Carnap, Language Pluralism, and Rationality

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1. Introduction

This paper will be centered on Carnap's views on rationality. More specifically, much of the focus will be on a puzzle regarding Carnap's view on rationality that Florian Steinberger (2016) has recently discussed. Not only is Steinberger's discussion of significant intrinsic interest: his discussion also raises general questions about Carnap interpretation. As I have discussed in earlier work, there are two very different ways of interpreting Carnap's talk of "frameworks" – and, relatedly, different ways of interpreting Carnap's principle of tolerance. Carnap can be interpreted as either a *relativist* or as what I call a *language pluralist*. Steinberger's puzzle arises given the relativist interpretation; I believe the language pluralist interpretation is correct. Most of the discussion will concern the correct interpretation of Carnap, and what this means for Steinberger's puzzle. While I will not here mount a full defense of the language pluralist interpretation, I will pause to discuss Vera Flocke's recent criticism of it. Towards the end, I will describe a puzzle regarding rationality different from Steinberger's. The puzzle that I describe does arise already for the language pluralist.

2. Steinberger's puzzle

Florian Steinberger (2016) says the following about Carnap and rationality:

Carnap's picture is this. Logics (and rational principles more generally) come as part of a linguistic framework. We are 'entirely free' … to devise any framework we please. None of the countless possible logico-linguistic frameworks has any exclusive claim to being

correct. Indeed, the question of correctness cannot be so much as meaningfully posed in the case of linguistic frameworks.[1]

Based on this understanding of Carnap, Steinberger presents a problem:

> According to Carnap's voluntarism, rational norms are self-imposed. We impose such norms upon ourselves by adopting a linguistic framework that gives rise to them. But on what basis do we choose a linguistic framework?... [I]f rational norms are always relative to a linguistic framework for Carnap, it becomes difficult to see how the process of framework choice can itself be rational. This problem strikes me as fundamental to Carnap's entire tolerance-based philosophy.[2]

The rest of Steinberger's article is devoted to a searching exploration of whether there is any reasonable way for Carnap to avoid this problem. Steinberger in the end thinks there is. I will not get into his purported solution, for I have concerns regarding the supposed source and nature of the problem to begin with.[3]

Whether there is a real problem here or not, and what, if so, the problem is, depends on just what the role of frameworks is in Carnap's philosophy. I have elsewhere discussed the matter of how Carnap's notion of framework is best understood, focusing my discussion around two importantly different sorts of views on what frameworks are.[4] On one interpretation, the *language pluralist* interpretation, frameworks are just languages, and the only framework-relativity at issue is, under this interpretation, the familiar phenomenon that the same signs can be employed with different meanings in different languages. "Chips" in

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[1] Steinberger (2016), p. 646.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Let me just briefly indicate the nature of Steinberger's solution. He first appeals to the notion of a "selection framework" (p. 654), to be employed for when frameworks are selected. He raises the concern that the principle of tolerance applies to selection frameworks just as to first-order frameworks, so there will be a plurality of selection frameworks to choose between. The response to this concern in turn is to advert to what Steinberger calls "soft foundationalism" (p. 662): "the framework in question may serve as a regress-blocking foundation just because we treat it as such (in a particular context)? After all, we must start somewhere!" (ibid.). Steinberger observes that this soft foundationalism may not answer all questions one might have, but says that it can still serve the pragmatic aim of "bringing about a successful scientific practice" (p. 664).

[4] See primarily my (2009) and (2013).

US English can mean something different from "chips" in British English. In the case of logic, all that Carnap stresses, or can reasonably stress, when he stresses framework-relativity is that, e.g., "p∨~p" is valid when "∨" and "~" are used with the classical meanings but is not valid when "∨" and "~" are used with the intuitionistic meanings. Instances of "p∨~p" can be guaranteed always to express true propositions when "∨" and "~" are used with classical meanings but not when they are used with intuitionistic meanings. Crucially, nothing in this picture requires that the truth of a *proposition* is at all relative to a framework, that is, on this interpretation, a language. The only thing that depends on language is what proposition a string of symbols expresses. It would be wrong to say that whether it is true that p depends on a framework; what would be correct to say is only that whether the sentence "p" is true depends on a framework. On a completely different interpretation of what Carnap means by "framework", the *relativist* interpretation, the framework-relativity amounts precisely to it being relative to a framework whether it is true that p. Compare the familiar moral relativism according to which it can be true relative to us or our standards that a certain kind of act is right but true relative to some other community's standards that this kind of act is wrong. Here it is not simply a matter of words meaning different things, but it is the propositions themselves whose truth-values are relative to standards.[5]

I believe that the language pluralist interpretation of Carnap's talk of frameworks is correct. I have laid out the case for this at some length elsewhere, and will here basically only summarize the case for the language pluralist interpretation. That is the task of the next section. There is certainly more to say about whether this interpretation is correct, and below I will address the recent criticisms due to Flocke, but my main focus will be on the consequences of this interpretation.

