Multitude, Tolerance and Language-Transcendence*

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1. Introduction

What I want to do in this note is to discuss some theses in the philosophy of logic held by Rudolf Carnap in the 1930s.

One thesis that positivists like Carnap subscribed to is a certain kind of pluralist thesis, what I will call (MULTITUDE): there are different logics of different languages, and the choice between these languages is merely one of expediency. Notice that (MULTITUDE), as characterized, is really a conjunction of two theses: that there are different logics of different languages, and that the choice between these languages is just one of expediency. One can certainly question the latter thesis even while accepting the former. But I will not pause on these matters here.[1]

According to (MULTITUDE) there is a range of alternative logics, such that for each alternative logic l there is a language L such that l is the logic of L, where this means, roughly, that the uses friends of l make of logical expressions all come out correct on the assumption that L is the language they employ. Importantly, (MULTITUDE) does not involve the thesis that the decision over whether to accept as logically true a given *proposition* ordinarily taken to be logically true is merely a matter of expediency. Rather, what is a matter of expediency is the decision what to have the resources to express.

In contemporary debates over *metametaphysics* – the nature of metaphysics – some positions are regularly dubbed Carnapian, by virtue of apparent similarities to what Carnap argued in his (1950). But there are two importantly different views on ontology that are so dubbed. One such view is analogous to (MULTITUDE). This is a view which emphasizes that there are different possible languages, equally legitimate for the purposes of metaphysics, such that the ontological expressions of these different possible languages have different meanings. Another view is more radical – a kind of relativist view – and says that propositions about what there is are not true absolutely, but somehow only in a relative sense. What Carnap famously does in (1950) is to emphasize the role of 'frameworks' and to distinguish between questions 'internal' to frameworks and questions 'external' to frameworks. But what are frameworks? On the moderate view, frameworks are just *languages*,

[1] For further discussion of (MULTITUDE), see my (forthcoming).

questions 'internal' to languages are just questions raised employing one language or other, and the only framework-relativity involved is the familiar relativity of sentence-truth to language. On a more radical view, Carnap takes statements to be true relative to a framework in a more controversial sense. Elsewhere, I have argued that Carnap's view was of the more moderate kind.[2]

Similar kinds of questions can be asked regarding Carnap's 1930s philosophy of logic. On a relatively moderate interpretation, Carnap's pluralism in logic amounted to something like (MULTITUDE). But there are more radical interpretations. In recent work by Warren Goldfarb and Thomas Ricketts, it has been urged that Carnap centrally "rejected language-transcendence". As I will discuss in later sections, I find it unclear just what this rejection is supposed to amount to, and I do not think there is compelling evidence for the interpretation.

In addition to accepting (MULTITUDE), Carnap and other positivists accepted (CONVENTION): the claim that somehow, the truths of logic are *true by convention* or *true by meaning* or *analytic* or *vacuously true*. The characterization of (CONVENTION) is disjunctive. There are potentially important differences between different formulations of the view. For example, it has been argued that Carnap was averse to any substantive conception of *truth by virtue of*; but of course Carnap centrally used a notion of analyticity.[3]

Sometimes it is alleged that the positivists' acceptance of (MULTITUDE) is bound up with their acceptance of (CONVENTION).[4] This may correctly represent how the positivists themselves saw things. But it should be clear that (MULTITUDE) does not require (CONVENTION). Of course one can in principle hold that 'or' and 'not' can have different meanings in different languages such that in one language all instances of 'p or not p' are true – even necessarily true – and in the other it is not so, while one holds that in neither language are the true sentences of the form 'p or not p' analytically true.

Recall here that Quine (1960, 1964, 1970), argued that someone who seems to be denying a basic logical truth (e.g. someone who affirms something of the form "'P and not P'") is best interpreted as meaning something different from what we would mean by the sentence she utters, due to the obviousness of logical truths and the constraint on interpretation that one ought not to take the interpretee as committed to obvious falsehoods.[5] So for Quine too there are different languages where the logical expressions have different semantics: hence there are different languages with different logics, in the sense of (MULTITUDE).

