

**METAPHYSICAL STRUCTURES AND HOLISM:
REPLY TO SCHAFFER**

Miloš Bogdanović

ABSTRACT: This paper deals with Schaffer's distinction between metaphysical structures, as well as his appeal for revival of neo-Aristotelian approaches that imply ordered structure, based on the criticism of Quine's method that, in his view, implies flat metaphysical structure. However, although we believe that Schaffer's distinction between metaphysical structures is an interesting and, basically, acceptable view, we will try to show that Schaffer's arguments are not convincing enough to persuade us to abandon Quine's method and adopt the Aristotelian metaphysical model. Moreover, when mistakes that Schaffer makes are corrected and Quine's method is given due attention, we will see that this can enable us a more tenable interpretation of the concepts that Schaffer speaks of (metaphysical structures), but also – as in his case – to draw certain conclusions that go beyond objectives of classification as such.

KEY WORDS: flat, sorted, ordered metaphysical (ontological) structure, Quine, Schaffer, Carnap, intuitions, ontology, metaphysics

1. Introduction

In recent philosophical literature we come across a certain trend towards confronting Quine's and Aristotle's metaphysical standpoints. But while for some scholars this confrontation is more declarative and could be described as mere differentiation, or even as arguing in Quine's favour (see, Varzi 2014), in others, however, it gets more radical by pointing out how Quine's view is an uninteresting and trivial metaphysical view that should be overcome for this reason.

For example, in the paper "On what grounds what", Jonathan Schaffer argues for, as he says, abandonment of the dominant Quinean stream in metaphysics, and revival of a more traditional, Aristotelian one. Schaffer justifies it by pointing out that the above standpoints imply completely different views of metaphysical structure, as evidenced by the fact that Quine and his supporters can only say what exists, or which entities enter the domain of variables over which we quantify, but they cannot, like Aristotle, say which of them are fundamental.

Although we believe that Schaffer's distinction between metaphysical structures, which will be discussed in more detail below, is an interesting and, basically, acceptable view, the attention here will be drawn to the fact that arguments offered by Schaffer for

abandoning Quine's and reviving Aristotelian metaphysics are unsatisfactory, and that the primary reason for this should be sought in his inadequate or *uncritical* reading of Quine. In this regard, we will try to put Schaffer's distinction between metaphysical structures in context of a closer examination of Quine's approach, its background and final results, in the hope that this could lead to more tenable views when it comes to concepts that Schaffer discusses in his text.

2. Schaffer's critique of Quine's method: Metaphysical structures

In his book *The aim and structure of physical theory*, the great French philosopher Pierre Duhem argues that the interpretation of any experimental physical laws ultimately depends on a metaphysical theory adopted by a theorist. In a more definite form, in order for the interpretation of physical laws to be possible at all, Duhem believes that we must adopt one of the following views: Aristotle's, according to which all objects are based on matter and form, Descartes', according to which these are mind and matter, Newton's, where the concepts of mass, its interactions, and forms are fundamental, or now dominant atomism, according to which everything is made up of tiny particles that cannot be observed directly and their processes. In a word, Duhem argues for the thesis that for a physicist "it would be irrational to work towards the progress of physical theory if that theory were not the more and more clear, and more and more precise reflection of a metaphysics" (Duhem 1990, 187).

Whether we agree or disagree with Duhem on this issue, if we observe the history of philosophy and science in general, we will no doubt come across a number of views that, as a common feature, give priority to some entities over others.¹ On the other hand, the situation today is that this way of thinking has mostly been abandoned, and the reasons should be sought primarily in the influence exerted by the work of one man, Willard Van Orman Quine.

Namely, unlike Aristotle and neo-Aristotelians, Quine is thought to have developed a view that we can only say which entities exist, but not which of them are fundamental. Inspired by this fact, Schaffer advanced a thesis about two basic types of metaphysical structure: "What emerges is that Quine and Aristotle offer different views of metaphysical structure. That is, the Quinean and Aristotelian tasks involve structurally distinct conceptions

¹ Of course, this list does not exhaust all of these views. However, we believe that the listed ones that Duhem has compiled are certainly the most influential, which is why the illustration of ordered metaphysical structures can be limited to them.

of the target of metaphysical inquiry. For the Quinean, the target is flat (...). For the neo-Aristotelian, the target is *ordered*” (Schaffer 2009, 354). However, in addition to this, Schaffer also argued for abandonment of the flat, and revival of a traditional, ordered metaphysics: “On now dominant Quinean view, metaphysics is about what there is. Metaphysics so conceived is concerned with such questions as whether properties exist, whether meanings exist, and whether numbers exist. I will argue for the revival of a more traditional Aristotelian view, on which metaphysics is about what grounds what. Metaphysics so revived does not bother asking whether properties, meanings and numbers exist (...). The question is whether or not they are *fundamental*” (Ibid., 347).

To be quite precise, Schaffer’s project of abandoning Quine’s and reviving traditional metaphysics is based on the idea of neo-Aristotelian conception of metaphysical task ‘as the best’. This is an idea that he will try to defend primarily by referring to the so-called ‘puzzle about ontology’, which consists of the following: namely, “how could it be that metaphysics seems to ask deep and difficult questions when existence questions seem shallow and trivial?”, and Schaffer’s solution is that this puzzle is “*only on the Quinean assumption that metaphysics is asking existence questions*. The deep questions about numbers, properties, and parts (*inter alia*) are not whether there are such things, but *how*” (Ibid., 361-362).