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[5] A continuing concern of mine is that distinctions like that between language pluralism and relativism are ignored in discussions of Carnap, and that this leads to philosophical confusion. (See Eklund (2009), e.g. p. 138fn15, and Eklund (2016), p. 186.) For example, Leitgeb and Carus (2020) cheerfully speak of the question of whether "numbers exist in the language of Zermelo-Frankel set theory", without pausing to note that this kind of formulation does not make much sense. One question which makes sense is whether "numbers exist" in the language of Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory (or rather what is regarded as the translation of "numbers exist" in this language) is true. Another question which might make sense is whether numbers exist according to the framework (in the relativist sense) of Zermelo-Fraenkel set theory. These two different questions correspond to the language pluralist and relativist interpretations of Carnap's talk of frameworks.

If the language pluralist interpretation of Carnap's talk of frameworks is correct, then there is nothing in Carnap's conception of frameworks that justifies the view that the problem Steinberger focuses on arises for Carnap. All that follows from framework-relativity is that we have a choice as to which meanings to use sentences, including sentences of logic, with; it does not mean that we have a choice as to the truths expressed by these sentences. To think differently is to think that because we have a choice as to which meaning to use "leg" with, and so whether "leg" is true of tails, we have a choice as to whether dogs have five legs.

Now, even if the language pluralist interpretation is correct, and even if I am right about what language pluralism yields and does not yield, it could still be that what Steinberger says about Carnap's puzzle is correct. It could be that there are other elements of Carnap's overall outlook which justify holding that the puzzle arises for Carnap. For that matter, it could in principle be that Carnap was confused, and didn't see what the framework-relativity does and does not yield. But as I will discuss in section 4, I don't see that Steinberger adduces any reason to believe in any hypothesis of this kind.

3. Carnap on "frameworks"

Here are some of my main reasons for thinking that the language pluralist interpretation is the correct one.[6] Carnap calls the frameworks linguistic frameworks (when the article was first published he used the label frameworks of entities, but this was changed for when the article was reprinted in the second edition of *Meaning and Necessity*, 1956). Where Carnap introduces the notion of a framework, he says, "If someone wishes to speak in his language about a new kind of entities, he has to introduce a system of new ways of speaking, subject to new rules; we shall call this procedure the construction of a linguistic framework for the new entities in question".[7] In other words: to speak in one's language about some entities one needs to introduce the expressions by means of which to do so. Later, Carnap uses "thing language" to denote a particular framework.[8] He uses "language" to talk about a framework. This is clear evidence that for Carnap, frameworks are languages. Moreover, if

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[6] See, e.g., my (2009), (2013) and (forthcoming) for more extensive discussion.
[7] Carnap (1950), p. 206.
[8] Carnap (1950), p. 206f.

Carnap were a relativist, one would expect him somewhere to emphasize that truths of the relevant kind are true only relative to some framework, but such formulations are entirely absent from his works; generally, Carnap treats frameworks as something straightforward.[9]

The main possible consideration in favor of the alternative, relativist interpretation is this. Carnap emphasizes frameworks in the context of laying out a distinctive, broadly deflationary metaontological view. If Carnap's view was the relativistic one, one could see how the appeal to frameworks would be relevant: if ontological claims are only ever true in a framework-relative way, then inquiry into what ontological claims are true absolutely is futile. By contrast, if frameworks are languages, appeal to frameworks fails to pack any corresponding philosophical punch. The only framework-relativity at issue is the uncontroversial dependence on sentence-meaning upon language: the meaning of a sentence, conceived of as a string of symbols, depends on the language.

A related concern about the language pluralist interpretation is that only the relativist interpretation promises to be directly relevant to Carnap's defense of his right to make claims to the effect that abstract entities exist, as against his empiricist critics. Carnap as relativist can say that all he needs to do is adopt a framework relative to which there exist abstract entities. By contrast, Carnap as language pluralist can only say that there are languages such that sentences like "numbers exist" come out true in them. That does not say anything about whether numbers exist.

Let me here just make some brief remarks in response to this point. First, in his (1950), where appeal to frameworks is the most prominent, Carnap does not invoke frameworks as part of an argument for the anti-metaphysical view he espouses. Instead he appeals to frameworks in order to defend, against critics found among empiricist allies sharing Carnap's anti-metaphysical views, his own practice of quantifying over, for example,

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[9] As is noted in Leitgeb and Carus (2020, Supplement C: Inductive Logic), Carnap included as parts of frameworks things that we would not regard as parts of languages – e.g. rules for "testing, accepting or rejecting" statements. But that does not speak against the language pluralist interpretation. It just means that Carnap accepted as part of language things which many today would not take to be part of language. After all, Carnap was a verificationist. (In general, I am not sure how to classify Leitgeb and Carus in present terms. They make occasional remarks where they seemingly distance themselves from a language pluralist interpretation; at the same time, they happily use "language" interchangeably with "framework" in many places.)

abstracta of various kinds. The appeal to frameworks need not then be meant to carry any anti-metaphysical punch by itself.

Second, even if the framework idea by itself should turn out to be relatively toothless when properly understood, that does not mean that Carnap has no significant and powerful philosophical tools to appeal to. He also relies upon the notion of analyticity, and arguably upon a kind of verificationism.

Carnap, of course, had a long career. One should be open to the possibility that he changed his mind in relevant ways over the course of this career. But I do not see that there are important differences of a relevant kind between the views of mid-30s Carnap and the Carnap of around 1950. His conception of language underwent changes in the meantime, but those changes do not affect the issues I will bring up. I might add that Steinberger too labors under the assumption that there are no relevant differences between the earlier and the later Carnap. Maybe one should be careful about describing the views of mid-30s Carnap in terms of meaning and in terms of propositions expressed. The underlying point that one and the same string of symbols can be associated with different rules in different languages still applies.