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[2] See Eklund (2009).
[3] See e.g. Ricketts (1994), p. 191, for the claim about 'truth by virtue of'.
[4] See Uebel (2005), p. 183.
[5] One may certainly want to add an "all else equal" here. Even if, generally, speakers should not be interpreted as accepting obvious falsehoods there can in principle be facts about them which makes such an interpretation all things considered preferable. Quine is not explicit concerning just how strong the claim is that he wants to make.

Quine's argument is one to the effect that disputes over basic logical laws are *verbal*, in the sense that the disputants talk past each other: it is never a good translation of someone to translate her as rejecting a basic logical law. (MULTITUDE) does not by *itself* entail that such disputes are verbal. Of course, even if there are these different possible languages speakers can use, sometimes two disputing speakers are using one and the same language, and disagree over a proposition expressed by a sentence of their common language.

A different theme in the logical positivist writings, most central in Carnap (1934), is (ANTI-FOUNDATIONALISM). As against, e.g., intuitionists and formalists who are concerned with what justifies certain basic mathematical and logical principles – and the legitimacy of, e.g. classical languages – it is maintained that such concerns are misguided and that instead an attitude of tolerance should be adopted.

I don't know that there is any actual confusion about the matter, but it may anyway be useful to stress that (MULTITUDE) does not necessarily require (ANTI-FOUNDATIONALISM). For example, one can, contrary to (ANTI-FOUNDATIONALISM), allow that questions of justification are not misguided, but still argue that, for example, both intuitionist and classical languages easily meet the appropriate standards of justification. Nor is there a clear relation between (CONVENTION) and (ANTI-FOUNDATIONALISM). One can think logical truths are true by convention, while thinking conventions must satisfy certain stringent requirements in order to be meaning- and truth-conferring. Conversely, one can reject the foundationalist's demands on grounds other than those of (CONVENTION).

A different feature found in Carnap's work around (1934) is (SYNTACTICISM): emphasis on syntactic notions in the study of language, and the avoidance of semantic notions. My statement of (SYNTACTICISM) is intentionally vague, even setting aside questions regarding how one should understand Carnap's notion of 'syntax'. A *strong* syntacticist thesis, suggested by some of Carnap's rhetoric, is that semantic notions are illegitimate, or legitimate only insofar as they can be reconstructed in purely syntactic terms. (So, for instance, Carnap does employ a notion of analyticity, but one that, by Carnap's lights, has been syntactically explicated.) A *weak* syntacticist thesis is that for a variety of purposes, including the purposes of philosophy, the proper focus is on syntactic notions, even though semantic notions too make sense and are legitimate. I will not here attempt to settle the question of whether Carnap's syntacticism was strong or weak.[6]

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[6] Passages that clearly encourage a strong syntacticist reading are (1934), §§ 78-79. But there are also passages that encourage a weak syntacticist reading, where Carnap suggests that expressions have genuinely semantic properties in addition to their syntactic ones: (1934), pp. 3, 5, 7, 12, 41, 216, 277, 284. Ricketts (1996), p. 239f, explains the differences between the two kinds of passages by saying that Carnap was more dismissive concerning reference than concerning truth.

It should be clear that (MULTITUDE) and (SYNTACTICISM) are logically independent, on either understanding of (SYNTACTICISM). (SYNTACTICISM) and (ANTI-FOUNDATIONALISM) are also in principle independent, again regardless of which version of (SYNTACTICISM) we consider. Of course one can believe in (ANTI-FOUNDATIONALISM) without buying into (SYNTACTICISM). Nor is it clear why (SYNTACTICISM) should lead to (ANTI-FOUNDATIONALISM). The notion of justification is an epistemic one, not a semantic one, so (SYNTACTICISM) is not immediately relevant to questions of justification.

Even though the relations between (MULTITUDE), (CONVENTION) and (ANTI-FOUNDATIONALISM) can be problematized, doubtlessly these theses are present in positivist writings. And surely Carnap was a syntacticist of some form or other. But in what follows, I will turn to other theses and claims that have been attributed to Carnap, radical theses of the kind mentioned above.

