows that or wants that Φ ’ is a comparatively unnatural operator. Maybe some names are more natural than

others. Most importantly, Sider (forthcoming) argues that some quantifier-expressions are more natural than others. According to Sider, the unrestricted quantifier is a perfectly natural expression.

The formulation of ontological pluralism is relatively minimal: ontological pluralism is the doctrine that there are possible semantically primitive restricted quantifiers that are *as least as* natural as the unrestricted quantifier. If we are ontologically bold, we can say that these possible semantically primitive restricted quantifiers ‘stand for’, ‘represent’, or ‘correspond to’ entities that are the modes of being.¹³ Alternatively, we can remind ourselves that we can make sense of the notion of a natural expression without assuming that it bears some sort of referential relation to an entity. In this case, we can happily say that some things exist in different ways from each other—there are *natural* semantically primitive restricted quantifiers such that some thing is in the domain of one of them but not in the domain of the other—without saying that there are any entities that are *the ways of existing*.¹⁴ In what follows, I will take the ontologically bold path, although what is said could be rephrased in terms acceptable to those more squeamish.

There are stronger versions of ontological pluralism than the one just articulated. According to a ‘neo-Aristotelian’ version of ontological pluralism, the unrestricted quantifier is not a perfectly natural expression, and there are possible semantically primitive restricted quantifiers that are *more natural* than the unrestricted quantifier.¹⁵ This position does not imply that the unrestricted quantifier is semantically complex or that it is in some way ‘defined up’ in terms of semantically primitive restricted quantifiers and other expressions. But it does imply that a language would be metaphysically better, at least with respect to its apparatus of quantification, were it not to have a semantically primitive unrestricted quantifier.

3. Almost Nothings and Being-In

In McDaniel (forthcoming-2, section 4.2) I discuss a mode of being that I call *being-in*. This is the mode of being enjoyed by attributes:

... attributes are not ‘self-standing’ entities. Rather, they *exist in* substances. Let us explore a view that takes the notion of ‘existing in’ as being maximally perspicuous. According to this view, there are two ways to exist. The kind of existence had by an attribute is *being-in*: the existence of an attribute is strictly and literally relative to something else, a substance. The logical form of the mode of existence of attributes is two-placed: *x exists in y*, where any such *y* is always a substance in which *x* inheres. On this view, *inherence* need not be taken as a fundamental notion: inherence reduces to *being-in*: *y* exemplifies *x* if and only if *x* exists in *y*.

The second mode of existence recognized by this view is *absolute being*, the kind enjoyed by substances. The logical form of this mode of existence is one-placed:

x exists *simpliciter*. The mode of being of substances is *prior* to the mode of being of attributes: to grasp fully the mode of being of an attribute one must be acquainted with the mode of being of substances.

In this section, I explore the idea that almost nothings enjoy being-in as their mode of existence.

We begin with the positive case for the proposal. First, let us note that holes are ontologically dependent on some host or other but it is not the case that each particular hole is ontologically dependent on some particular host or other. Consider a rectangular piece of cloth with a single hole in its left-hand side:



If you destroy most of the fabric except for a small amount that surrounds the hole, as shown below,



then you will have destroyed the original host of the hole (the piece of cloth) and yet the hole will persist.¹⁶ Similarly, attributes require the existence of some substance or other, but needn't require the existence of any particular substance.¹⁷

Second, just as we talk of attributes as being-in substances, we talk of holes as existing in or residing in their hosts. And just as we have the option of taking this talk strictly and literally by holding that the logical form of the kind of existence enjoyed by attributes is two-placed, we can take this talk literally with respect to holes.

Third, we can provide content to the inchoate intuition that holes enjoy 'less reality' than their hosts. Although I hesitate to give a definition of the expression ' x is more real than y ', the following seems to be a reasonable condition for its use: x is more real than y if (i) the mode of being of x has an n -placed logical form whereas the mode of being of y has an $n+m$ -placed logical form (n and m are positive integers) and (ii) all entities that have y 's mode of being have being relative to some entity that has x 's mode of being. The intuition behind this condition is that modes of absolute being are more real than modes of relative being, and if your mode of being is being relative to something else, then you can't be more real than that something else.

On this account, holes have less reality than their hosts. The mode of being of a hole is 2-placed, whereas the mode of being of its host is 1-place, so the first clause is satisfied. And since every hole exists in some host or

other, the second clause is also satisfied. It is nice that we can give an account of the intuitions that (i) although holes exist, they do not exist in the same way as positive entities such as their hosts, and that (ii) holes enjoy a kind of reality less robust than that of their hosts.

But there are also reasons to be concerned with the view that the being of holes is being-in. First, one might hold that the defining feature of an ontological category is that two entities belong to the same ontological category if and only if they exist in the same way, i.e., share the same mode of being.¹⁸ If this is right, then the proposal articulated here implies that attributes and almost nothings belong to the same ontological category. This seems mistaken. As Casati and Varzi (1994) argue, holes and other almost nothings seem to be dependent particulars, not universal attributes. An easy way around this objection is to deny that attributes and almost nothings exist in the same way, but grant that both modes of existence have the same logical form and structure: both are kinds of relative existence, one of whose relata is always some substance.