4. Steinberger on Carnap

In the passage quoted early on, Steinberger claims that for Carnap "rational norms are always relative to a linguistic framework". If that is Carnap's view, then Steinberger's question of what norms can govern framework choice naturally arises for Carnap. (Though one may wonder how serious the problem is. If one really is a relativist about some norms, as Steinberger's Carnap is, could one not simply cheerfully say that there is a clear sense in which the norms will simply *be* arbitrary?)

But if, as per the language pluralist interpretation, the only framework-relativity at issue is the familiar relativity of an expression's meaning upon language, Carnap's position does not give rise to any of these problems. What "tomato" means is framework-relative; that is to say, language-relative. That does not mean that tomatoes are framework-relative. There is no sense in which for Carnap, interpreted as simply a language pluralist, rational norms are relative to a framework. Norms are like tomatoes in this respect. The frameworks

– that is, the languages – are only relevant for what things to have the linguistic means to express, and how to express the things, whether these things are tomatoes or norms.

Early and late, Steinberger talks about Carnap's principle of tolerance. He quotes Carnap's statement of the principle:

> everyone is at liberty to build his own logic, i.e. his own form of language, as he wishes. All that is required of him is that, if he wishes to discuss it, he must state his methods clearly, and give syntactical rules instead of philosophical arguments.[10]

and comments, in the passage quoted already above,

> Logics (and rational principles more generally) come as part of a linguistic framework. We are 'entirely free' … to devise any framework we please. None of the countless possible logico-linguistic frameworks has any exclusive claim to being correct. Indeed, the question of correctness cannot be so much as meaningfully posed in the case of linguistic frameworks.[11]

Corresponding to the language pluralist and relativist interpretations of the talk of frameworks, there are language pluralist and relativist understandings of the principle of tolerance. On the language pluralist way of understanding tolerance, it concerns precisely only what languages to adopt. Tolerance does not say anything about the status of propositions. For all that the principle of tolerance says, some propositions are true and others false, quite unproblematically. The liberty it speaks of is the liberty regarding what propositions to express, and regarding the kinds of tools with which to express them. On the relativist way of understanding tolerance, the liberty it speaks of is the liberty regarding which propositions to accept. Within the discussion of logical pluralism in philosophy of logic, the language pluralist understanding of the principle of tolerance is often simply presupposed.[12]

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[10] Steinberger (2016), p. 646.
[11] Ibid.
[12] See, e.g., Restall (2002) and Russell (2019).

I have described the upshot in terms of propositions, finding that a helpful way to express the differences between the views. But the talk of propositions may be eliminated without real loss. For example, one can say that tolerance on the language pluralist interpretation just amounts to a claim that we can use symbols with different associated rules; something which is an innocuous claim.

I further think that, although there are issues regarding how to understand tolerance, tolerance has an air of common sense understood the language pluralist way. A decision about what language to adopt does not itself prejudge any factual issue. Compare here what Steinberger later says, when commenting on tolerance: "None of the countless possible logico-linguistic frameworks has any exclusive claim to being correct. Indeed, the question of correctness cannot be so much as meaningfully posed in the case of linguistic frameworks".[13] If by "logico-linguistic framework" we just mean language – in accordance with Carnap's own formulation – this becomes: no language has an exclusive claim to be correct, and it is not even meaningful to speak of languages as correct or not. That sounds simply *right*; and for boring rather than substantive theoretical reasons. What does it even mean for a language to be correct? The natural view is that it is not *languages* that are correct or not, but the *theories* formulated therein.[14]

And if one were to object that at least a language wherein "if it's raining then it's raining" is synthetic or wherein "there are over 7 billion humans alive in 2023" is analytic would be incorrect then the answer is the following. Focus on the former example, and suppose that this sentence currently is analytic. If it is "if it's raining then it's raining" *with a different meaning than it currently has* that is so classified then there is no problem: of course one can endow a given string with different semantic properties. And if what is envisaged is "if it's raining then it's raining" could be synthetic *while still having the meaning it has*, the response is to say that its status as analytic is so bound up with what meaning it has that this is impossible.[15]

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[13] Steinberger (2016), p. 646.

[14] One can in principle make sense of speaking of a "correct" language. Building on work by, e.g., David Lewis (1983, 1984) and Ted Sider (2011), one can say that a language is "correct" just in case its primitive expressions have a certain privileged metaphysical status – are joint-carving, as it is often put. But that languages can be correct in the sense indicated is a minority view, and it would be anachronistic to treat this as the view Carnap opposes.

[15] Thanks to an anonymous referee for encouraging me to discuss this objection.

Steinberger seems to presuppose the relativist understanding of tolerance. He talks of "rational principles" as being part of frameworks. He is not explicit: is it the sentences that express rational principles that are part of frameworks, or is it the principles thus expressed that are part of frameworks? But it sounds as if it must be the latter. It is the latter understanding which would undergird his concerns about Carnap and rationality.