In other words, the problem with contemporary, Quinean metaphysics, in Schaffer’s view, is that it identifies its questions with “existence questions” that are “trivial, while Aristotelian fundamental questions are interesting” (Ibid., 356). However, not only can Quine’s method, as we shall see, answer a question such as ‘*how do entities exist?*’ (although *not necessarily* in Schaffer’s way), but it seems that in distinguishing ontological (trivial) from metaphysical (deep) questions Schaffer forgets that Quine uses the same method to, *inter alia*, *flatten metaphysical structures that Schaffer claims to be ordered (deep)*. With this in mind, apart from the opinion regarding the depth of metaphysical questions, it seems that Schaffer would have to provide more convincing arguments for its abandonment, which he will ultimately try to do by presenting Quine’s approach as one that, so to speak, lives parasitically on Aristotle’s.

Namely, in order to show that Quine’s metaphysics is subordinate to Aristotle’s, Schaffer will divide the method used by Quine into five phases, emphasizing that each of them “requires presuppositions about ordering structure”. Thus, the first phase of this method would consist of “identifying the best theory”, and since for Quine it is physics, Schaffer will identify his presuppositions in this phase with presuppositions of Aristotle’s approach in the same phase: “(...) it seems that the question of what makes a theory best is interwoven with

the question of what is basic”, which would be equal to “Aristotelian presuppositions at stage 1: the best theory is a theory of the fundamental (...). Aristotelian metaphysics is thus built into Quinean method from the first stage”, because “part of what makes a theory best (even by Quine's own lights) is that it is a theory of what is fundamental (‘ultimate structure of reality’)” (Ibid., 366-367).²

Therefore, in favour of abandoning current, Quinean metaphysics, in addition to triviality of the questions it raises, Schaffer also points out that its method is “inextricably interwoven with questions of grounding”, which is why Quine’s metaphysical structure is not only ‘strictly weaker’, but also ‘subsumed by Aristotelian’. However, if it has to contain presuppositions about fundamentality, the question is how can metaphysical structure that Quine argues for be flat, and Schaffer’s answer is that, referring to (modern) physics, Quine’s method would ultimately have to be eliminative with regard to all entities that are not part of its ontology.

Although this should speak in favour of Schaffer’s assessment of the type of metaphysical structure we come across in Quine’s work, in what follows we will try to show that eliminativism cannot ultimately be attributed to Quine, which is why Quine’s metaphysics, although flat – or rather, unordered – is not and cannot be the way Schaffer sees it. However, in order to do that, it is necessary to introduce another, third type of metaphysical structure that Schaffer identifies.

Namely, in addition to flat and ordered, Schaffer identifies one more type of metaphysical structure that he claims to be sorted: “Perhaps also worth mentioning is a third view of metaphysical structure, on which the target is *sorted*. The task is to solve for the number of categories n , and solve for the sets $E_1 - E_n$ of entities in each category” (Ibid., 355). However, the problem is that, apart from identifying it, he does not give any detailed account of this type of metaphysical structure, or an example of it that the history of philosophy would teach us. The only thing that Schaffer claims is that sorted metaphysical structures would imply classification of entities into categories, and that they are, just like flat ones, subsumed under ordered structures: “Flat structure is strictly weaker than sorted structure, which in turn is strictly weaker than ordered structure” (Ibid.).

In a word, unlike the flat and ordered metaphysical structure, Schaffer does not give any instructions that would be helpful when it comes to sorted metaphysical structure.

² For more detailed information on other phases of Quine’s method that are not directly important to us, see Schaffer, “On what grounds what”, pp. 366-373.

However, we believe that this is favourable in a way, because while he sees Quine's metaphysics as a flat one, we will attempt a more cautious approach to his method and argue for the view that it is, in fact, a sorted one. On the other hand, one should not think that the reason for this is that Quine did differentiate categories after all – since this is exactly an uninteresting and trivial view – but it is precisely *his method that could give us a nontrivial categorization*, which could enable us, in our view, to have a different and more acceptable interpretation of what a flat metaphysical (*ontological*) structure would require, and what a *sustainable* ordered one, at least from today's perspective.

3. Background of Quine's (meta)theoretical position

Therefore, Schaffer put forward a thesis about two basic types of metaphysical structure, with an additional one of no special importance to him, but of great importance to us. On the other hand, believing that the way to go is to criticize Quine's method, he also argued for, as we have seen, abandonment of the flat metaphysical structure, and revival of a traditional, ordered one. However, although in general Schaffer clearly identified the position that he criticized, he failed to mention that Quine significantly modified his views over time.

Namely, as those well acquainted with Quine's philosophy know, the problem of the basic presuppositions of his method for resolving ontological disputes primarily concerns the question which of the two doctrines he gives priority to, empiricism or naturalism.³ Thus the period associated with Quine's empirical postulates is a period in which he was strongly influenced by Carnap's (ontological) conventionalism, according to which “to accept the thing world means nothing more than to accept a certain form of language, in other words, to accept rules for forming statements and for testing, accepting or rejecting them” (Carnap 1983, 243-244).