A deeper worry stems from the intuition that, even if holes and attributes enjoy different modes of being, attributes enjoy more reality than holes and other almost nothings. Attributes might be mere modifications of substances, and because of this less real than substances, but their reality is at least a positive kind of reality, whereas almost nothings seem less real than even attributes. Light is more real than shadow, noise more real than silence. However, it is hard to see what grounds this judgment if we understand comparative reality in the manner articulated above. The sufficient condition articulated above implies that substances are more real than attributes and substances are more real than holes. But on the natural way of extending the sufficient condition above so as to allow us to compare the reality of attributes and holes, attributes and holes come out as equally real. Let x and y be entities and $B(x)$ and $B(y)$ be their respective modes of being. Suppose that (i) $B(x)$ and $B(y)$ have the same adicity and (ii) if $B(x)$ and $B(y)$ are kinds of relative being, then every kind of entity to which $B(x)$ is relative to is also a kind of entity to which $B(y)$ is relative to. If these conditions are met, then x and y are equally real. The idea is this: modes of being that are 'absolute', i.e., 1-placed, are the highest degrees of reality. Modes of being that are $1+n$ -placed are less real modes than absolute modes. The absolute modes of being are the 'central' points whereas relative modes of being are to some extent distant from these 'central' points.

Admittedly, intuitions here are somewhat woozy, and the sufficient condition for equal reality articulated above is certainly not one we are forced to endorse. But it is attractive, and if it is true, then on the current proposal attributes and almost nothings enjoy the same amount of reality. Both attributes and almost nothings are the same 'ontological distance' from that which is maximally real, namely substances, since both attributes and almost nothings enjoy a mode of being that is relative in the same way to substances.

This is intuitively incorrect: attributes are a kind of positive reality, whereas almost nothings are mere privations, and so should have less reality than attributes.

Fortunately, there is another proposal worth considering that is in the neighborhood. Perhaps the mode of being of an absence is relative not only to substances (their hosts) but also to their modifications, such as their surfaces or other attributes of the host. The mode of being had by an almost nothing, on this proposal, is doubly-indexed: *x exists in substance S relative to attribute A*. On this view, an absence exists in a modified substance. This proposal is attractive, for not only can no absence exist without a presence, no absence can exist without that presence being positively modified in some way or other. The donut has a hole, after all, because it has a positive modification, specifically its shape.¹⁹

Note that, on this view, the sufficient condition for equal reality articulated earlier is not satisfied. Note also that the sufficient condition for greater reality is satisfied: on the proposal just articulated, substances enjoy the fullest kind of reality, attributes are less real than substances, and almost nothings are less real than attributes. This is a pleasing consequence of the proposal.

I suspect that many philosophers will be uncomfortable with the idea that something's mode of being might be relative to something else. It is hard enough to swallow modes of being: that some of these modes are relational might be just too much! Fortunately, there is another way to accommodate the intuition that holes and other almost nothings enjoy a diminished mode of being. This alternative will be explored next.

4. Being-by-Courtesy

Section 2 discussed the minimal formulation of ontological pluralism, which is the view that there are possible languages with semantically primitive restricted quantifiers that are at least as natural as the unrestricted quantifier. A 'neo-Aristotelian' version of this view was also discussed, which holds that these semantically primitive restricted quantifiers are *more* natural than the unrestricted quantifier. The view that will be articulated in this section will presuppose the neo-Aristotelian version of ontological pluralism.

I will assume, however, that the unrestricted quantifier is semantically primitive.²⁰ There is a simple sense of 'being' present in ordinary English that is fully captured by the '∃' of first-order logic. If there are other senses of 'being' present in ordinary English, the sense of '∃' is not decomposable into those senses. I want to remain neutral on whether there are other senses of 'being' in ordinary English. Some historically important friends of modes of being held that there are senses of 'being' corresponding to them present in ordinary language.²¹ (This is a natural position to hold, but it is not mandatory.)

However, it will expedite matters to explicitly introduce quantifiers that stand for the modes of being. Let's assume a meta-ontology according to which concrete objects, such as tables, chairs, and human persons, enjoy one mode of being, represented by \exists_m , while attributes and other abstracta enjoy a different mode of being, represented by \exists_a .²² Let's assume that these are the only two modes of being. On the neo-Aristotelian account, \exists_m and \exists_a are more natural expressions than \exists . It is tempting to think that, given this meta-ontology, \exists is something like the quantificational equivalent of a 'mere disjunction' of \exists_m and \exists_a .²³ This temptation is increased if we hold that the domain of \exists contains all that is in the domains of both of \exists_m and \exists_a and nothing more, i.e., that the domain of \exists is simply the union of the domains of \exists_m and \exists_a .

The domain of \exists must *include* everything that is within the domain of \exists_m and \exists_a . \exists is the *unrestricted* quantifier after all, and its job is to range over everything there is regardless of what kind of thing it is. But it is not obvious that the domain of \exists must contain *only* that which is in the domain of either \exists_m or \exists_a . Suppose that the domain of \exists contains *more*. If this is the case, then there are some things such that there is no fundamental way in which these things exist: there are things that enjoy no fundamental mode of being. Let us call any such beings *beings by courtesy* and the derivative mode of being they enjoy, a kind of mode of being that may be *defined purely negatively, being-by-courtesy*. Being-by-courtesy, represented by \exists_b , can be defined as follows: $\exists_b \Phi = \text{df. } \exists \Phi \ \& \ \sim(\exists_m \Phi \ \text{or} \ \exists_a \Phi)$.

Being-by-courtesy is a truly degenerate way to be: on the one hand, things that are beings by courtesy can be truly said to exist, i.e., they fall within the range of the unrestricted quantifier of ordinary English. But in no language with only perfectly natural quantifier expressions are beings by courtesy quantified over. This gives us a different way of articulating the claim that some entities are more real than others: x is more real than y if x enjoys a fundamental mode of being while y is merely a being by courtesy.

The hypothesis to be explored is that almost nothings are beings by courtesy. We have seen that this hypothesis accommodates the idea that almost nothings exist in a different way than concrete material things. It also gives us a way of articulating the intuition that almost nothings are *privations*: even their mode of being is to be understood negatively, as a remainder of what is left in the domain of \exists once one subtracts from it what is 'fully' real.