Even if the language pluralist understanding of Carnap is correct and the relativist understanding is not, it could still be that Steinberger is right about his puzzle arising for Carnap. It could be that there are independent reasons why it does. There are two main points I wish to make about this. First, Steinberger himself does not really do more than to emphasize supposed framework-relativity, so Steinberger himself does not provide independent good reason to accept that his puzzle arises for Carnap. Second, to complicate matters, Carnap was a kind of non-cognitivist about normative matters (or many of them). This non-cognitivism alone – no need to invoke any talk of frameworks – is naturally (whether in the end correctly or not) put in the service of justifying much of what Steinberger describes as Carnap's view on norms. If there are no normative facts on which to base normative convictions, then, it may be said, it is we who "impose norms upon ourselves" (to relate back to Steinberger's formulation of what he sees as Carnap's view). The question of what actually follows from non-cognitivism is of course controversial. But it might be natural to hold that the non-cognitivist strand could be put in the service of justifying the view of Steinberger's Carnap, whatever in the end should be said about these matters. The idea, such as it is, would be that already sketched, that if there are no objective facts settling normative issues, we impose norms upon ourselves.

Some of what Steinberger says echoes what some other theorists have said about Carnap, and it may be helpful to relate to other discussions, in order to emphasize that Steinberger's reading is not idiosyncratic, and to show that the issue I raise concerns more than just Steinberger's work. Let me just focus on one case. Steinberger approvingly quotes Alan Richardson (2007) saying that on Carnap's view,

> …logic provides the formal conditions for sense-making. Suppose we wish to know the reason the sky is blue. The object for which we want the reason is the sentence 'the sky is blue'; a theoretical reason is then another sentence within the same language from which

our target reason logically follows. The very notion of a theoretical reason, therefore, makes sense only internal to a logical framework. Thus there is no realm of theoretical reasons that can be appealed to in advance of the adoption of a logical system. [. . .] The adoption of some logical system is necessary for there to be a notion of evidence or theoretical reason in the first place.[16]

It seems clear that what Richardson in the context variously talks about as "logical systems" and "logical frameworks" are Carnap's frameworks. Richardson claims that for Carnap, "the very notion of a theoretical reason makes sense only internal to a…framework". This sounds like it might be an understanding of Carnap given which Steinberger's puzzle could arise, given the reliance on a kind of framework-relativity that seems to go beyond what is involved in language pluralism.

But what might the "notion … makes sense only internal to"-talk that Richardson employs mean? Some possible ways of understanding such talk correspond to the language pluralist and relativist interpretations of "framework". The talk can be seen as giving voice to relativism. A relativist about taste might say: the notion of *tasting better* makes sense only relative to a framework, and mean by this that there are no absolute truths about what tastes better than what, but only truths relative to frameworks. If instead frameworks are just languages, the talk in question can be seen as giving voice to the rather trivial point that to speak of anything at all one needs the linguistic means to do so. Without the linguistic means to speak about reasons, one cannot speak about reasons.

Richardson speaks of certain specific notions, like that of theoretical reason, as *framework-internal*. Neither of the proposed ways of making sense of talk of being framework-internal vindicates this way of speaking, for in both the characterized senses of "framework-internal", all notions are equally framework-internal. Carnap's claims about being internal to frameworks, however they are to be understood, are fully general, and then it seems odd to single out specific notions as framework-internal. If any notions are in any interesting sense internal to frameworks, then all are.

That said, there may be other ways to make sense of talk of being "framework-internal". For example, the language pluralist might say that notions that apply only to

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[16] Richardson (2007), pp. 300-1; quoted in Steinberger (2016), p. 648.

expressions of the language to which they belong, and parts thereof, are in a reasonable sense framework-internal. For example, some truth and reference predicates may be claimed to be like that. It is sometimes claimed that those are the only proper truth and reference predicates. Such claims amount to the view that truth is in a certain sense language-internal. But arguments regarding the language- or framework-internality of truth and reference would not any any immediate way justify or make sense of talk of, e.g., the notion of a *theoretical reason* as being similarly language- or framework-internal.[17]

5. Frege and Carnap on logic

Steinberger's appeal to Richardson occurs in a context of a comparison between Frege's and Carnap's views on meaning. Comparing Frege and Carnap, Steinberger says,

> Rather than assuming, as Frege did, a pre-existent realm of senses and thoughts that one's vocabulary would then have to be mapped onto by means of necessarily imprecise verbal 'elucidations', Carnap starts with a purely syntactic specification of the language, which receives meaning through […] coordination with our theoretical principles and our observations.[18]

It may sound as if there is a stark contrast between Carnap's approach and an approach that relies on pre-existent senses and propositions. But things are not so simple. Even if one believes that there is a pre-existent realm of the kind indicated, the question remains: by virtue of what do particular symbols of ours get to be hooked up with entities in that realm? And a story like Carnap's provides a potential answer to that question. Conversely, even if, like Carnap, one is concerned with what endows our linguistic symbols with meaning in the first place, that does not mean that one is committed to denying that the meanings that

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[17] Sebastian Lutz (2020) criticizes me for treating observational and non-observational sentences and propositions the same way (p. 1102fn5). But while the observational/non-observational distinction certainly is central for Carnap, I do not see that there is anything in Carnap's talk of frameworks and choice between frameworks that, e.g., would make a language pluralist interpretation more plausible in one case than in the other.