In sections 2 through 6, I will critically discuss some of the recent discussion of Carnap's *Logical Syntax*, specifically with an eye toward the claim made by Goldfarb and Ricketts that Carnap rejected "language-transcendent" contents and facts, and their claims about what follows from this supposed rejection of language-transcendence. In section 7, I will turn to Michael Friedman's case that Carnap operated with a notion of *relative* a priori, and the idea that this might elucidate Carnap's philosophy of logic. Theses Friedman centrally ascribes to Carnap are ambiguous as between two interpretations. Under one interpretation, they are, from a contemporary perspective, fairly innocuous; under another, Friedman's Carnap bears some affinities to the Carnap of Goldfarb and Ricketts.

2. Tolerance

In (1934), Carnap famously stated his principle of tolerance, "*It is not our business to set up prohibitions but to arrive at conventions*"[7], elaborated as follows:

> *In logic, there are no morals.* Everyone is at liberty to build up 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 syntactic rules instead of philosophical arguments.[8]

Relatedly, he says in the preface of the book that regarding the construction of language, "no question of justification arises at all, but only the question of the syntactical consequences to which one or the other choices leads, including the question of non-contradiction".[9]

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[7] Carnap (1934), §17, p. 51.
[8] Carnap (1934), §17, p. 52.

Now, on what may be called a deflationary reading – deflationary by contrast to other readings, which we will get to – Carnap here simply emphasizes (MULTITUDE) and (ANTI-FOUNDATIONALISM).

What Carnap is envisaged as stressing on this reading is that there are different possible languages, with different counterparts of the logical expressions, such that the counterparts of the logical laws found in these different languages do not all have the status of logical truths. (E.g. "p or not p" may state a law in our language, but in another language where 'not' works differently, in does not.) The law of excluded middle stated in our language may be a logical law, while its counterpart in another language fails to be.

Now, for example a certain kind of intuitionist will insist that typical classical languages are plainly impossible. While the intuitionist will agree that there are different possible languages with logical expressions meaning different things, she will hold that there exist no classical languages of certain kinds. Carnap's (ANTI-FOUNDATIONALISM) enters in here: he thinks the intuitionist concern with foundations is unwarranted.

If one does not understand tolerance as amounting to what I just described, how else should one understand it? Goldfarb and Ricketts present what might be a different view. They say that encapsulated in the principle of tolerance is the following:

> There are many logics, many potential frameworks for inference and inquiry. There is no question of correctness of such a framework – for there is nothing for it to be correct to. There is no question of justifying one over another, because there is no right or wrong in the choice of a logic; in any case, justification can proceed only once the logical relations of a framework are in place.[10]

It is actually possible to interpret this as being fully in accordance with the deflationary understanding of tolerance described above. What Goldfarb and Ricketts are then understood as saying about Carnap is that there are many *languages* that can be used for inference and inquiry; and that languages cannot properly be described as 'correct' or 'right' or 'wrong'. And as for the point about justification: it will be true on any reasonable view that one needs something like a language to conduct any reasoning at all.

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[9] Carnap (1934), p. xv. Compare here the very end of Carnap (1950).
[10] Goldfarb and Ricketts (1992), p. 62.

However, Goldfarb and Ricketts also take Carnap to "reject language-transcendence", and they take this rejection of language-transcendence to be a central feature of Carnap's philosophy.[11] Now, there is again a somewhat trivializing understanding of what they say: to reject language-transcendence could just be to emphasize that we must always employ some language or other. And on yet another understanding of the rejection of language-transcendence, to say that Carnap rejected language-transcendence is just a picturesque way of saying that Carnap subscribed to a strong version of (SYNTACTICISM): to reject language-transcendence is on this understanding to say that our expressions are not *about* the world in the way that the use of semantic notions would capture.

But given the kind of substantive use to which Goldfarb and Ricketts put the supposed rejection of language-transcendence, I doubt that they take themselves to simply be making one of these claims. Something more radical is being suggested. I turn to this in the next section.[12]

3. The rejection of language-transcendence

Goldfarb and Ricketts appeal to the supposed rejection of language-transcendence for example when evaluating Kurt Gödel's now widely discussed argument against Carnap's (1934) views.[13] Here is Gödel's argument, as presented by Goldfarb and Ricketts:

> Gödel argues that if mathematical rules are to be considered conventional, we would have to know them to be independent of the empirical world .... To show the rules have this property is a fortiori to show them consistent. Hence by Gödel's Second Incompleteness Theorem it cannot be shown without invoking mathematical principles beyond those which the rules provide. Therefore, we can never be in a position to take mathematics to be independent of what is the case.[14]