Is being-by-courtesy really possible? How could it come to be that the unrestricted quantifier ranges over things that exist in no fundamental sense?

Let's start with the banal observation that we could have meant something else than we actually do by \exists . Some of these possible meanings are such that, had we meant one of them by \exists , it would still be appropriate to think of \exists as something like an existential quantifier. The possible semantically primitive restricted quantifiers appealed to earlier are expressions whose meanings are among those possible for \exists . There are also possible meanings

for '∃' that we can think of as 'super' meanings in the following sense. Let s be a possible meaning for '∃' and let '∃_s' be a quantifier-expression with that meaning. Say that s is a 'super-meaning' for '∃' just in case it is true that, for all Ψ , "∃ Ψ " is true only if '∃_s Ψ ' is true, yet for some Φ , "∃_s (Φ & \sim ∃ Φ)" is true. (The '∃' appearing in this formula has the meaning that it customarily has: it is *our* unrestricted quantifier.) '∃_s' is a semantically primitive quantifier expression, as is '∃'. What is interesting about '∃_s' and other 'super' meanings is that any speaker of a language in which such a quantifier-expression is the primary expression ought to think of our language as containing only *restricted* quantifiers.²⁴

What makes it the case that '∃' has the meaning it has rather than any of these possible alternatives? David Lewis (1983a, 1984) and Theodore Sider (2001, *forthcoming*) have argued that two factors are relevant to determining the meaning of an expression: how we use that expression and how natural the candidate meanings are.²⁵ Our use of an expression consists in our dispositions to utter sentences in which that expression appears: roughly, a possible meaning for an expression fits with our use of that expression to the extent that it makes those sentences that we are apt to sincerely assert come out as true. Obviously, fit with use is a matter of degree.

As we have seen, the naturalness of a meaning is also a matter of degree. Fit with use and naturalness are independent and competing factors: the meaning that most fits with use needn't be the most natural, and vice-versa. In addition, neither factor invariably trumps the other: perfect naturalness can trump even high fit with use.

On the neo-Aristotelian version of ontological pluralism we have been considering, there are two perfectly natural quantifier expressions '∃_m' and '∃_a'. But the meaning of neither expression fits with use at all well. Presumably this is why '∃' is not synonymous with either '∃_m' or '∃_a'. (Perhaps we don't even have a use for '∃_m' and '∃_a', although those friends of the distinction between *existence* and *subsistence* might disagree. Perhaps both senses are represented in ordinary English, and this is why it is allegedly appropriate to say 'Tables and numbers do not exist in the same sense of 'exist'.) However, on the neo-Aristotelian view considered here, there are no other perfectly natural meanings for '∃' to take. Any remaining candidate meaning for '∃' must be less than perfectly natural.

There might well be a *most natural* (but less than perfectly natural) meaning for '∃'. Perhaps it is the meaning such that, were '∃' to mean it, each substitution instance of Φ in '∃ Φ iff (∃_m Φ or ∃_a Φ)' would yield a true sentence. If this meaning is the meaning of '∃', then it is true that the unrestricted quantifier ranges over all and *only* those things that enjoy some fundamental mode of being. Let '∃_d' be a possible quantifier with this meaning, and let ' m (∃_d)' stand for its meaning. m (∃_d) is probably more natural than any other candidate meanings for '∃'. But this fact does not actually tell us *how* natural it is.

Note that $m(\exists_d)$ does not fit terribly well with our use of ‘ \exists ’. As noted earlier, we happily and frequently quantify over almost nothings, which are neither abstract objects nor concrete realities. Instead, they are privations of concrete realities. If the meaning of ‘ \exists ’ is $m(\exists_d)$, then ‘ $\exists x x = \text{a hole}$ ’ is false.

Presumably, there are other candidate meanings for ‘ \exists ’ that have a better fit with our use of ‘ \exists ’ than $m(\exists_d)$. Such meanings would make ‘ $\exists x x = \text{a hole}$ ’ express something true. These candidates are not as natural as $m(\exists_d)$, but sometimes fit with use trumps naturalness, especially when the degree to which a meaning fits with use is high and the degree of naturalness of alternative meanings is relatively low. The hypothesis entertained here is that fit with use has trumped naturalness in this case: the meaning of ‘ \exists ’ is *not* $m(\exists_d)$, but is rather something relative to which ‘ \exists_d ’ is a restricted quantifier. If this is the case, then there are things such that they exist in no fundamental way. In other words, on this hypothesis, there are things that are mere beings by courtesy.

This hypothesis gives content to the intuition that beings by courtesy are less real than, e.g., concrete material beings. We can ‘define’ the notion of degree of reality as follows: x is less real than y to degree n just in case (i) ‘ \exists_1 ’ is the most natural quantifier that ranges over x , (ii) ‘ \exists_2 ’ is the most natural quantifier that ranges over y , and (iii) ‘ \exists_2 ’ is a more natural quantifier than ‘ \exists_1 ’ to degree n . Given this definition, it follows that beings by courtesy are less real than concrete material beings (and less real than attributes).