[18] Steinberger (2016), p. 648. Steinberger (p. 648fn5) notes that this strictly only describes Carnap's view during his "syntactic period" but adds that the overall point remains unaffected by his later switch to semantics – and I see no reason to disagree.

symbols can have can exist independently of our practices. It can be that our practices only determine which symbols are associated with which meanings: the meanings themselves can be fully independent of the practices.[19]

I believe that the distinctions drawn earlier, between language pluralist and relativist understandings of Carnap, are of relevance also to understanding the relationship between Frege's and Carnap's philosophies of logic, and in this section I will discuss how.

Elsewhere, in his (2017), Steinberger compares Frege and Carnap at more length and then with a special focus on their views on logic. Frege is described as a *monist* and a *realist* about logic, holding that "there is one true logic and…logic issues in substantive generalizations that are answerable to an objective reality".[20] Moreover, Frege is described as embracing the following constitutivity thesis: "Logic provides constitutive norms for thinking as such".[21] As Steinberger discusses, care is needed regarding this talk of constitutive norms. It is evidently possible to reason illogically – and to think when doing so – and if it is to be plausible the Fregean thesis had better not rule that out. One further gloss Steinberger provides is that what is "necessary to count as a thinker is to be sensitive to the fact that my practice of judging, inferring, believing, etc., is normatively constrained by the laws of logic".[22]

Carnap is described as rejecting "the notion that there is but one true Logic", and as "jettisoning" both Frege's realism and his monism.[23] Turning to the normative dimension – and inching closer to the issue of the constitutivity thesis – Steinberger says that "for Carnap the question of 'correctness' cannot even be meaningfully asked when it comes to logical systems". Steinberger says that Carnap is committed to rejecting the constitutivity thesis:

> …thought cannot be normatively constituted by two distinct sets of logical norms. Given that no two extensionally distinct logical laws can give rise to the same set of norms, it follows that thought is governed by a unique set of logical laws by the standards of [the

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[19] These points about the compatibility of what on the face of it may seem to be two very different outlooks on language are made forcefully and compellingly by David Lewis (1975).
[20] Steinberger (2017), p. 153.
[21] Steinberger (2017), p. 151.
[22] Steinberger (2017), p. 151.
[23] See Steinberger (2016), p. 645 and (2017), p. 153.

constitutivity thesis]….[the constitutivity thesis] is incompatible with Carnap's logical pluralism.[24]

Having argued this, Steinberger does add that Carnap still can, and actually does, embrace a kind of *relativized* constitutivity thesis, according to which it is constitutive of thought to acknowledge the authority of some logical laws or other, even if there are no particular logical laws such that it is constitutive of thought to acknowledge the authority of them.

The distinctions drawn earlier, between two different interpretations of Carnap's talk of frameworks and between two corresponding interpretations of Carnap's principle of tolerance, are relevant also to the comparison between Carnap and Frege. If Carnap simply embraces language pluralism then the supposedly sharp contrast between Carnap and Frege is not so sharp anymore. For Carnap's pluralism then only says something about possible languages that differ in which sentences are true, and in which sentences follow from which. Nothing is entailed regarding a pluralism concerning which propositions follow from which or a pluralism regarding which propositions are true – whatever such pluralism might amount to.[25] While Frege does not discuss such Carnapian pluralism, there is nothing in Frege's – or any other reasonable logical monist's – outlook which rules out that expressions could have different meanings in different languages or rules out that sentences which in our language express logical laws could have other meanings in other languages. When it comes to whether Carnap was a logical realist, things are trickier. There is an issue of what "realism" amounts to here. As Steinberger characterizes logical realism, the realist holds that "logic issues in substantive generalizations that are answerable to an objective reality". In works like his (1947), Carnap held that logical truths are true in all state descriptions, and arguably this meant, for Carnap, that their truth is vacuous. They do not demand anything of the world. That is presumably incompatible with logical realism as characterized: if they do not demand anything of the world then they are arguably not "answerable to reality". Being vacuous they are not answerable to anything. However, Carnap's view is still compatible with realism in another intuitive sense, for facts about what is true in what state description

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[24] Steinberger (2017), p. 155. Note that for the argument to work it must be assumed that the different sets of logical norms are in some sense complete or at least render verdicts on the same cases.

[25] It will be in the spirit of language pluralism to stress that "follow" can mean different things: there are different logical consequence-like relations that one can pick out. But that is different.

can be objective, and it can be an objective fact that what is true in all state descriptions also is true.

Turning to the constitutivity thesis, we must again be careful about the distinction between theses about sentences and theses about propositions. One kind of constitutivity thesis would say that it is somehow constitutive of thought to have certain attitudes towards propositions or sets thereof; another kind of constitutivity thesis would say that it is somehow constitutive of thought to have certain attitudes toward certain sentences. It is fairly natural to think of a constitutivity thesis the former way. And if one construes a constitutivity thesis the latter way, it is only plausible if one thinks of it as involving sentences with the meanings they actually have. What may perhaps be plausible is that one must not deny that if a sentence "P" is true and a sentence "Q" is true then the sentence "P and Q" is true, *provided "and" has the meaning it actually has*. The corresponding claim without the italicized rider would not be plausible in the least: the string of symbols "and" could mean something such that when "and" has this meaning, "P and Q" means what "neither P nor Q" actually means.

The reason for belaboring these presumably obvious points is that if a language pluralist interpretation of Carnap's talk of frameworks is correct, then this talk does not in the least problematize any antecedently plausible constitutivity thesis.

