Ways of being quantified

Abstract: Ontological pluralists maintain that things may have being in different ways. They also hold that their view is consistent with an orthodox, broadly Quinean, quantifier-first approach to ontology. In this paper, I put pressure on this package of views. I show that ontological pluralists should allow that there is a generic way of being, which is less fundamental than the other, more specific, ways of having being. Given the quantifier-first approach to ontology, to have being in this generic way just is to fall within the domain of a general quantifier. I then suggest that the generic notion of being must be more than a mere disjunction of various specific ways to have being and argue that it follows that it is conceivable that something could have being generically without having being in any specific way. If so, then there is conceivably an important ontological distinction among the things falling within the scope of the general quantifier between those that have being fundamentally and those whose being is merely generic and non-fundamental. Finally, I claim that the conceivability of this ontological distinction requires pluralists to acknowledge a conceptual gap between our quantificational and ontological commitments that is in tension with certain interpretations of the quantifier-first approach to ontology. This conclusion, I suggest, should in turn count against at least one kind of deflationary approach to ontological questions.

According to philosophical orthodoxy the study of ontology is importantly connected to quantification. Although dominant, this view is hard to state precisely because, by the lights of its proponents, it is a trivial tautology. To articulate the view as a substantive thesis, we introduce two terms: "being" which names the subject matter of ontology and "existence" which names the status a G possesses when it is in the range of an existential quantifier (i.e. when $\exists x G x$). (I'll use "having being" and "existing" for the corresponding verb forms.) Importantly, I am not understanding the stipulated content I have just attributed to "being" as a *definition*. Instead to avoid tendentiousness, I mean to leave the question of definition open and thus to use "being" in a somewhat open-ended way. I take it that we can nonetheless grasp the term sufficiently for present purposes by specifying "being" ostensively, by reference to our practice of ontology.

Granted these stipulations, the orthodoxy that I want to investigate becomes the claim that having being just is existing. Call this **Equiv**. In practice, the proponents of **Equiv** typically adopt a stronger thesis—**Equiv***—according to which it is a conceptual truth that to have being is to exist. This paper focuses in particular on a tension between **Equiv*** and the view that there are many ways to have being, which is known as "ontological pluralism" or "pluralism" for short.[1] Paradigmatic forms of the view hold that physical and mental things each have being in their own unique way, or that God has being in a way that mere mortals do not. As these examples suggest, pluralism has been historically influential—it was plausibly the view of Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Frege, and Russell among others—and it is currently enjoying a

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[1] Given the stipulation I introduced above this is equivalent to saying that ontological pluralists believe that the subject matter of ontology is irreducibly plural. We should understand the foregoing *de re* as the claim that the thing(s) that is(/are) the subject matter of ontology is(/are) irreducibly plural.

mini-resurgence.[2] For the purposes of this essay, though, I take no stand on the merits of pluralism. As we'll see shortly, there are reasons to be interested in pluralism in relation to **Equiv**/**Equiv*** regardless of the attractions the view may possess.

The tension between **Equiv** and pluralism may seem unsurprising since it looks as though there is a quick argument from ontological pluralism to the falsity of **Equiv**. The thought is that while there is only one kind of existential quantification, according to pluralism there are various ways to have being. Thus being and existing must be distinct.[3] But this argument is *too* quick: proponents of pluralism have a simple response. They can argue that in a metaphysically perspicuous framework there are many kinds of existential quantification just as there are many ways of being (see Turner 2010, pp. 7-8ff; Turner 2021, p. 185). This dissolves the quick argument against **Equiv**.[4] Yet as we will see, there is a second, more subtle, route from pluralism to the falsity of **Equiv** that cannot be answered in the same way.

This conclusion matters in part because there are good reasons to take seriously views which insist that an adequate metaphysical framework must employ multiple quantifiers. Given **Equiv** such views will lead to ontological pluralism. For if being just is existing and there are many kinds of existential quantification, and therefore many ways to exist, it follows that there are many ways to be, which is the defining tenet of ontological pluralism. If the arguments of this paper succeed, though, this combination of views is unstable. In other words, if metaphysics requires that we theorize using multiple quantifiers, then **Equiv** must be false and there are reasons to

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[2] Historical discussion can be found in Turner 2010, n.3, p. 15, McDaniel 2017, pp. 12–47, and Caplan 2011. These three works are part of a growing contemporary literature on pluralism, which includes also Builes 2019, Merricks 2019, Rettler 2020, and Turner 2012.

[3] See e.g. van Inwagen 1998 for a version of this idea.

[4] Turner 2012, p. 420.

think that metaphysics might indeed impose such a requirement.[5] For reasons that I'll briefly elaborate on below, the falsity of **Equiv** counts against certain deflationary views about metaontology. The big picture, then, of which this paper is just one part, suggests both that **Equiv** is false and that its falsity has important metaontological implications.