Goldfarb and Ricketts take Gödel's criticism to rely on the assumption that "we first have a realm of empirical fact; given it, we then adopt the conventions that yield mathematics", and respond as follows on Carnap's behalf:

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[11] Goldfarb and Ricketts (1992), p. 65. See too Goldfarb (1997), p. 57f; Ricketts (1994), p. 180; Ricketts (2004). p. 191; Ricketts (2007), p. 210. What Goldfarb and Ricketts say about this has been influential. See e.g. Richardson (1998), p. 217, saying that "the whole notion of 'matter of fact' is internal to a logico-linguistic framework for Carnap".
[12] Moreover, Ricketts (1996) positively stresses that Carnap never says that truth is a pseudonotion, but only claims that it is syntactically intractable.
[13] Gödel (1995); posthumously published article, written in the 1950s.
[14] Goldfarb and Ricketts (1992), p. 64f.

In Carnap's terms, this is just to presuppose a language-transcendent notion of empirical fact. But Carnap rejects any such language-transcendent notion. This rejection is part of the message of the Principle of Tolerance. On Carnap's view, it is only given the apparatus of a linguistic framework that we can formulate a notion of the realm of empirical facts.[15]

They also take the rejection of language-transcendence to have related important consequences:

> To think there is some foundational question that will concern relative strengths of metalanguage and object language....is to accept some kind of epistemic relation that applies across languages. But that is precisely what Carnap's basic view disallows. The dependence of some truths on other truths, be they empirical or analytic, can be made sense of only within a linguistic framework.[16]

Start with the next to last passage. There is (again) a fairly trivial point there: it is only given a *language* that we can *formulate* anything about anything. Similar remarks apply to what Goldfarb and Ricketts say about epistemic relations across languages in the last passage. We need a language to formulate claims about epistemic relations, and in that sense they can only be made sense of within a language. If these trivial points are all there is to rejecting language-transcendence, then language-transcendence ought certainly to be rejected. Goldfarb and Ricketts cannot very well simply have these trivial points in mind. These points cannot be deployed for serious philosophical purposes such as that of replying to Gödel's argument. But what else might Goldfarb and Ricketts be getting at? In what follows, I will discuss whether there is a coherent, substantive understanding of the 'rejection of language-transcendence' that they ascribe to Carnap.[17]

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[15] Goldfarb and Ricketts (1992), p. 65. Compare e. g. Goldfarb (1997), p. 57f; Ricketts (1994), p. 179f; Ricketts (2007), p. 209f. I take it that when Goldfarb and Ricketts speak of 'frameworks' they mean languages.
[16] Goldfarb and Ricketts (1992), p. 69.
[17] Compare too Ricketts (2007), where central claims can be similarly trivialized. On p. 211, he says, "Although it would be foolish to adopt [an inconsistent] calculus, we should not call the logic built into the calculus by the transformation rules "wrong" or "incorrect". To repeat: on Carnap's view, these terms of criticism become available only relative to a calculus and its envisioned use as the language of science". The trivialization is: on any view, terms are 'available' only in a language. To be sure, Ricketts hardly means to put forward this trivial claim. But what exactly is the non-trivial claim he wants to make, and what is its support? On p. 225, he talks about "the language-relativized understanding of truth that Tolerance enforces". There are two ways in which emphasis on a plurality of possible languages enforces a "language-relativized understanding of truth". First, there is the perfectly trivial point that a sentence, non-semantically individuated, can have different truth-values of different languages. Second, there is the somewhat less trivial point that in different languages there can be truth predicates with different meanings and extensions. Is it either of these points that Ricketts has in mind? If not, what else does he have in mind?
 Goldfarb (1997) says, in the course of emphasizing the "depth of Carnap's rejection of language-transcendent notions" (p. 58), that "Forty years before Rorty's criticism of 'the mirror of nature' and before Putnam's attack on 'metaphysical realism', Carnap clearly saw that there is no world of which we can speak