As is well known, Carnap's approach is usually considered to present a challenge to traditional metaphysicians, primarily because it implies that certain claims, being independent of any conceptual framework or ‘form of language’, cannot be valid. Since Carnap classified most of the theses that traditional metaphysicians put forward in this group, he claimed that the questions they seek to answer are pseudo-questions, and their position in general ‘external to the adopted belief system’ within which it is only legitimate to make any claims about the

³ For more detailed information on this, see Roger, F. Gibson, *Enlightened empiricism: an examination of W. V. Quine's theory of knowledge*.

world, and therefore, to talk about what exists. On the other hand, although Quine did not accept the distinction between internal (theoretical) and external (pragmatic) questions,⁴ in his empiricist phase not only did he argue for a view close to Carnap's, but, as Schaffer says, he shared his 'anti-metaphysical sympathies'.

Namely, in the period when he was influenced by Carnap, Quine promoted a holistic view according to which our knowledge consists of a complex, intertwined system of statements with the so-called observation sentences on its periphery, and highly theoretical at its centre: "The totality of our so-called knowledge or beliefs, from the most casual matters of geography and history to the profoundest laws of atomic physics or even of pure mathematics and logic, is a man made fabric which impinges on experience only along the edges (...). A conflict with experience at the periphery occasions readjustments in the interior of the field" (Quine 1951, 39). However, perhaps more important than this is that Quine treats the mentioned 'fabrics' as 'fictions' that we use in the systematization of experience, and objects postulated by them as 'convenient intermediaries' in the process, or "irreducible posits comparable, epistemologically, to the gods of Homer" (Ibid., 41).

In other words, in addition to the holistic view, in his empiricist phase Quine also distinctly advocates instrumentalism (anti-realism), according to which theories are primarily "a device for working a manageable structure into the flux of experience", and since different theories can serve this purpose, his view also implies the existence of a multitude of (comprehensive) theories about the world: "If all observable events can be accounted for in one comprehensive scientific theory (...) then we can expect that they can all be accounted for equally in another, conflicting system of the world" (Quine 2008, 228). However, it is important to keep in mind that this pluralism is not so much a difficulty for Quine's view as a symptom of the fact that theories are not, nor can they be unambiguously determined by data.

Namely, one of the novelties introduced by Quine was that he integrates the objection regarding plurality that could be raised to Carnap's and metaphysical approaches (especially by supporters of these approaches to one another) into his own research program, where it ceases to be a problem in general, and becomes a phenomenon of underdetermination of theories by empirical evidence. This will enable Quine, when speaking of objects, to speak less in terms of experience, and more in terms of language in which statements about them are formulated. However, it should be kept in mind that what Quine is aiming at when

⁴ For more information, see Quine's papers "Two dogmas of empiricism", and "Ontological relativity".

referring to language is not “in order to know what there is, but in order to know what a given remark or doctrine, ours or someone else’s, says there is?” (Quine 1948, 35).

4. Basics of Quine’s ontological method

Therefore, although Quine shared Carnap’s conviction that “when we adopt a particular theory/conceptual framework/language, we must also accept corresponding ontological commitments, i.e. we have to assume a domain of objects to which our statements will refer” (Lazović 2007, 30), unlike Carnap, he believed that “there is no absolute sense in speaking of the ontology of a theory”, but “how one theory of objects is interpretable or reinterpretable in another” (Quine 1968, 201). When it comes to resolving ontological disputes, this will result in an approach – which is of importance to us – that implies two fundamentally different cases: the first, when we move within the same background theory or language, and the second when this is not the case, which is why we can speak about objects of the theory we interpret only quite provisionally, from the perspective of presuppositions about objects of our (background) theory.

The first case is the one that Quine illustrates, *inter alia*, as follows: “Take some theory formulation and select the two of its terms, say 'electron' and 'molecule' (...). Now let us transform our theory formulation merely by switching these two terms throughout. The new theory formulation will be logically incompatible with the old: it will affirm things about so-called electrons that the other denies. Yet their only difference, the man on the street would say, is terminological; the one theory formulation uses the technical terms 'molecule' and 'electron' to name what the other formulation calls 'electron' and 'molecule'. The two formulations express, he would say, the same theory. Someone else might urge, however perversely, that they express very different theories: both of them treat molecules in same sense but disagree sharply regarding the behavior of molecules, and correspondingly for electrons. Clearly, in any event, the two theory formulations are empirically equivalent – that is, they imply the same observation conditionals” (Quine 2008, 234).