There are precedents to the position defended here. Kit Fine (2001) argues that we should distinguish between *what is* and *what really is*:

Is there room for another form of antirealism—and another account of philosophy’s pretensions—that does not put them in conflict with received opinion? If there is, then it requires that we be able consistently to affirm that something is the case and yet deny that it is really the case. It requires, in other words, a *metaphysical* conception of reality, one that enables us to distinguish, within the sphere of what is the case, between what is really the case and what is only apparently the case. [pp. 2–3]

One can think of the proposal Fine defends in following way. There is a special propositional operator, *it is really the case that* (‘ \mathbf{R} ’). \mathbf{R} is not extensional, that is, for some true propositions P and Q , $\mathbf{R}(P)$ is true whereas $\mathbf{R}(Q)$ is false. According to Fine, there are some true existentially quantified propositions that are not *really* true. Fine’s proposal enables us to distinguish beings by courtesy from genuine beings: both exist, but only the latter *really* exist.²⁶

Ross Cameron (forthcoming) also distinguishes between what exists and what ‘really’ exists. According to Cameron, things that really exist are minimal truthmakers for existential sentences. But a true existential sentence such

as ‘*a* exists’ can be made true by something other than *a*: if *a* is not a minimal truthmaker for ‘*a* exists’, then *a* exists but does not really exist.²⁷

This distinction between *a*’s existing in the sense of their being a true sentence of the form ‘*a* exists’ and *really* existing has a much earlier precedent. Consider these remarks by Aquinas:

We should notice, therefore, that the word ‘being,’ taken without qualifiers, has two uses, as the Philosopher says in the fifth book of the *Metaphysics*. In one way, it is used apropos of what is divided into the ten genera; in another way, it is used to signify the truth of propositions. The difference between the two is that in the second way everything about which we can form an affirmative proposition can be called a being, even though it posits nothing in reality. It is in this way that privations and negations are called beings; for we say that affirmation is opposed to negation, and that blindness is in the eye. In the first way, however, only what posits something in reality can be called a being. In the first way, therefore, blindness and the like are not beings. [Aquinas, *Being and Essence*, section 4/ p. 21 of Bobik 1965].²⁸

The ten genera referred to by Aquinas are Aristotle’s ten categories, which for the sake of convenience have been here compressed into two.²⁹ According to Aquinas, there is a sense of ‘being’ whose job is to range over the entities that fall under the ten categories. This sense is like our $m(\exists_d)$.³⁰ There is also a sense of ‘being’ that ranges over *more*, according to which privations such as blindness and the like (which presumably includes holes and other almost nothings) are beings. This sense of ‘being’ is ‘being-true.’³¹ I am inclined to think that Aquinas’s beings in the sense of being-true are beings by courtesy.

However, there are apparent differences between Aquinas’s view and the one defended here. First, the view defended here is consistent with the claim that, as a matter of fact, ‘being’ has exactly one sense, i.e., ‘being’ is not polysemous. Call the putatively sole meaning of ‘ \exists ’, ‘ $m(\exists)$ ’. ‘ \exists ’ is semantically simple, i.e., $m(\exists)$ does not have other meanings as parts. Likewise, $m(\exists_d)$, a merely possible meaning for ‘ \exists ’, is semantically simple. Part of what is meant by saying that $m(\exists)$ is simple is that sentences of the form ‘ $\exists \Phi$ ’ will not be identical in meaning to sentences containing ‘ $\exists_d \Phi$ ’ plus additional operators or other linguistic machinery. There is a sense in which $m(\exists)$ is an *extended* sense of ‘ \exists ’ relative to $m(\exists_d)$, in that ‘ \exists ’ contains more in its domain of quantification than ‘ \exists_d ’. But ‘ \exists ’ is not to be understood in terms of ‘ \exists_d ’, despite the fact that the latter expression is more natural.

(The view defended here, namely that almost nothings are beings by courtesy is also consistent with the claim that ‘being’ is polysemous in the ways Aquinas suggests. Perhaps the following facts jointly suffice for ‘being’ to be polysemous: (i) $m(\exists_d)$ is relatively natural but is not a terrific fit with use, (ii) $m(\exists)$ fits with use very well but is comparatively less natural, and (iii) no other candidate meanings for ‘ \exists ’ balance these two factors as well as either $m(\exists_d)$ or $m(\exists)$.)

Casati and Varzi (1994, pp. 178–184) argue persuasively that claims about the existence of holes cannot be paraphrased away.³² We are committed to the literal truth of ‘ $\exists x x = \text{a hole}$ ’. That there is no paraphrase of sentences in which quantification over holes occurs into sentences in which such quantification does not occur is what we should expect given that that sentences of the form ‘ $\exists \Phi$ ’ are not identical in meaning to sentences containing ‘ $\exists_d \Phi$ ’ plus additional operators or other linguistic machinery. When one truly says that holes are beings, or that they exist, one is not using ‘being’ or ‘exist’ in an attenuated or metaphorical sense.³³ It does not follow, however, that holes are genuine beings rather than beings by courtesy. On the view articulated here, strictly and literally, holes exist, but they are less real than their hosts.

Let us return to contrasting the view here with the view that was plausibly attributed to Aquinas. A second difference is that, according to a popular interpretation of Aquinas’s *Being and Essence*, those things whose sole mode of being is being-true exist ‘only in the mind.’³⁴ One way of understanding this claim is as the view that those entities whose sole mode of being is being-true are such that, were there no minds, they would not exist. Those objects whose mode of being is being-true are ‘beings of reason’, creatures whose existence is the product of our cognitive structure or intellectual activities. This view seems to be defended by Francisco Suarez (2005, p. 75), who writes, ‘It must be said, therefore, that a being of reason properly comes to be through that act of the intellect by which something that in reality has no entity is conceived in the manner of a being.’³⁵

Regardless of whether one should attribute this view to Aquinas or other scholastics, I would like to distance myself from it.³⁶ Beings by courtesy needn’t be mind-dependent. If there is a hole in the center of the earth, it would exist regardless of whether there were any minds to think about it. Holes (and other absences) are no more dependent on human cognition than the material bodies in which they reside.³⁷