6. Flocke's criticism of language pluralism

Throughout the discussion I have relied on the language pluralist interpretation of Carnap. This interpretation has recently – in Vera Flocke (2020) – come up for prominent criticism, and in this section I will respond to this criticism.[26]

In order to explain Flocke's criticism, I must first present her alternative interpretation, and this gets somewhat complex. There are two aspects to what she says about Carnap. First, she says that Carnap is a noncognitivist about ontology, and emphasizes that for Carnap the metaphysicians' ontological claims can be (re)interpreted as recommendations about which framework to adopt.[27] This first aspect by itself is fully compatible with language pluralism. One can just replace "framework" in this description by

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[26] In my (forthcoming) I discuss other recent criticisms, due to Gabriel Broughton (2021).
[27] Flocke (2020), p. 528.

"language". Generally, there is no serious disagreement about there being a noncognitivist or nonfactualist element in Carnap's thinking about normative matters and about the fact that he thinks that purported external questions are in order only given a non-factual understanding. We can and must choose between frameworks, but we should not mistake framework choice for a factual question. But second, Flocke also holds that for Carnap there are two dimensions to meaning, and it is in connection with this that she sees a conflict with language pluralism. She holds that for Carnap, the ordinary sentence "there are numbers" possesses an "ordinary meaning" and its ordinary meaning is that there are numbers – but it has a clearly defined "semantic content" only relative to a framework.[28] She emphasizes that on her view on semantic content, "no semantic content has a merely relative truth-value".[29] What the "frameworks" provide are "rules of assessment" which are what yield the semantic contents, as opposed to merely the ordinary meanings.[30] It is here that relativity to a framework enters in. On Flocke's interpretation of Carnap, there is a clear structural similarity between what Carnap says about language and what Allan Gibbard says about normative language.[31] For Gibbard, normative sentences cannot simply be assessed for truth relative to possible worlds, but must be assessed for truth relative to worlds *plus norms*. Analogously for Flocke's Carnap, but without the specific focus on normative sentences, and with *rules of assessment* taking the place of Gibbard's norms.

What Flocke proposes can sound like relativism of a kind that is familiar from the recent literature: the propositions expressed by (ordinary) sentences are not apt for absolute truth, but only for truth relative to such-and-such.[32] Flocke is aware of the similarities, but seeks to distinguish her view from such relativism. She says that whereas relativists "think that certain kinds of semantic contents, i.e. relativistic propositions, can be assessed relative to different frameworks", on her view, as mentioned, "no semantic content has a merely

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[28] Flocke (2020), p. 541.
[29] Flocke (2020), p. 541.
[30] Flocke (2020), p. 528.
[31] Flocke (2020), p. 537f.
[32] See, e.g., MacFarlane (2014). As is often remarked, the mere idea that truth is relative should arguably not be controversial. That truth is relative to a world is a commonplace. What is controversial is that truth is relative to something like judges or standards.

When describing Flocke's view, I mention both non-cognitivism and relativism, following Flocke's presentation. That there are strong affinities between comtemporary relativism and contemporary non-cognitivism should not be a surprise. See, e.g., MacFarlane (2014), pp. 167-75.

relative truth-value".[33] The difference may appear straightforward, but is a bit elusive to me, especially since "semantic content" is a term of art. It is still true on the view of Flocke's Carnap that "there are numbers" means *that there are numbers*, and that this latter thing, the "ordinary meaning" of the sentence, has different truth-values relative to different rules of assessment. It is only that given how Flocke uses "semantic content", this does not mean that "there are numbers" has a semantic content with different truth-values relative to different rules of assessment. The view of Flocke's Carnap is like the relativist view that ordinary sentences express something, but what they express – the ordinary meaning, in Flocke's taxonomy – does not have an absolute truth value but only has a truth-value that is in a significant way relative to something or other.

Flocke can say what the relativist says about Carnap's defense of his talk of abstract objects: on the view of the relativist's and Flocke's Carnap, it holds, e.g., that numbers exist is true relative to a framework/relative certain to rules of assessment. To legitimately say that numbers exist, one need only adopt the relevant framework or the relevant rules of assessment. Language pluralism, by contrast, yields only that by adopting a new language one gets to say "numbers exist". That is different, for the new language may differ from the old one. What one expresses when, using the new language, one says "numbers exist", may not be that numbers exist. (When I am saying this, I am using the "old" language.) Return to the tail/leg example from above. I can choose to start using "leg" in such a way that "leg" is true also of tails. I can then say, truly, "dogs have five legs". But (still using the unreformed language now) I do not thereby assert that dogs have five legs.

This may be seen as a strike against language pluralism. I addressed this potential concern at the end of section 3. But this concern regarding language pluralism should also be weighed against the fact that there is in Carnap no direct evidence for the kind of more complex view on meaning and content ascribed to him by Flocke and under the relativist interpretation. There is no mention of anything like relative truth. Are we to believe that Carnap subscribed to something as radical as this without even remarking on it? (Though there is a more modest and more plausible claim about Carnap in the vicinity. It is that ordinary sentences are often so indeterminate in meaning that they can often equally well be translated as true and as false sentences of more precise languages/frameworks.)

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[33] Flocke (2020), p. 541.