This is the case we have when theories we interpret are subordinate to the same conceptual framework or background theory, which Quine, like Carnap, primarily identifies with language. However, the second case is a situation when reinterpretations that Quine speaks of are possible only if ontological presuppositions of one theory are read into another. This is a situation in which we would find ourselves whenever determining *what a particular*

doctrine claims to exist would require something that Quine calls radical translation. Then, however, we would no longer be dealing with subordinate, but so-called background theories or languages, and what is specific about these cases is that the ontological point of view implied by them would remain inscrutable.⁵

To demonstrate this, Quine examines the procedures we would apply when translating sentences of a completely unknown language into our mother tongue, and he observes that in such a situation – this would presumably imply contact with indigenous people – we would have to rely solely on behavioural evidence, because we would not have any other method at our disposal but the one that involves connecting our informants' utterances with directly observable circumstances in which they were stated. However, although it would be possible to obtain an acceptable translation in this way – at least by pragmatic standards – Quine concludes that it would also be possible to obtain a number of other variants and, based on the available evidence, we could not give priority to any of them over the others. Quine finds justification for this conclusion in the fact that, relying on evidence that we could have in this situation, i.e. behavioural evidence, we can never know with certainty what the utterances of our informants really refer to. On the other hand, since it is assumed that we are members of a culture in which speaking about (individuated) physical objects is deeply rooted, it is natural to expect that we would translate an expression that regularly accompanies the appearance of a particular object as the name of a correlated object in our language. However, although this has practical value, it is quite arbitrary in Quine's view,⁶ and testifies to the fact that, after establishing other correlations, we would actually make a translation or a dictionary that is most in line with our ontological point of view, while the native one would constantly elude us and remain inscrutable: "English general and singular terms, identity, quantification, and the whole bag of ontological tricks may be correlated with elements of the native language in

⁵ It should be said here that for Quine the thesis about the inscrutability of reference concerns not only the cases that require radical translation, but also those in which we move within the same background theory (language). However, since it is then already implied by the assumption that it is not possible to determine in an absolute sense what the objects of a theory are, it gains its full meaning in the case of confronting two, presumably, completely different conceptual frameworks or background theories.

⁶ Thus, for example, we can never know whether to translate the native expression that regularly accompanies the appearance of a certain object as the name of that object, one of its undetached parts, or its one second stage. The famous example used by Quine is a fictitious term 'gavagai', which is supposed to be uttered in the presence of a rabbit, but – based on all the available evidence – we cannot know whether to translate the term as 'rabbit', 'undetached rabbit-part', or "one second rabbit-stage". For more detailed information on this, see Quine's papers "Speaking of objects" and "Ontological relativity".

any of various mutually incompatible ways, each compatible with all possible linguistic data, and none preferable to another save as favored by a rationalization of the native language that is simple and natural to us” (Quine 1957, 7).

5. Ontological relativity and atomistic realism

Therefore, if we accept that theories are underdetermined by empirical evidence, it is reasonable to assume empirically equivalent theories that would imply different descriptions and objects, and therefore, truth conditions of its claims; the only difference is that the theories we would have in the second case, compared to the first, would require us to read into them our ontological point of view. However, it is important to keep in mind that this opacity or inaccessibility of alien global theories is in no way something that affects Quine’s position of ontological relativism or his view on the character of entities in general – that is, *as posits or convenient intermediaries in the process of systematization of experience*. Moreover, it seems that apart from this, it supports the thesis that there are no grounds for giving priority to any of the theories, if for no other reason then because – due to the fact of indeterminacy of translation, or ‘impossibility of reconciling them by a reconstrual of predicates’ – in most cases we cannot know what the alternatives would be.

With all this in mind, despite the differences between Quine’s and Carnap’s approach that are most often attributed to the fact that Quine did not accept the distinction between internal and external questions,⁷ when it comes to his contribution to ontological debate – and, in general, his attitude towards metaphysical doctrines that follows – it seems that in his empiricist phase he still largely followed Carnap. However, it is also a fact that Quine very quickly abandoned the methodology inspired by Carnap’s approach, as evidenced by the fact that, instead of acknowledging a multitude of theories that are equally successful in coping

⁷ To illustrate, Quine’s rejection of this distinction will have as one of the consequences that (metaphysical) statements Carnap claimed to be exempt from the usual verification could still be approached theoretically. Thus, for example, while the justification of statements about the world of things would depend on the adopted linguistic framework, in Carnap’s view, the thesis about reality of that world “cannot be among these statements, because it cannot be formulated in the thing language or, it seems, in any other theoretical language” (Carnap 1983, 244). However, emphasizing the holistic character of our knowledge, Quine believes that the answer to a question such as ‘about the reality of the world’ will depend on what place, if any, such a presupposition would occupy within the system.

with the available evidence, he later claimed something that is in principle contrary to any conventionalism – that only one of these theories could be true.

This is, of course, physics, and it is generally believed that the reasons for this turn should be sought in Quine's increasingly explicit belief that it is the only one that can tell us what is true: "According to Quine's naturalism, there is no source for facts beyond what the best science has to offer, and physics is the best science has to offer" (Thompson 2008, 122). However, we will argue that there are some less obvious reasons that led to this transition, which are in Quine's case *practically* completely binding; on the other hand, although Schaffer shares the same belief, we will try to show that most of the content of Quine's naturalistic position – which is the sole target of his criticism – is not motivated by these reasons, which is precisely the source of its susceptibility to criticism such as Schaffer's, but also of certain weakness when it comes to this criticism.