Although holes and other absences are not dependent on our minds or our conceptual schemes, we can try to soothe the intuition that some seem to have that they are mental constructions or products of reason. The worry seems to be that beings by courtesy are not truly *objective* beings.³⁸ The concept of *objectivity* is intimately tied with the concept of *parochialism*. There are at least two ways in which a classificatory scheme can be parochial. First, it might demarcate entities on the basis of features that are dependent on human minds. Second, a classificatory scheme can be parochial when that scheme is not *required* by the world. If our conceptual scheme is like this, then it is very reasonable to fear that the explanation for our *having this scheme* as opposed to some other turns more on facts about us than facts about the content of the scheme. And on the hypothesis that we are considering, to some degree this is the case: ‘ \exists ’ has the meaning it has largely because of how we use the term. There were other, *metaphysically better*, meanings

available for '∃', and if we had meant one of them, we could not truly say, 'holes exist.' Holes are 'conceptual projections' or 'beings of reason' or 'social constructions' not in the sense that they depend for their existence on concepts or rational activities or societies, but rather in the sense that a conceptual scheme that recognizes them is not mandated by the world.³⁹ A conceptual scheme is parochial to the extent that it recognizes beings by courtesy.

That almost nothings are beings merely by courtesy has proved to be a coherent and fruitful hypothesis. Perhaps other putative entities are best thought of as beings-by-courtesy. In the next section, we will briefly explore some of the possibilities.

5. Diminished Beings

How big is the class of beings by courtesy? As we saw earlier, the temptation to identify almost nothings with mind-dependent entities, so-called 'beings of reason', should be resisted. I suggest that we consider the opposite approach. Some of the entities that have been called 'beings of reason' might be better thought of as beings by courtesy.⁴⁰

For example, some medieval philosophers who wrestled with questions about the ontological status of relations concluded that they are mere beings of reason.⁴¹ But this view is very implausible. For example, x could be five feet from y even in possible worlds that contain no minds. But, necessarily, x is five feet from y if and only if x bears the *being five feet from* relation to y . So the relation *being five feet from* is not mind-dependent.⁴² Still, it might, for all this argument shows, be a mere being by courtesy. One who is tempted by Aristotle's claim that 'the relative is least of all things' [*Metaphysics* 1088a23] should seriously consider classifying relations as beings by courtesy.⁴³

If relations are beings by courtesy, then perhaps objects that exist only when certain relations are exemplified are also beings by courtesy. Indeed, perhaps many of those things that we now take to be genuine realities are mere beings by courtesy. It is a Moorean fact that I have hands, that is, that my hands exist. But are there Moorean facts about the *mode of existence* had by hands? Perhaps it is a Moorean fact that my hands do not *subsist*—this is the mode of being had by *abstracta*—but it is not a Moorean fact that my hands are not mere beings by courtesy. Similarly, we can grant that 'I think, therefore I am' is a certainty, while denying that 'I think, therefore I am a genuine being rather than a being by courtesy' is certain. That I might be a mere being by courtesy is especially disturbing.

Mereological nihilism is the view that no complex object exists. This is a hard view to defend.⁴⁴ These reflections suggest that a more moderate view according to which no complex object is fully real might turn out to be more defensible. Perhaps the only material objects that are fully real are

microscopic simples; one might be attracted to this view if one thought that, necessarily, all facts about composite objects obtain in virtue of facts about microscopic simples.⁴⁵

A related view, also worth considering, is a kind of *existence monism*. Recently, Jonathan Schaffer (*forthcoming*, 2007a, 2007b) has defended a kind of monism according to which, although the many are as real as the One, the One is *prior* to the many. Schaffer calls his view ‘priority monism’, and contrasts it with the view he calls ‘existence monism’, which holds that the One is the only thing that exists. Existence monism is as hard to defend as mereological nihilism. But perhaps a kind of existence monism construed as the view that exactly one entity, namely Reality-as-a-Whole, is a genuine being might turn out to be defensible. This version of monism is neither Schaffer’s priority monism nor his existence monism but rather lies somewhere between them in logical space.

Is it possible that everything is a being by courtesy? I would be inclined to deny this possibility: it is a fundamental metaphysical truth that something is genuinely real. I doubt this truth is capable of proof.

Another disturbing possibility is that, in a sense, there might be more to reality than what is ranged over by the absolutely unrestricted quantifier. In section 4, we briefly discussed the possibility of ‘super’ meanings for ‘ \exists ’. Let $m(\exists_s)$ be a ‘super’ meaning for ‘ \exists ’, and let ‘ \exists_s ’ be a primitive quantifier with that meaning. $m(\exists_s)$ is a ‘super’ meaning in the sense that, for some Φ , ‘ $\exists_s \Phi$ & $\sim \exists \Phi$ ’ expresses a truth. Suppose that ‘ \exists ’ is not a perfectly natural expression, but not because some semantically primitive restricted quantifier is more fundamental, but rather because the most natural meaning for ‘ \exists ’ is $m(\exists_s)$. Relative to ‘ \exists_s ’, ‘ \exists ’ is a *restricted* quantifier. Since $m(\exists_s)$ is more natural than $m(\exists)$, somehow $m(\exists_s)$ must fit with use much less than $m(\exists)$. I don’t have a story about how this could be. But I also do not have a proof that there is no such meaning as $m(\exists_s)$. If there is, then there is a sense in which there are *more* entities than those ranged over by our most unrestricted quantifier.⁴⁶

Other contentious entities are *possibilia*, i.e., merely possible individuals or worlds. In his interesting article on the status of the merely possible in late scholastic thought, Jeffrey Coombs (1993) articulates the views of John Punch. According to Coombs, ‘... Punch’s difficulty is to explain how possible entities can be entities without claiming that they are eternally actual.’ [p. 450]. In Punch’s words, the solution lies in positing ‘... a certain diminished being, so to speak, an intermediate being between beings of reason and actual being without qualification.’ [p. 450] It is not plausible to identify possibilia with beings of reason. But we can develop a view inspired by Punch’s remarks. Let us distinguish between two versions of the most extreme kind of modal realism. Both versions agree that concrete possible worlds other than the actual one exist, but one version demotes the mode of being of non-actual concrete possible worlds to being-by-courtesy, whereas the other

grants them full reality.⁴⁷ The latter view holds that possible beings enjoy a ‘diminished’ kind of being.