Having discussed general features of Flocke's interpretation of Carnap, let me now turn to analyticity, which, as we will see, is of special relevance for her specific criticism of language pluralism. A sentence is analytic (in a framework) if it is entailed by the rules of the framework. Flocke rejects the idea that for Carnap analytic sentences are true, saying

> It is common to think of analyticity as truth in virtue of meaning, which would mean that analytic sentences are true. However, Carnap's notion of analyticity is importantly different…Carnap's view is inspired by Wittgenstein's notion of a tautology. Tautologies, for Wittgenstein, are not genuine propositions. Analytic sentences, for Carnap, are similarly distinguished by their lack of any kind of descriptive content.[34]

I have two objections here. First, in (1947) – the major work on language written a few years before (1950) – Carnap identifies analyticity with "L-truth" and says that a sentence is "L-true in a semantical system S" just in case its "truth can be established on the basis of the semantic rules of the system S alone".[35] Carnap thus seems to explicitly say that analytic setences are true, contrary to Flocke's interpretation. And while Carnap did change his views over time, I do not think it is a mistake to read views from (1947) into what he says in (1950), which served to reply to criticisms of the former. I might also add that in "Meaning Postulates" (1952), Carnap says, "[i]t is the purpose of this paper to describe a way of explicating the concept of analyticity, i.e., truth based upon meaning". [36] Second, I do not see why Flocke would say what she says, even given other aspects of her interpretation. Frameworks are supposed to provide the rules of assessment determining what is to be classified as true and false. Truth and falsity are not supposed to be properties had independently of these rules of assessment. But then, regardless of what exactly distinguishes the sentences which are analytic within the framework from other sentences, there is nothing standing in the way of classifying analytic sentences as true. Even if there are significant differences between analytic sentences and straightforwardly factual sentences, the label "true" can be freely sprinkled across sentences of both kinds.

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[34] Flocke (2020), p. 538f.
[35] Carnap (1947), p. 10.
[36] Carnap (1952), p. 66.

Flocke says that her point that for Carnap analytic sentences are not true is important, for

> …the acceptance of a framework rule hence is an attitude towards something without descriptive content and is in this sense a noncognitive mental state. Hence, pragmatic external statements, that concern which framework one ought to accept, do not express beliefs but express noncognitive mental states. This drives home one of the main points I want to make in this paper.[37]

I am not convinced by what Flocke says, for two reasons. First, there are different notions of "descriptive content" floating around. Carnap does hold that analytic sentences are *vacuously* true. In that sense they lack descriptive content for Carnap. But this is different from a claim to the effect that some sentences for *non-cognitivist* reasons lack descriptive content. Saying that a sentence "lacks descriptive content" because its truth demands nothing of the world is different from saying that it "lacks descriptive content" through not being apt for truth and falsity at all. Second, there is a distinction between issues about what type of content some sentences have, and issues about what deciding to use some sentences with some given meanings involves. Even if some given sentences do have descriptive content, in whichever sense is at issue, the decision to use some given string of symbols with some given meaning, as well as statement expressing such a decision, may well be non-cognitive. The decision to use "snow is white" to mean that snow is white needn't be a cognitive decision and a sentence expressing this decision does not have to be a factual sentence. The nature of the meanings of some sentences is one thing; the decision to use some strings of symbols with a certain meaning is another one. And I do not see that Carnap says anything that serves to blur that straightforward distinction. Flocke's Carnap seems to blur it, by taking the question of whether a sentence has descriptive content to be relevant for what kind of decision to use it with a given meaning is.

Let me now finally turn to Flocke's specific criticism of language pluralism. She says, that the language pluralist view on what "framework rules" are leads to ascribing the following view to Carnap:

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[37] Flocke (2020), p. 539.

The number framework is an interpreted language which is defined by syntactic and semantic rules which entail the truth of the sentence 'There is an x such that x is a number'. I.e., this sentence is true in virtue of the syntactic and semantic rules provided by the framework.[38]

But she says that this view is false and obviously so:

Linguistic rules are conventional and do not entail that numbers exist. Linguistic rules are conventional and do not entail that numbers exist. For instance, consider a specific rule of the first kind (i), that maps 'there are numbers' onto the proposition that there are numbers. This mapping establishes a relation between a sentence and a proposition but does not entail anything about the truth of that proposition. Language pluralists in particular should agree with this, since the whole point of language pluralist interpretations is that merely which proposition 'there are numbers' expresses but not the truth-value of this proposition is a framework-dependent matter.[39]

So, language pluralism is committed to ascribing the mentioned view to Carnap, and the view is false. The idea is, in outline, this. For Carnap, analytic sentences are in some way or other entailed by framework rules. Given language pluralism, that amounts to the view that Flocke describes, according to which sentences are true in virtue of rules help constitute frameworks. Since that view is false, language pluralism is false.