In other words, although there is no doubt that in developing his new position Quine put forward different views, even those that imply referring to the best theory we have, the focus here is primarily on its foundations. In this regard, if we go back to the examples from the previous section, we will notice that in the case of radical translation there remains a group of entities that are not affected by Quine's theses on underdetermination of theories by empirical evidence, indeterminacy of translation, and inscrutability of reference; these are the entities from the first example, i.e. the entities of physics such as molecule, electron, etc. However, although these entities would most likely not be read into alien global theory, and an assumption about them is not necessary at all to describe all the events available to our observation, it seems, however, that the fact that they are independent of translation would make Quine face a choice: whether to claim that their existence is dependent on a particular parochial perspective such as ours, which would mean, more consistently with the spirit of Carnap's conventionalism, that it is *in general* conditioned by the adoption of *some* conceptual framework, or to assume, more consistently with our modern intuitions, that these entities exist independently of any conceptual framework.

As is well known, Quine opted for the latter option; on the other hand, Schaffer obviously thought, although he did not formulate it in this way, that after this Quine could no longer observe the entities *per se* in the way he had done until then, i.e. as 'irreducible posits comparable, epistemologically, to the gods of Homer', but that he would have to differentiate between two types of entities: the ones that, as *trans-theoretical*, would also be *existing*, and all the others that would be fictitious (posits), and as such, finally eliminated.

In a word, Schaffer has based the view that Quine's metaphysical structure is ultimately flat, as we have seen, on the assumption of the eliminative character of Quine's method. However, since any eliminativism necessarily entails a kind of fundamentalism, Schaffer makes the mistake of attributing to Quine, in addition to the thesis *on reality*, the thesis *on fundamentality of the entities of physics*. On the other hand, what mitigates Schaffer's position, or even justifies this manoeuvre is that Quine himself openly argued for this view from time to time. However, it is important to keep in mind that this does not change the fact that there is a distinction (or in any case, that it would be desirable to make a distinction) between what we claim, and what results from the position we have taken.

6. Quine's modified naturalism and metaphysics

Therefore, in order to criticize Schaffer's position successfully, it seems that we have to modify Quine's theoretical position as well. Although the image of naturalism we arrive at in this way significantly differs from the one that Quine eventually offers, what makes these modifications possible, and ultimately necessary, is that unlike arbitrariness behind attitudes such as about fundamentality of the entities of physics, there is a strong motivation and a rigorous method behind the thesis on their reality. However, it is important to note that grounds on which we express distrust of certain Quine's views, and on which, after all, we modify his naturalism are in fact the same ones on which we can express distrust of the programs that Schaffer wants to revive, and thus of his criticism in general.

In other words, since the type of motivation we believe to exist in Quine's case does not in any way characterize the approaches that Schaffer has in mind, one of the lessons of our interpretation is that, before making any judgment on a particular (meta)theoretical view, the motives that guided its adoption should be examined. Thus, while the adoption of neo-Aristotelian programs or the assumptions on which they are based is motivated solely by pragmatic reasons such as explanatory power, empirical adequacy, parsimony, etc., it seems that this is not the case when it comes to the view that postulates reality of a particular class of entities. In short, by distinguishing the entities that concern (radical) translation from those that are independent of it, it seems that we are unequivocally bound to adopt it.

In general, this should support the distinction we are trying to make between the doctrines that Schaffer argues for – and for the sake of illustration, we can list the ones that Duhem compiled – and Quine's naturalism as it manifests itself when freed from everything

that is not guaranteed by Quine's empiricism, in short, its metaphysical baggage. However, although there should be no misunderstanding when it comes to reasons behind adopting the views whose revival Schaffer argues for, our thesis about strong motivation of Quine's program versus neo-Aristotelian or metaphysical programs may seem uncertain.

Namely, even if Quine's naturalism, now limited to a purely ontological thesis on reality of certain entities is not arbitrary as we claim, it certainly seems to be based on his empiricism, hence it follows that the way to criticize Quine's view as neutral and thus superior would be to show that Quine's empiricist view is arbitrary in a similar way that is usually thought metaphysical views are. Since the distinction between theoretical and transtheoretical as a consequence of our modification of Quine's naturalism calls for Carnap's model of justification (so-called methodological dualism), this could be done by drawing attention to the fact that such a program, just like Carnap's, does not imply or represent the result of some final criticism of traditional metaphysics, but at best an alternative approach to metaphysical ones.⁸

In other words, just as metaphysical claims are unfounded or 'external' from Carnap's perspective, it can also be shown that, from the perspective of traditional metaphysicians, the criteria set by Carnap or, in their case, the constraints he tried to impose on them are insufficiently justified.⁹ Applied in Quine's field, this would mean that even after our interventions, we do not really have any decisive argument why we should put in place of metaphysical theses any of Quine's empiricist ones, such as that it is not possible to determine in an absolute sense what the objects of a theory are, underdetermination of theories by empirical evidence, inscrutability of reference, etc. However, although this interpretation is correct in the broadest, philosophical sense of the word, the problem is that it results in missing the opportunity to finally base our strong intuitions about reality of a

⁸ Moreover, both of these programs can in fact be seen as a consequence of the failure of such a project, although not equally directly. It is, of course, the positivist project of rational reconstruction of knowledge, which had as one of its presuppositions the inadequacy of traditional metaphysical approaches, and its successful implementation should thus have led to their eventual abandonment. However, this project proved to be unsuccessful, as it is well known, which forced Carnap to take refuge in conventionalism that Quine himself advocated in one period, although with some modifications.