Ricketts (2004), comparing Carnap and Frege, says that for Frege, "[t]he principles of logic are to articulate the most fundamental standards for validity and consistency in thinking", and that from this perspective "it makes no sense to represent the adoption of a logic, as Carnap does, as a choice from 'an open ocean of free possibilities". And he asks, "How is Carnap's attitude of tolerance towards logic itself supposed to make sense?".[18] Mere emphasis on (MULTITUDE) doesn't give rise to worries like this. Even given (MULTITUDE) one can, of course, hold that given what some premise sentences and a conclusion sentence actually mean, one cannot consistently accept the premise sentences and reject the conclusion sentence. What would give rise to the worries that Ricketts mentions is the view that *there is no fact of the matter as to which inferences to accept*, even given what the sentences express and what language is employed. This is what I will call a (NO FACT) thesis: a thesis of the form *there is no fact of the matter as to*.....

If it is a (NO FACT) thesis that Goldfarb and Ricketts have in mind – below I will return to this – their talk of "language-transcendence" obscures matters. Saying that there is no language-transcendent fact of the matter, as opposed to saying merely that there is no fact of the matter, suggests that although there is no fact of the matter as to what is an empirical fact, *relative to a given language* there is a fact of the matter. But that seems just confused. What language is adopted would appear only to matter to which propositions get expressed; the truth-values of propositions do not change. (Of course the fact that the thesis seems confused doesn't necessarily mean that Carnap didn't subscribe to it. Below I will turn to the textual evidence.)

The talk of propositions in a discussion of 1930s Carnap may raise red flags. It may be thought that given his syntacticism, the Carnap of (1934) should have objected to the contemporary notion of a proposition (of something language-independent which is what a sentence means). But the point can be made without the offending talk of propositions. The point is that if there is not now a fact of the matter as to whether BLAH, I cannot by further linguistic stipulations make it a fact that BLAH. What I can have is a sentence of my language, L1, 'BLAH', such that neither it nor its negation is true, and then I can make changes to my language, such that 'BLAH' of the language thus modified, L2, is true. It would be wrong – a kind of use/mention mistake – to describe this by saying that relative to L1, there is no fact of the matter as to whether BLAH but relative to L2 there is.

Ricketts (2004) compares Carnap's view on logic and the view that there is no one correct physics:

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without being in a language" (p. 59). I am not sure one needs either Rorty or Putnam or Carnap to provide the lesson that to speak of something one needs a language.

[18] Ricketts (2004), p. 190f.

Frege holds that there is one correct logic, just as there is one correct physics. With the Principle of Tolerance, the heart of Carnap's conception of logic from *Logical Syntax* onwards, Carnap breaks with Frege and Russell, repudiating this monotheism as regards logic.[19]

It should be obvious that what Ricketts here ascribes to Carnap goes beyond the deflationary understanding of tolerance. The claim that there is no correct physics is best understood as: there are different theories of physics (not mere notational variants of each other) such that there is no fact of the matter as to which of them is true. Embracing (MULTITUDE) is not analogous to saying there is no correct physics. A thesis in the philosophy of logic which would be so analogous is a thesis according to which there is no fact of the matter as to which *claims* are true; in other words, a (NO FACT) thesis.

Comparing the view ascribed to Carnap with the idea that there is no correct physics suggests that the claim with which Ricketts is concerned is that there are *theories*, as opposed to languages, such that there is no fact of the matter as to which of these theories is correct. But how is that related to the supposed rejection of *language*-transcendence? Again, such a rejection, whatever exactly it is supposed to amount to, seems to have essentially to do with the role of *language*.

5. Comparison with Quine

Here is one thing that rejection of language-transcendence might mean: there is no notion of proposition, or generally no notion of what is said, such that one can meaningfully talk about sentences of different languages saying the same, or different, things. It is then possible to take Quine's own conclusion from argument for the indeterminacy of translation to be to the effect that language-transcendence must be rejected.

In most of their works on Carnap, Goldfarb and Ricketts do not bring up Quine at all. This tells against the suggestion that they seek to ascribe to Carnap any distinctly Quinean thesis. However, Ricketts (2004) does emphasize the supposed similarities between Carnap and Quine, concluding his discussion by saying, "we should not lose sight of the overwhelming similarities that follow from Carnap's and Quine's rejection of fixed contents for statements, from the shared rejection of Fregean thoughts".[20] And as Ricketts recounts, there are passages in 1930s works by Carnap which suggest something like an indeterminacy of translation thesis.[21] So maybe we should take seriously that a comparison with Quine might elucidate what they want to say about Carnap.