We can entertain a further expansion of being-by-courtesy to include merely intentional objects of all varieties, even those for which it is metaphysically impossible that they be actual. A kind of qualified Meinongianism in which the merely intentional enjoy being-by-courtesy might prove to be a defensible position.⁴⁸ (For what it is worth, I don’t think that this was Meinong’s own view, since by my lights he held that the outermost quantifier – the one that ranges over absolutely everything there is – is a perfectly natural expression, whereas on the view discussed here it is not. On this interpretation, Meinong also makes use of two other perfectly natural semantically primitive quantifiers, a subsistence quantifier that ranges over obtaining abstracta and an existence quantifier that ranges over obtaining concretia.)⁴⁹

The realm of being by courtesy deserves to be fully mapped.

6. Metaphysical Reflections on Being-by-Courtesy

In this section I will briefly discuss some intriguing questions raised by the possibility of beings by courtesy.

First, what sort of evidence could one have for thinking of some being that it is a mere being by courtesy? The main goal of the paper was to provide a theory that accounts for the intuition that holes and other absences are in some sense real but less real than their hosts. In order to do so, I articulated a distinction between what I call ‘genuine beings’ and ‘beings by courtesy’, and argued that the theory that almost nothings are beings by courtesy satisfies this intuition. But I didn’t articulate general principles that told us when some entity is a mere being by courtesy. We will now consider principles of this sort.

Facts about holes and other almost nothings supervene on facts about ‘positive’ entities. Holes and other almost nothings are mereologically distinct from their hosts. What is suggested by these observations is that in general facts about beings by courtesy supervene on facts about genuine beings. Suppose we learn that the *x*s are mereologically distinct from the *y*s but asymmetrically supervene on the *y*s. Should we conclude that the *x*s are mere beings by courtesy?

One is reminded of Armstrong’s (1982) dictum that that which supervenes is no addition to being. But we must be careful. Suppose there is an omnipotent God such that all else supervenes on the divine will. Is God then the only genuine being? Worse, facts about mathematical and logical entities supervene on facts about facts about concretia, since mathematics and logic are realms of necessary truth. Do mathematica form a merely superficial super-structure of beings by courtesy?⁵⁰

Suppose that we cannot paraphrase statements about holes and other almost nothings in terms of statements about ‘positive’ entities alone. Perhaps this is because of the limits of our language: there are no infinitely long sentences in English, and the only way to paraphrase talk about holes would be via infinitely long constructions. However, suppose we can conceive of how such a paraphrase might go in an augmented version of English. I think this is the case with holes. If we think this augmented version of English would be a metaphysically better language to speak than ours, even though no quantifier in that language ranged over holes, then we have a reason to think that holes are mere beings by courtesy. Ontological reduction, on this picture, amounts to identifying some entity as a mere being by courtesy. Ontological elimination, by contrast, consists in denying any sort of reality to the entity in question.⁵¹

Once we take seriously that *being* might not be perfectly natural, we need to re-examine other metaphysical notions. Here is a deliciously tricky question: can beings by courtesy exemplify perfectly natural properties or stand in perfectly natural relations?⁵² Here is a rough and handy-wavy argument for the conclusion that they can’t. Facts about the exemplification of perfectly natural properties or relations do not supervene on any other facts. But all facts about beings by courtesy supervene on facts about genuine beings. So no being by courtesy exemplifies a perfectly natural property or stands in a perfectly natural relation.

However, holes (and other almost nothings) can be identical with themselves, perhaps have proper parts, and can stand in spatial, temporal, and causal relations with other beings by courtesy and even genuine beings. (When driving, it is very important that one not get too close to a hole in the road.) Identity, parthood, spatiotemporal distance, and causation are all good candidates for being perfectly natural relations.

I suspect that the right thing to say is that identity, parthood, spatiotemporal distance, and causation are not perfectly natural relations. Instead, the perfectly natural relations are identity*, parthood*, spatiotemporal distance*, and causation*. These latter relations are each *restricted* relations in that they are exemplified only by genuine beings. The ‘topic-neutral’ identity relation exemplified by both donut-holes and donuts is no more natural than being. The lesson I am inclined to draw is this: if we accept a kind of ontological pluralism that recognizes being-by-courtesy, then we should also accept a kind of pluralism about these relations as well. Just as there are modes of being, some of which are degenerate, there are different ways of being identical, kinds of parthood, modes of spatiotemporal relatedness, and so forth.⁵³

Notes

¹ Ontological pluralism is defended in McDaniel (forthcoming-1, forthcoming-2, forthcoming-3, ms-1), and Turner (ms). I follow Turner (ms) in using the name ‘ontological pluralism’ to stand for the doctrine that there are ways of being. Unfortunately, the name was

in use prior to Turner's appropriation of it: Matti Eklund (2006) earlier used the name to stand for the doctrine that there are many equally good meanings for the existential quantifier. This latter doctrine is also scalled *quantifier variance*, and is defended by Hirsch (2005) and criticized by Sider (2004, forthcoming). McDaniel (forthcoming-1, section 5) suggests that quantifier variance is also a view in which there are modes of being.

² Lewis and Lewis (1970) began the discussion. See Casati and Varzi (1994) for a book-length treatment. Lewis and Lewis (1996), Casati and Varzi (2004), and Sorensen (2008) continue the discussion.