⁹ Without having to go deeper into this debate, it can be said with great certainty that the key objection to Carnap concerns drawing attention to the fact that the way he tried "to undermine or eliminate the metaphysical dimension of our thinking is self-defeating, because the very attempt necessarily constitutes a piece of metaphysical thinking itself" (Lowe 2002, 4). In the context of our discussion, this would mean that Carnap's approach is also arbitrary, just like the metaphysical one, which will be shown in more detail below.

certain class of entities on solid grounds. On the other hand, the problem with identifying Quine's and Carnap's views results from a similar reason.

Namely, although in Carnap's case there is a rigorous method that consistently arises from his position – which is the criterion of validity that we are trying to establish by distinguishing Quine's approach from metaphysical ones – the problem is that it is assumed that to recognize reality of entities such as electrons, atoms, and molecules is a matter of adopting a certain conceptual framework, which is arguably in open conflict with our intuitions.¹⁰ On the other hand, even if no one questioned this necessity that we suspect to characterize atomistic ontology, it would in no way diminish the *necessity of its theoretical grounding*, and the methods available to traditional metaphysicians prove to be inferior in this respect to the method derived from Quine's position, as shall be seen in more detail below. With all this in mind, it seems that the only way to fulfil intuitions in this regard, or to *place them on appropriate theoretical grounds* would be to follow Quine's position, i.e., Quine's naturalism as we interpret it. However, since it turns out in the end that intuitions are those that carry a considerable weight in our argument, there is a danger here again that the position we argue for in interpretation of Quine's approach proves to be close to metaphysical ones, and thus devoid of grounds on which to give it priority.

7. The role of intuitions in metatheoretical discussions

Therefore, what puts Quine's position on a par with metaphysical ones, so to speak, and thus allows Schaffer his criticism are Quine's theses on fundamentality of the entities of physics and on physics as the best science we have. On the other hand, by distinguishing views that consistently arise from a particular theoretical position from those that do not, we have *freed this position from these theses* and reached the conclusion that, when it comes to Quine's naturalism, one can consistently speak only of the (ontological) view that attributes

¹⁰ As is well known, Carnap will make a concession when it comes to the entities of atomistic ontology, attributing to them the character of mathematical ones (see, Carnap, 1975). However, it can be said that this adoption of a neutral position concerning a particular class of entities regardless of its specificity does not seem particularly enlightening, at least from the current perspective, and in this particular case it seems more like avoidance than tackling the problem it poses. With this in mind, we will assume that the same conditions that Carnap has set in general apply to recognizing reality of entities such as molecules or electrons, and that such an interpretation is acceptable will be shown below.

reality to a particular class of entities. However, since taking *certain* intuitions into account is, in addition to the rigorous method, even more responsible for the assumed *motivation* of Quine's approach,¹¹ one could object here to taking any intuition into account at all, as we noted above.

Namely, although it is almost generally accepted today that there is much more behind recognizing reality of atomistic ontology than mere intuitions – or, as Varzi would melancholically put it, referring to its content, “desert is real. It's out there and it's what it is regardless of how we feel” (Varzi 2014, 24) – there is no doubt that we can claim that molecules, atoms, and electrons are things in themselves only if we adopt the same method we criticize and try to free Quine's view from. In a word, it may be objected that intuitions we do not allow in metaphysical methods are now allowed in Quine's method, and referring to their strength will not be of great help since it seems that (neo-Aristotelian) intuitions about the world as a ordered structure are, if nothing else, at least as strong as those we have in mind in interpretation of Quine's method.¹² However, the problem is that it turns out that apart from intuition, we actually have no reason to believe that the world is *really* organized according to this model, and even if we had it, it is not clear how we could take a step that would logically have to precede the establishment of any hierarchy between classes, or as Schaffer puts it, categories of entities that would constitute it.

In other words, before we put forward a specific thesis that would support the Aristotelian model, we would have to find *a sufficiently convincing way of speaking both about the categories of entities that would constitute it and about their reality*, and this is again something that metaphysical views can provide only on insufficiently justified, pragmatic grounds. On the other hand, that this can be done *on theoretical grounds* using Quine's approach, although the aim is not to affirm this model, is evidenced by the fact that this approach does not have any specific preferences when it comes to our intuitions, but it is in line with only one of them – intuition about reality of the entities of atomistic ontology.

¹¹ Generally speaking, we believe that taking these intuitions into account in Quine's case is so crucial that we see no other reason why he would abandon his empiricist view and adopt naturalistic one. In a word, it seems that Quine has increasingly seen the inadequacy or counterintuitiveness of Carnapian (conventionalist) position we drew attention to, which is why he decided to abandon it.

¹² Moreover, Schaffer believes that this idea, or traditional metaphysics that implies it, is “so tightly interwoven into the fabric of philosophy that it cannot be torn out without the whole tapestry unravelling” (Schaffer 2009, 373), which he will justify, *inter alia*, by arguing that even an approach such as Quine's requires referring to it.