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[19] Ricketts (2004), p. 189.
[20] Ricketts (2004), p. 200.
[21] Ricketts (2004), p. 192f.

However, when we look at the details, the proposal falters. I do not see how this Quinean rejection of language-transcendence would be "part of the message of the Principle of Tolerance" given how this principle is stated; and there is nothing in the Quinean rejection of language-transcendence to suggest that there is no fact of the matter as to which inferences to accept, or that there is no correct logic, even if there is one correct physics.

5. On Gödel's argument

The rejection of language-transcendence was held to help defuse Gödel's argument. It can be suggested that thinking about what sort of thesis could defuse this argument might help us see what Goldfarb and Ricketts are after.

However, it is hard to see how anything in the ballpark of what Goldfarb and Ricketts are talking about could possibly be useful here. Can't Gödel's worry arise so long as I, within my language, can operate with my language's notion of empirical fact (whatever we are to make of this) and ask whether some mathematical rules imply the truth of falsehood of a claim about the empirical facts – and conclude that I cannot prove that they do not do this without invoking mathematical principles beyond those which the rules provide, hence lack assurance that I can trust the rules? Isn't this reasoning – which I can go through 'within' my language – exactly Gödel's?

It can be objected that on Carnap's understanding of what it is to for a sentence to be synthetic (and hence to stand for an empirical fact, if we persist in facts-talk) just is for it not to be entailed to the logical and mathematical rules of the language.[22] But the importance of this point should not be exaggerated. At most it forces a rephrasing of Gödel's argument: what we should ask is not whether some mathematical rules imply the truth or falsehood of a claim about the empirical facts but whether, after the introduction of the rules for mathematical language, we can have any assurance that any sentences of our language are synthetic.

By these remarks I do not mean to endorse Gödel's argument. A simpler response to the argument can be given. There is a step from saying that a consistency proof can be given only in a richer language to saying that we "will never be in a position to take mathematics to be independent of what is the case".[23] In general, there will on any view be basic things which we have to accept – and arguably justifiably accept, and know – even when no proof, or no proof not in some sense presupposing what is proven, is available. Carnap's stance could just be an instance of this. Applying this to foundational mathematical disputes may be original, but it does not require the sort of distinct philosophical outlook that Goldfarb and Ricketts try to ascribe to Carnap.

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[22] Carnap (1934), p. 40. Goldfarb (1996), p. 227, stresses this point about Carnap in connection with Gödel's argument.
[23] Awodey and Carus (2004) make the same point. See especially pp. 207-9.

6. The textual evidence

Goldfarb and Ricketts provide surprisingly little by way of textual evidence to back up, and elucidate, their reading of Carnap. And in fact they themselves point to passages that, by their own lights, present problems for their reading. These are passages where Carnap gives intuitive characterizations of analyticity and employs a notion of empirical fact which Goldfarb and Ricketts say appears language-transcendent.[24] And they add in a footnote that Carnap is not "always fully clear" on the consequences of his rejection of language-transcendent notions, and that therefore he "sometimes speaks misleadingly".[25]

Now, one may think one reason Goldfarb and Ricketts do not adduce much textual evidence is that it is just blatantly obvious that Carnap emphasized language-relativity in something like the way Goldfarb and Ricketts say he does. For example, Carnap stressed that the notion of analyticity is language-relative. Might not attention to this shed light on what is going on? But the relevant point Carnap makes about analyticity is, "the concept is a relative one; it must always be referred to a particular system of assumptions and methods reasoning (primitive sentences and rules of inference), that is to say, in our terminology, to a particular language".[26] The passage is curious in several ways. In general – and this relates to earlier remarks – it is true, on one natural way of individuating sentences, that the meaning of a sentence, and hence its truth and analyticity, is relative to a language, and Carnap can be read as simply making this point. As against this reading one may well want to stress that when Carnap *specifically* emphasizes the relativity of the concept of analyticity, he cannot simply have this trivial point in mind: for the relevant language-relativity affects all semantic features of sentences. I am sympathetic to this concern. But Carnap's specific focus on analyticity is equally a problem for anyone who would take this passage to justify ascribing to Carnap a *general* rejection of language-transcendence: the passage can at best be taken to show that for Carnap the specific notion of analyticity is not language-transcendent (whatever that means).