³ Sorensen (2008, pp. 127–129) argues that holes can be perceived, and that this fact need not violate a causal theory of perception.

⁴ According to the position defended in Casati and Varzi (1994), holes are immaterial particulars, equal in reality but differing in constitution to material particulars. But being immaterial does not suffice for being a privation: Cartesian souls are immaterial *substances*, not absences.

⁵ The discussion will be somewhat brief; for more detailed discussion, see McDaniel (forthcoming-1, forthcoming-2) and Turner (ms).

⁶ Ontological pluralism can be formulated without this assumption, but assuming it simplifies the discussion, and dropping it would raise issues not germane to this paper. For details on how to formulate ontological pluralism without assuming the possibility of genuinely unrestricted quantification, see McDaniel (forthcoming-1, section 5.)

⁷ The notion of a semantically primitive restricted quantifier was articulated first by Eli Hirsch (2005).

⁸ Following Goodman (1955), we define “is grue” and “is bleen” as follows:

x is *grue* = df. x is green and is examined before the year 3000 A.D., or is blue and is not examined before 3000 A.D.

x is *bleen* = df. x is blue and is examined before the year 3000 A.D., or is green and is not examined before 3000 A.D.

⁹ See, for example, Lewis (1983a), (1984), and (1986) for a discussion of these jobs and how the notion of naturalness is employed to perform them. More will be said on the role that naturalness plays in determining meaning and reference later.

¹⁰ Perhaps an expression can be semantically complex whilst still being maximally natural. I won't try to determine whether this is the case here, since nothing in what follows turns on this question.

¹¹ A related view holds that *only* natural expressions correspond to entities. Such a view is consonant with the sparse realism about universals defended by Armstrong (1978) and discussed by Lewis (1983a).

¹² Sider (forthcoming) offers several detailed accounts of how the nominalist might formulate and defend this position. Sider's preferred nominalistic account is to introduce a primitive naturalness *operator* N rather than a naturalness predicate. N can be prefixed to pairs of open-sentences to form a complete sentence. Sentences of the form “ N (x is an F , x is a G)” are ascriptions of comparative naturalness: informally, they tell us that to be an F is more natural than to be a G . Nothing in what follows turns on whether it is better to have a primitive naturalness predicate or a primitive operator.

¹³ What sort of entities are good candidates for being modes of being? McDaniel (forthcoming-2) suggests that they might be properties of individuals or higher-order properties of properties or facts. Another possibility is that they are *sui generis* entities. Just as properties correspond to predicates and substances to proper names, modes of being correspond to quantifiers. I won't settle this issue here.

¹⁴ For further discussion, see McDaniel (forthcoming-2).

¹⁵ Various versions of neo-Aristotelian ontological pluralism are articulated and defended in McDaniel (forthcoming-2).

¹⁶ See Casati and Varzi (1994, p. 19) for discussion. Perhaps it would be more careful to say that the hole had more than one host to begin with, specifically the whole piece of clothe and any proper parts of that clothe that “contain” the hole. Note that the conclusion that holes are not ontologically dependent on any particular bearer still follows. Thanks to Ross Cameron for discussion here.

¹⁷ The Aristotelian assumption that attributes ontologically depend on their bearers is controversial, but I can’t hope to defend it here. For a recent defense of Aristotelian realism, see Armstrong (1978).

¹⁸ This account of ‘ontological category’ is defended in McDaniel (ms-1).

¹⁹ Why not say instead (or also), “The donut has a certain shape because it has a hole”? The answer is that it is intuitive that the shape of the object is primary: the object has a hole *in virtue* of the fact that the object has that shape. The *in virtue of* relation is asymmetric: since the object has a hole in virtue of the object having that shape, it does not have the shape in virtue of the object having a hole. I thank an anonymous referee for raising this question.

²⁰ Recall that the assumption that ‘ \exists ’ is semantically primitive does not imply that ‘ \exists ’ is a natural expression.

²¹ See McDaniel (*forthcoming-1*) for references and discussion.

²² I am not assuming here that the being of attributes is a kind of relative being.

²³ That is, it is tempting to think that ‘ \exists ’ is highly unnatural. McDaniel (*forthcoming-2*) argues that it is not quite right to say ‘ \exists ’ is a ‘merely disjunctive’ expression. Rather, it is better to say that ‘ \exists ’ is an *analogous* expression, where analogous expressions are more natural than merely disjunctive ones but less than perfectly natural. I won’t try to settle this issue here.

²⁴ Note that, in order to state the thesis that ‘super’ meanings are possible, one must assume that the meaning of a quantifier expression is not simply its domain. The unrestricted quantifier, by definition, ranges over the most expansive domain there is. For more on this point, see Sider (2001, *forthcoming*).

²⁵ I don’t think these factors are the only two factors. Causation also plays a role. But it is hard to see exactly what role it plays in determining the meaning of ‘ \exists ’. I will accordingly ignore causation in what follows, but I am aware that it might be a mistake to do this.

²⁶ Fine does not explicitly discuss almost nothings, but the position that almost nothings are real without being really real is a natural view for him to endorse. I thank Ted Sider for helpful discussion of Fine’s view.

²⁷ Cameron does not explicitly discuss almost nothings, but rather applies his framework to questions concerning composition and mathematical objects.

²⁸ Similar passages are translated and discussed in Klima (1993).

²⁹ I have ignored other ontological categories besides *substance* and *attribute* here.

³⁰ Aquinas also sometimes speaks as though for each category of being, there is a sense of ‘being’ associated with it. For example, Aquinas (1993, p. 92) says that ‘being’ is used in one sense to stand for substances and in another sense to stand for properties. See also McInerney (1961, p. 39). Brentano (1981, p. 90) attributes this claim to Aristotle: ‘This much is certain: he thought that there was a sense of the term being for each category; and in making the classification, he wanted to distinguish as many different senses of being.’