Therefore, what distinguishes Quine's view from metaphysical ones is that by following Quine, we are not really obliged to *assume* any special intuitions; namely, Quine's approach *is not*, so to speak, *prescriptive in any sense*, which allows him to avoid the difficulties that traditional metaphysicians face and that are revealed in their views through quite a rudimentary critical activity.¹³ However, it may seem that neutrality we attribute to Quine's approach, and give preference to over metaphysical approaches based on it is even more marked in the case of Carnap's conventionalism, so that of those offered, Carnap's method would actually be the one able to neutralize completely the influence that our preconceptions or intuitions could have in this type of research.

In other words, if we assume that intuitions are insufficiently grounded preconceptions that corrupt metaphysical programs, given that Quine's method, although it does not imply them, *ultimately entails them*, it seems that in the end we would have to seek refuge in Carnap's conventionalism. However, the difficulty here is that it is assumed that we adopt conceptual frameworks motivated not by theoretical, but by pragmatic reasons.

Namely, seeing theories as different linguistic frameworks we use to speak about objects, "as more or less convenient ways of speaking about these objects", Carnap believes that they are "not subject to theoretical, but only pragmatic assessment" (Lazović 2007, 20), which is why we are not guided by theoretical, but pragmatic reasons when adopting them. However, since it is difficult to imagine a sufficiently pragmatic reason that we would stick to on that occasion and which would be in conflict with our intuitions, it follows that, even in an approach such as Carnap's, it is still necessary to refer to some intuitions.

In fact, when we speak about neutrality of Carnap's (meta)theoretical position, this neutrality seems to be inversely proportional to the degree of intuition involved in the decision to adopt a *particular* conceptual framework, or that by adopting a framework that conflicts with our intuitions, it will increase, and when it is in line with them, it will decline.

¹³ Although in the end Quine justifies a particular propositional attitude such as belief in reality of a particular class of entities, given that this was not initially his position, as we have seen, or the position that he would *necessarily* argue for when the conditions are met, it is not obvious how any of the usual objections to metaphysical views, such as, primarily, uncritical adoption of the assumption that we have direct access to the objects of our knowledge would also affect his view. In other words, it seems that the only way to criticize that view, as we have noted above, would be to *criticize the postulates on which it is based*, that is, Quine's empiricism. However, although this would be possible in the broadest (philosophical) sense, this fact would in no way lead to reaffirmation of neo-Aristotelian approaches, while Quine's approach would maintain a comparative advantage of allowing us to place at least one strong belief or intuition we have *on theoretical grounds*.

However, if we assume that adopting a framework is *always in line with certain intuitions* – and it seems that we have to, if we already accepted the thesis that it is motivated by *pragmatic reasons* – we should note that this fact greatly undermines the supposedly *strong theoretical aspect* of Carnap’s method, and in fact makes it, if not neo-Aristotelian, then certainly very close to metaphysical programs.¹⁴

8. Sorted (ontological) structure and eliminativism

Therefore, what gives Quine’s approach priority over neo-Aristotelian approaches is that in Quine’s case, we are not obliged to assume any intuitions in advance, only to acknowledge them later. On the other hand, although Carnap’s method has the same feature, the problem is that once we do that (acknowledge our intuitions), this fact will devalue the assumed strong grounding or neutrality of the position from which we have done that. With all this in mind, apart from the conclusion that in discussions such as this one, some intuitions are necessary after all, we can thus conclude that of those offered, we would have to adhere to Quine’s method in the end. However, we should have in mind that in addition to atomistic ontology, this adherence would result in the establishment of another ontology, and to show this, it would be good to return to Schaffer’s interpretation of Quine’s approach.

As we have noted several times, Schaffer argues that Quine’s metaphysical structure is ultimately flat, justifying this thesis with the assumption of the eliminative character of Quine’s method. On the other hand, we argue that, as we have seen above, eliminativism can be attributed to Quine only if we adopt the theses from which we freed Quine’s naturalism. However, since at this point of our discussion, the entities of physics are still the only ones that are able to move from the realm of posits to the realm of reality, despite all our efforts, it seems that if nothing else, at least Schaffer’s judgment on the type of metaphysical (ontological) structure that we come across in Quine’s work is correct.

In other words, although Schaffer’s arguments may not be convincing enough to persuade us to abandon Quine’s program and return to neo-Aristotelian (metaphysical)

¹⁴ Since we said in the previous section that Carnap’s approach is counterintuitive, and now that it is always in line with intuitions, there may seem to be some inconsistency or even contradiction in our interpretation. However, we believe that it is not our interpretation but Carnap’s approach *itself* that is contradictory, primarily because the question arises as to how we can demand a special criterion such as the one that Carnap demanded of metaphysicians or, better yet, what would constitute its distinctive content if we are *de facto* guided by the same reasons as they are in adopting conceptual frameworks or theories, *viz.* pragmatic reasons.

programs, since the only thing we can claim by adopting it is the existence of a particular *class* of entities, given the specificity of this class, it seems that eliminativism necessarily follows from Quine's method, with or without metaphysical preconceptions. However, it is precisely the strong eliminativist tendency or characteristic of the one we have established that convinces us of the necessity of formulating another ontology.