There are other passages which might seem clearly to support Goldfarb and Ricketts' reading of Carnap. But again, if one looks at them more closely, a more complicated picture emerges. In his (1935), Carnap argues for "the relativity of all philosophical theses in regard to language", and it may be thought that there could be no clearer textual evidence in favor of taking Carnap to reject language-transcendence.[27] But all Carnap is doing in the relevant section is to argue that certain seeming disputes evaporate once it is clear that the disputants simply use some expressions with different meanings; in other words, speak different languages. The only kind of language-relativity

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[24] Goldfarb and Ricketts (1992), p. 73.
[25] Goldfarb and Ricketts (1992), p. 65fn8.
[26] Carnap (1934), §14, p. 44.
[27] Carnap (1935), p. 78.

that is implied here is the uncontroversial one. (Carnap does stress that philosophical theses are *about* language, but that is different.) In another relevant discussion, Carnap (1949), Carnap says "...the formulation in terms of 'comparison', in speaking of 'facts' or 'realities', easily tempts into the absolutistic view according to which we are said to search for an absolute reality whose nature is assumed as fixed independently of the language chosen for its description".[28] In other words, one may think, Carnap is explicit that he believes in a relativistic view, on which the nature of reality is in part fixed by the language chosen for its description. But what Carnap goes on to stress, apparently by way of argument for the quoted claim, is that not all languages are *intertranslatable*. But a failure of intertranslatability is not immediately relevant to relativism. So what is going on? It is made clear when Carnap actually gives his argument. What Carnap says is, "The answer to a question concerning reality....depends not only upon that 'reality'....but also upon the structure (and the set of concepts) of the language used for the description".[29] This is not any kind of relativism. Rather, Carnap is just emphasizing that how we describe reality depends not only on independent reality but also on what conceptual resources we have.[30]

So, to sum up my discussion of Carnap's supposed rejection of language-transcendence in this section and the previous one: I find it very unclear what the thesis is supposed to be; I don't see how it can do the philosophical work it is enlisted to do (for I don't see that it blocks Gödel's argument); and the textual evidence appears questionable.

7. The relative a priori

Issues similar to those I have been concerned with above come up also elsewhere in the literature on Carnap. For example, Michael Friedman held that Carnap believed in a relative (or 'relativized') and revisable a priori, and that this sets him apart from earlier defenders of the a priori. Given this view, one may further believe that for Carnap the laws of logic are relative a priori; specifically, that relative to different languages or frameworks, different laws of logic hold a priori. There may be *something* to this, for all I wish to argue. But what I do want to stress is that some central arguments for ascribing to Carnap a notion of relative a priori are mired in confusion.

Friedman says, for example,

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[28] Carnap (1949), p. 126.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Compare Field (1982), p. 553f, criticizing Putnam's discussion of metaphysical realism. Putnam takes the metaphysical realist to hold that there is only one true and complete description of the way the world is; Field demurs, saying that this does not follow from the realist's more basic contention that the world consists of a fixed totality of mind-independent objects.

...in *Logical Syntax*, there is no fixed a priori framework – no uniquely "correct" set of formal rules – definitive of logic and mathematics. Just as....the a priori framework of physics is the product, in the end, of a conventional or pragmatic choice based on the overall simplicity and tractability of our total physical theory, now the a priori framework definitive of logic and mathematics themselves is similarly the product of a conventional or pragmatic theory choice based on the very same considerations.[31]

The passage may not be entirely clear. But there is a thesis suggested by Friedman's remarks that would make the a priori relative in only a fairly trivial sense. It is the thesis that we have different choices open to us regarding what language to speak, and in different languages different sentences are a priori. We can, say, start with a classical language, such that all sentences of the form "p or not p" express a priori truths, and then, by pragmatic considerations, come to adopt instead a language where this is not the case. This is perhaps in some sense a relative a priori. But only in the same trivial sense that the sentence "all bachelors are unmarried" on all views can be said to be only relatively a priori, due to the fact that "unmarried" could have meant *untidy*. The a priori status of *propositions* is in no sense relative. All that is being called attention to is that a sentence (non-semantically individuated) can express something a priori in one language and something which is not a priori in another language, and we can abandon one language in favor of the other.[32]