³¹ The inspiration for this doctrine in Aquinas is Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, specifically book IV 1003b5.

³² This claim is consistent with the plausible claim that facts about beings by courtesy supervene on facts about real beings. That facts about holes are fixed by facts about material objects is granted by Casati and Varzi (2004) and Lewis and Lewis (1996).

³³ This view is in stark contrast with the position of Franz Brentano (1981), who argues that there is a difference between the strict sense of ‘being’ and many ‘extended’ senses of ‘being’, but claims that truths stated using an extended sense can be paraphrased in terms of the ‘strict’ sense. ‘Being’ in the sense of ‘being-true’ is one such extended sense.

³⁴ See, for example, Bobik (1965, pp. 36, 57) and McInerney (1961, pp. 39–40). This interpretation of Aquinas is also suggested by Klima (1993).

³⁵ Suarez (like Aquinas) does distinguish (at least) two uses of the word 'being'. In Suarez's [2005] commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, he writes:

... we ... speak about being in two ways: in one way, as it comprehends only true real beings—and it transcends and contains under itself all of those. In another way, it is extended to many things which are not truly and intrinsically and which are called beings only by a certain extrinsic attribution, for example, privations, or beings which are entirely by accident, or beings of reason. [p. 70]

³⁶ For further discussion of being in the sense of being-true, see Kenny (2002, pp. 3–6).

³⁷ In a similar vein, Sorensen (2008, pp. 18, 248–249) criticizes Sartre for making absences dependent on the human mind. John Doyle (2005, pp. 29–30), in his introduction to Suarez (2005), discusses this objection as well. One response to this objection is to argue that, although holes are mind-dependent, material objects could be perforated independently of the existence of any minds. One problem with this response is that it makes some apparently analytic or conceptual truths turn out false. For example, 'If there are holes, then necessarily a material object is perforated if and only if it has a hole' is conceptually true: anyone who understands what 'holes' means ought to agree with it. However, on the view suggested by Bobik and others, this sentence is not conceptually true. There are holes, but it is possible for something to be perforated without having a hole. A world in which there are no finite intellects is, on this view, a world that is holeless, but it might for all that be a world that has perforated objects. One can consistently deny that there are holes. One can't consistently say that there are holes but material objects could have been holed without them.

³⁸ Suarez (2005, pp. 82–84) wonders whether the cognitive activity of God or angels produces beings of reason. Suarez argues that only imperfect intellects are productive of beings of reason, and hence God does not produce them (and probably angels do not either.)

³⁹ The extent to which 'anything goes' with respect to *existence* is a relatively hot topic these days. Eli Hirsch (2005) defends a view, *quantifier variance*, according to which disputes about which composite objects exist or whether objects have temporal parts are bankrupt. The world does not mandate any answer to these metaphysical questions. The reason Sider (2001, *forthcoming*) appeals to the naturalness of quantifiers is that he believes these metaphysical questions are genuine (and difficult).

⁴⁰ Suarez (2005), for example, takes privations to be a species of beings of reason. I have argued that it is better to think of privations as beings by courtesy.

⁴¹ See Brower (2005) for an impressive overview of the terrain. One of the strategies adopted by these philosophers was to dispense with the full-blooded existence of relations while appealing instead to properties of the *relata* to ground the truth of statements that apparently attribute relations to things.

⁴² Brower (2005), p. 11, discusses something like this argument.

⁴³ I am not inclined to think that relations should be thought as beings by courtesy, on the grounds that some facts about relations are metaphysically fundamental. (It seems hard to see how all relations could be beings by courtesy if some relational facts do not supervene on non-relational facts.) Rather, relations enjoy the kind of reality enjoyed by other attributes. I thank an anonymous referee for pressing me on this issue.

⁴⁴ But it has been defended. See Rosen and Dorr (2003).

⁴⁵ In a similar vein, Cameron (*forthcoming*) advocates the view that complex objects exist but don't really exist. I thank an anonymous referee for pushing me to seriously consider this view. For what it's worth, I don't think that all facts about complex objects obtain in virtue of facts about simples. I accept the possibility of genuinely emergent properties had by complex objects; facts about such properties do not obtain in virtue of facts about the properties and relations enjoyed by simples. But the issues here are too large for the discussion here to do them justice.

⁴⁶ I cannot tell whether these observations should be comforting to those who reject the possibility of unrestricted quantification because of the set-theoretical paradoxes. On the puzzles and perplexities concerning unrestricted quantification, see the papers in Rayo and Uzquiano (2007).

⁴⁷ The issue of whether concrete possibilia are mere beings by courtesy is not settled by any of the arguments David Lewis (1986) gives for the existence of concrete possible worlds. McDaniel (forthcoming-1) advocates a kind of modal realism in which the possible and the actual have different modes of being, but does not take the further step of arguing that the possible have an *inferior* mode of being.

⁴⁸ See McDaniel (forthcoming-2) for a different way of defending Meinongianism that also appeals to modes of being.

⁴⁹ I thank Ben Caplan for helpful discussion of Meinong and Meinongianism.

⁵⁰ Perhaps a stronger relation than asymmetric supervenience, such as the *grounding* relation appealed to by Fine (2001) or the *in virtue of* relation, would be more appropriate to consider.

⁵¹ Compare these remarks with those of Fine (2001).

⁵² Compare this question to Suarez's (2005, pp. 65–66) worry about whether 'common concepts' can apply to both beings of reason and real beings.

⁵³ I thank Elizabeth Barnes, Ben Caplan, Ross Cameron, Matti Eklund, Andre Gallois, Mark Heller, Kara Richardson, Roy Sorensen, and Ted Sider for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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