Book Review

Ontology After Carnap

Stephan Blatti and Sandra LaPointe (eds.),

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Reviewed by Gareth Fuller

The book, *Ontology After Carnap* is a collection of new essays mainly covering contemporary topics in meta-ontology. Many of the essays do not focus on providing a deeper understanding of the work of Carnap, and this much is admitted in several essays, and so this would not be a great collection for someone looking strictly into Carnap. However, the depth of content in the collected essays would make this book well worth it for anyone interested in contemporary meta-ontology. It includes good mix of work both in favor and critical of neo-Carnapian ontology. The essays assume a general understanding of contemporary meta-ontology, and in what follows so will I. In what follows I discuss a few of the essays that provide a general outline of what sort of concerns there are for neo-Carnapians.

Carnap famously presented us with the idea of linguistic frameworks and the distinction between internal and external questions. Linguistic frameworks for Carnap were formal languages, although the contemporary incarnations of this idea typically avoid formality. Thomas Hofweber, in his essays "Carnap's Big Idea", gives us an update to the internal/external distinction, focusing on whether this distinction can be compatible with factual work in ontology. Hofweber formulates the internal/external distinction in terms of quantifiers. He proposes that there are two different roles for quantifiers, the inferential role and the domain-conditions roles. Under the inferential role, a quantified sentence, "There is(x) F(x)" is satisfied by any sentence "F(t)" given "the schema 'F(t) thus something id F' is valid". The domain-conditions role directly points to a domain of objects, or tries to pick out existing things. These two readings clearly fall closely in line with Carnap's own distinction, the inferential role being similar to internal questions and the domain-conditions being external. However, Hofweber does not want to deny content to external questions the way that Carnap would.

Domain-conditions questions can be factual, as it can be shownthatsomethingsexist.Movingawayfromastrictuseoflinguistic frameworks allows for Hofweber to incorporate Carnap's internal/external distinction in a way that allows for work in ontology to be factual.

Stephen Biggs and Jessica Wilson take up concern with contemporary approaches to modal semantics similar to Carnap's in their essay, "Carnap, the Necessary A Posteriori, and Metaphysical Anti-Realism". In particular, they focus on some forms of two-dimensional semantics and argue that resolving indeterminacy in these languages undercuts any anti-metaphysical leanings a neo-Carnapian may have tied up with this semantics. Biggs and Wilson argue that there are particular issues that arise due to indeterminacy of our language, and this is why Carnap developed his concept of explication. Explication is necessary for resolving this indeterminacy. However, they also argue that Carnap sneaks theoretical virtues into his concept of explication, and these theoretical virtues are abductive. They have, therefore, argued that Carnap's view of explication is actually a notion of inference to the best explanation. They then go on to argue abductive reasoning about intensions in semantics provides *a priori* knowledge. Requiring inference to the best explanation in semantics, the metaphysician can now make claim to this methodology themselves. This now allows metaphysician a toolkit with which to work, and so anti-metaphysical leanings of neo-Carnapians are undercut.

Kathrin Koslicki, in her essay "Questions of Ontology", poses the argument that Carnap, and Quine, and many who follow them miss important questions by focusing on existential questions. Koslicki argues that there are differing views that would appear very similar under Carnap's internal/external distinction. She works through difference between pure and impure trope theory to show where they agree and disagree. The important point of disagreement comes when considering whether tropes are "relatively or absolutely fundamental entities within their respective ontologies." Both pure and impure trope theory would answer the existential questions the same way under Carnap's internal/external distinction. However, key difference arise in their theories based on this distinction. Numerical identity for pure tropes is tied to tropes themselves while it is tied to the bearers of tropes on impure trope theory. She derived further differences in their theories from this, such as the possibility of "free-floating" tropes and briefly mentions humean and anti-humean leanings concerning the laws of nature. Believing that she has shown that these sorts of questions about fundamentality are important questions, Koslicki argues that a meatontology which would not capture distinctions in this question, as Carnap's wouldn't, miss something. She then points out that, if questions of being are not exhausted by ques-

tions of existence, then purporting to show that ontological questions are not important because existential questions are trivial or non-factual fails.

The readings above exemplify a few of the important questions considered throughout the book. There are some that focus more on interpretation of Carnap, or whether neo-Carnapians have truly captured a Carnapian view. This book, in general, does a good job of covering many facets of one view on contemporary meta-ontology. It is a book to be recommended to anyone who has an interest in contemporary meta-ontology, and in particular those debating over deflationist meta-ontology.

References

Stephan Blatti and Sandra Lapointe editors; *Ontology After Carnap*; OUP, Oxford UK, 2016.