As earlier, one might be uneasy about using the contemporary notion of a proposition in a discussion of 1930s Carnap. But again as earlier, skepticism on this score is beside the point. Even someone rejecting the contemporary notion of a proposition should hold that it is a contingent fact that some given string of symbols are used a particular way – are associated with a given type of linguistic behavior – and that mere changes in use of some symbols does not give rise to any interestingly relative notion of the a priori. The contemporary notion of proposition is useful when laying this out, and or the sake of convenience I will keep on using it.

There is of course a distinctly Kantian view on which there are some concepts and propositions such that we cannot avoid relying on these particular concepts and propositions in thought. On a view different from this, one may think that one does not *need* to employ any particular concepts or propositions: I need not use the laws expressed by sentences of classical logic, but can in principle use the propositions that would be expressed using a different set of logical expressions. This can, perhaps, be called a relative or revisable a priori. But the label is misleading. For the status of the propositions as true and a priori knowable is in no way relative or revisable.

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[31] Friedman (2004), p. 112.
[32] As earlier one can worry: how appropriate is it to employ the contemporary notion of proposition when speaking of the Carnap of 1934? But again the substantive point can be made without employing the notion of proposition. Sentences, non-semantically individuated, can have different properties in different languages.

The reason the above distinctions are relevant is that the talk of a relative a priori may otherwise suggest that on Carnap's view, a proposition is a priori relative to one language or linguistic framework but not to another. That would be a thesis in line with central appeal to non-trivial language-relativity, and with the supposed rejection of language-transcendence.

The above remarks of course do not refute the contention that there is, in some interesting sense, a relative a priori, or that such a notion was employed by the positivists. Friedman builds a case that according to some of the logical positivists, certain assumptions, for example pieces of mathematics, function as *presuppositions* of scientific theories in a way that legitimizes a description in these terms.[33] In this he may be right, for all I want to say. All I want to do is to separate out a clearly confused strand in the discussion of the relative a priori.

In a passage Friedman centrally refers to, Carnap discusses "the metrical fundamental tensor 'g_{mn}' by means of which the metrical structure of physical space is determined". He brings up two languages such that in one this is a "logical symbol" and in the other it is a metrical symbol".[34] Although Carnap is not explicit, it is very natural to take him to hold that 'g_{mn}' means different things in the two languages, and thus that sentences of the two languages where 'g_{mn}' occurs systematically mean different things. What Friedman says about this is worth quoting in full:

> ...it is Carnap's view that, in the context of physical geometries of constant curvature, the term for the metric constitutes a logical rather than a descriptive expression and thus the principles of metrical geometry are L-rules or analytic sentences; in the case of the variable, mass-energy-dependent curvature of general relativity, however, the term for the metric constitutes a descriptive expression and the principles of metrical geometry are P-rules or synthetic sentences. Thus [on Carnap's analysis] geometry has itself undergone a transition from a nonempirical and constitutive status to an empirical and this nonconstitutive status – indeed, Euclidean geometry is now empirically, that is, synthetically, false.[35]

Friedman's first remark simply suggests what I would say: what we are dealing with is simply a case where the meanings of some expressions are changed. But by the end of the passage, Friedman speaks of 'Euclidean geometry' having changed its status from non-synthetic to synthetic, thus making it sound as if it is particular *propositions* that have changed their status from non-synthetic to synthetic.

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[33] See e.g. Friedman (1994) and (2001).
[34] Carnap (1934), p. 178f.
[35] Friedman (1994), p. 69.

6. Concluding remarks

Carnap subscribed to (MULTITUDE), (CONVENTION), and (ANTI-FOUNDATIONALISM), and in 1934 and 1935 he also subscribed to some version of (SYNTACTICISM). These views are all important and controversial in their own right. But they don't entail the "rejection of language-transcendence" that Goldfarb and Ricketts ascribe to Carnap; nor is there any other compelling evidence that Carnap rejected language-transcendence. And Carnap did not believe in a relative a priori, if we understand that thesis to mean that propositions are true or a priori knowable only relatively.

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