It is, of course, ontology of common sense or the level that concerns translation in Quine's work, and whose entities would thus be eliminated in favour of the entities of physics. However, that they would form a special class even after that is evidenced by the fact that, according to the view we follow and which is the best we have, as we have shown, they can vary from one conceptual framework to another, which means that by recognizing the atomic level, we would have to *maintain* another level, the common sense one as real. In a word, although affected by Quine's theses on underdetermination of theories, indeterminacy of translation, and inscrutability of reference, we are obliged by the eliminativist character of the ontology we have established to treat common sense entities, or more precisely, *the class they constitute* as transtheoretical and therefore *as real*, which would ultimately make ontological structure that follows from Quine's method *sorted*, in our view, instead of strictly flat one.

9. Consequences of Quine's approach: Concluding remarks

Therefore, although by adopting Quine's method we cannot assume that entities such as people, houses, chairs, and tables exist in the same way that atoms, electrons, and molecules exist – i.e. *independently of any conceptual framework or theory* – once we establish the latter, it seems that the former will also *form a class* characterized by a transtheoretical character, and therefore, by *reality*. On the other hand, it is important to note that in this case, as in the previous one, we did not have to assume this class in advance, or to argue in its favour *in order to put forward some kind of ontological thesis*, but only to follow through the consequences of the method we have previously adopted on what we hope to be convincing grounds.¹⁵

¹⁵ It is important to note that, with the exception of Quine's contribution, establishment of this class would also be either poorly grounded theoretically or, as in Carnap's case, this establishment would be in conflict with our even stronger intuitions, which is certain when it comes to it. In this regard, even if we were wrong about Carnap's approach when we attributed to him the view concerning the entities of atomistic ontology that he did

In other words, adopting Quine's method, provided that we have made appropriate modifications to it such as introducing certain constraints that are in our opinion justified, enables us not only to establish on solid grounds two different categories of entities, but it seems that the image we would get in this way would, at least in rough outline, correspond to today's prevailing (ontological) intuitions. However, even more important in the context of current discussion is that this would necessarily result in a significantly different and, in our view, more tenable interpretation of the concepts that Schaffer speaks about, as well as a whole new set of consequences that it would entail.

Namely, while Schaffer believes that flat and sorted structures are weaker than ordered ones, as we have shown above, we argue that the strongest of them is actually the sorted one. This means that, contrary to Schaffer's view, both the flat one we now attribute to Carnap, and the ordered structure that metaphysicians stick to would actually depend on the sorted structure we attribute to Quine, primarily because, regardless of whether we intend to order them, it would be justified to expect forming or differentiation of classes of entities that only Quine's method allows *in a non-trivial manner*. On the other hand, such interpretation would have, in addition to the formal level, equally important consequences in terms of content, because if we decided to take this step, the only order that would *also be valid* would imply ordering primarily those categories that Quine's method enabled us to establish. However, since this would require a revival of metaphysical way of thinking which no longer has a place in this constellation, it seems that to establish any order against the backdrop of Quine's (metatheoretical) position would be impossible, and sorted ontological structure that would imply the two above categories of entities is the best we can hope for at this point. However, we believe that certain important lessons could be learned from this manoeuvre, which is why we will allow it, contingently speaking, to the metaphysician.

First of all, it should be noted that the process of ordering of the above categories would imply referring to *a kind of* essentialism, which would in one case mean *to Platonism* that gives priority to common sense with its assumption of eternal and unchangeable forms (*universals*), and in the other *to scientific essentialism* that should do so with entities at the atomic level. However, although from today's perspective scientific essentialism seems to be a more plausible option, the problem is that *against the backdrop of Quine's method*, this essentialism is possible *only if a view that would neutralize indeterminacy at the level of*

not advocate in reality, we can justify it now by referring to the way we established common sense ones, which does not presuppose the adoption of any conceptual framework or theory – just as our intuitions dictate.

common sense is possible. Without intending to use it as a basis for favouring Platonism, this is evidence, in our view, that *if we were to search for some ontological priority*, we could find it only at the level of common sense, and that our prospects in this respect do not have to be quite so grim could be evidenced by the following line of argument.

Namely, we have seen that, from the perspective of Quine's method as we interpret it, the level of common sense does not really concerns entities, but primarily *a particular class of entities*, which means that, even before indeterminacy, it is also characterized by unstructuredness, or inordinacy, so to speak. In this regard, if we were to succeed in putting forward a thesis aimed at neutralizing this inordinacy, it seems that we would thus neutralize indeterminacy too, after which entities at the atomic level could only be treated as *paraphrases* of entities at the common sense level, and not *vice versa*. However, for such a thesis to have value in this context, it would have to be *transtheoretical*, that is, it would have to be an *idea* of an *a priori structure* of thought, and so the question is to what extent, if at all, it would be tenable. However, the fact that would be in its favour is that, strictly speaking, it would not be a metaphysical, but epistemological thesis, thus avoiding the problems that metaphysicians face in this constellation, while entities at the common sense level – in addition to epistemic priority that already belongs to them, and thanks to which the thesis could only refer to them – would also be provided with a certain ontological priority over the entities at the atomic level.

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