Here is my response to this. First, even if I do think that for Carnap, analytic sentences are true, the opposite view could easily be accommodated even given language pluralism. The basic claim of language pluralism is just that one and the same string of symbols can mean different things in different languages, and that this is what Carnap's emphasis on frameworks amounts to. That claim remains, and retains its relevance, even if a given string of symbols within some languages has a different kind of function and is not

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[38] Flocke (2020), p. 543.
[39] Flocke (2020), p. 543.

capable of truth and falsity. Second, consider the following view. Some propositions are *vacuously* true. These are the ones true in all possible worlds. Since they are true in all possible worlds, they are true no matter what the world is like; that is why they are vacuously true. Now let p be a vacuously true proposition, and let S be a sentence such that the linguistic rules governing S determine that S expresses p. In this case, it is natural to say that the linguistic rules (alone) determine that S is true. In any ordinary case, a true sentence is determined to be true by the linguistic conventions governing the sentence (determining which proposition it expresses), together with the world (which determines whether the proposition is true or false). But in the case of a vacuously true proposition, the second aspect ends up vacuous. Now, one can certainly take issue with aspects of the view described. For example, does truth in all possible worlds really amount to vacuous truth? However, the present question is not whether the assumptions are true but whether something like this picture can be ascribed to Carnap. And it seems to me that it can. Carnap did centrally claim that the L-true sentences, i.e. the analytic sentences, are the ones that are true in all "state-descriptions".[40]

What all this shows is that the language pluralist interpretation of Carnap does not commit him to any problematic claim to the effect that linguistic rules themselves determine that (say) numbers exist. What they determine is only that "numbers exist" expresses something which is vacuously true.

There remains of course the point first brought up toward the end of section 3, that language pluralism is less helpful than either Flocke's interpretation or relativism when it comes to defending the legitimacy of saying that numbers exist (as opposed to saying "numbers exist", using some language or other). Again, I am inclined to agree that Flocke's interpretation and the relativist interpretation do better on this score, but for the reasons

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[40] In the passage quoted above, Flocke goes back and forth between speaking about what the linguistic rules *entail* and what holds *in virtue of* linguistic rules. There is a distinction to heed here, of relevance for how to think about analyticity. On at least some notions of entailment, necessary, or at least analytic, truths, are entailed by anything whatsoever. But it would be wrong to hold that these truths hold in virtue of what they are entailed by. Consider the view that analytic truths are vacuous in light of this distinction. It would be because these truths are vacuous that they are entailed by anything whatsoever; yet at the same time, precisely because they are vacuous, they are not true by virtue of anything.

earlier mentioned I think that on the balance of evidence the language pluralist interpretation is to be preferred.

7. A real problem

I have defended a language pluralist interpretation of Carnap, and I have argued that given this interpretation, the problem that Steinberger thinks arises for Carnap's view does not arise. Generally, language pluralism should seem rather anodyne. How could emphasis on language pluralism possibly have any significant philosophical upshot?

There is actually a problem regarding the objective authority of normativity for which the characteristic claim of language pluralism, that there is a certain plethora of languages, plays a role. I have discussed this kind of problem at some length elsewhere, and will here only briefly summarize my discussion.[41] (My discussion in other work has been focused on other normative notions than rationality, but the points are straightforwardly transposed.)

Suppose that there are objective truths about what is (categorically) rational and what one rationally ought to do. So far so good for the friend of the objective authority of normativity. But suppose further that there are alternative *rationality-like* notions – call one of them *schmationality* – and different objective truths about what is schmational and what one schmationally *schmought* to do. When deciding about what principles to accept, there are some facts about what it would be rational to accept and other facts about what it would be schmational to accept. What then to do? Rationality points to one course of action, and schmationality points to another. Why favor rationality? Whenever we try to reason about this question, we find ourselves using some normative notions or other. This presents problems regarding how to address this question. Asking about what we *ought* to do, maybe we arrive at the conclusion that we *ought* to do what is rational; but at the same time we can see that if instead we were asking what we *schmought* to do, maybe we would arrive at the conclusion that we schmought to do what is schmational. The question is just pushed back one step: ought or schmought?

The worry is that even if there are objective facts about what we ought to do, what is right to do, etc., there will be other possible normative concepts, and facts about what we

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[41] See Eklund (2017).

schmought to do and what is schmational to do. There is then, intuitively, a further question about which concepts to use for action-guiding purposes and this further question is not addressed by appeal to these normative facts.

Language pluralism, anodyne though it may be, plays a role in the challenge, for an underlying assumption is that there is a certain kind of plethora of possible languages or systems of concepts.[42]

The challenge is presented in abstract terms. Are there these alternative rationality-like notions? This is a big question. And what is it for a notion to be rationality-like to begin with? Perhaps it can be reasonably denied that there are these alternative rationality-like notions. But it is in the spirit of Carnap's principle of tolerance to adopt a liberal stance about what possible languages there are.

8. Concluding remarks

Let me end by just briefly recapitulating a few main points. Relying on the language pluralist interpretation of Carnap, I have argued that Steinberger's puzzle about Carnap and rationality just does not arise. The language pluralist interpretation also affects how one should see Carnap's principle of tolerance, and given this interpretation it is not straightforward how Carnap and Frege differ over realism and monism. Having defended the language pluralist interpretation elsewhere, I have not here mounted a full defense of it. But I have rehearsed some main points in its favor, and have responded to Flocke's criticisms of it. Towards the end I described a different puzzle concerning rationality, one which naturally does arise given language pluralism.

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[42] See here, e.g., Olle Risberg's (forthcoming) emphasis on a pluralism about concepts when discussing issues concerning epistemic matters parallel to those I here bring up regarding normativity generally. A complication is that it is actually not obvious to me that this pluralism is *necessary* for the problem to arise. However, the pluralism certainly helps make the problem vivid.

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