1.   Being and quantifying

Equiv and **Equiv*** are inspired by a Quinean approach to metaontology that is orthodox in contemporary analytic metaphysics. In a slogan, the Quinean proposal is that to be is to be the value of a variable bound by an existential quantifier (Quine 1948). This idea turns out to be open to interpretations with importantly different emphases. In this section, I isolate the interpretation in which I am interested and suggest why it might conflict with pluralism. In what follows I will use the term "ontological commitment" to mean commitment to some entity's having being.

Let's start by considering a specific question—whether or not numbers belong in our ontology. Euclid's theorem states that there are infinitely many prime numbers. According to a view defended by John Burgess and Gideon Rosen, who understand themselves to be employing a Quinean approach, our ontological question is therefore answered by ordinary mathematics. Euclid's theorem quantifies over primes, prime numbers are numbers, so it follows from the theorem that there are numbers (Burgess and Rosen 1997).

Ted Sider suggests a slightly different way to approach such questions. While he too favors a Quinean methodology, he introduces an important complication, observ-

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[5] One such reason derives from the arguments favored by those who deny that it is possible to quantify over absolutely everything since on this view for any given quantifier it will be possible to construct a distinct quantifier with a yet larger domain, see e.g. Fine 2006.

ing that our evaluation of theories is sensitive to the language in which they are formulated. We should focus, then, on theories articulated in a *joint-carving* language, where a language is joint-carving to the extent that its expressions correspond to perfectly natural features of the world. Such a language might include the predicate "electron" but will not include predicates like "grue". Sider argues that it is not only predicates that can be more or less joint-carving, quantifiers can also vary in this regard (Sider 2011, pp. 85–104). Just as gruesome predicates don't help us to describe the world as it really is, so un-joint-carving quantification could also fail to be ontologically perspicuous. Quantification, he concludes, is ontologically committal only when the quantifier in question is joint-carving.[6] This approach seems to leave open a different kind of answer to that defended by Burgess and Rosen: maybe mathematical theories are not articulated in a joint-carving language. In that case, the truth of various mathematical theorems need not settle the ontological question.[7]

Burgess and Rosen are skeptical of this approach: summarizing considerably, they suggest that there are two ways of thinking about what someone who pursued a strategy like Sider's to argue that there aren't really any numbers might be doing. According to them, a philosopher of this ilk is *either* arguing that mathematicians don't really mean to say that there are infinitely many primes *or* means to suggest that a *mathematically* better theory wouldn't say that there are prime numbers. An alternative view that accepts the mathematical claim taken at face value, but denies that it is ontologically committal is not, according to Burgess and Rosen, a viable option. In particular, they worry that this view relies on a distinction without a difference (Burgess and Rosen 1997, pp. 188–9). They hold, that is,that there is no intelligible content that can be given

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[6] Sider 2011, especially p. 202.
[7] Sider doesn't *actually* make this claim; the point is rather that his metaontological approach opens up logical space for an argument of this kind.

to the difference between the sense in which there are (i.e. exist) numbers—given the truth of the relevant mathematical theories—and a deeper sense in which there aren't. As I interpret them, this amounts to skepticism that there are any ontological facts if that means anything more than that some quantified claims are true. (It's worth noting in passing that although the Burgess and Rosen view is not universally held, it is also by no means idiosyncratic: see the following footnote for details.[8])

The important point is that the Quinean approach—and therefore also **Equiv**—is susceptible to different interpretations, some of which are more deflationary than others. Crucially, whereas Sider's approach allows for the possibility of ontologically innocent quantification—quantification that is not ontologically committal—the Burgess-Rosen view does not. My interest in this paper is in the stronger interpretation of **Equiv** and **Equiv*** suggested by Burgess and Rosen. On this picture, **Equiv** has deflationary implications that are likely to be uncongenial to philosophers of an ontologically realist disposition. To see this, suppose a theory T in biology, say, quantifies over some entity e. If Burgess and Rosen are right, ontological debate about the status of e will have to be conducted either *among biologists* by giving rival theories to T or *among linguists* by arguing that T doesn't really mean what it seems to say and that what T *really* says is consistent with the negation of what it *seems* to say.[9] (The

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8 See e.g. Burgess 2008a, p. 92 which dismisses Jody Azzouni's notion of ontologically innocent quantification (Azzouni 2004) as "self-contradictory"; Hazen 1993, (especially p. 136) which gives an argument for platonism from the presumption that quantifiers are ontologically committal expressions; Lewis 1990 which reads Routley's would-be Meinongianism as intelligible only under the supposition that quantification which Routley regards as "neutral" is in fact [ontologically] "loaded"; Parsons 1990 which argues against the innocence of second-order quantification by appeal to "an ontological intuition a little different from but complementing Quine's" (p. 328); van Inwagen 1998, pp. 235–6 which argues that being and existence are identical; Florio and Linnebo 2021, pp. 164–7 which argues against the innocence of plural quantification by appeal to rival conceptions of ontological commitment both of which take the quantification-ontology tie for granted; and Lycan 1979, p. 290 wherein the author reports his inability to understand "Meinongian"—i.e. ontologically non-committal—quantification.

9 Strictly speaking there is an intermediate step here. A philosopher could accept that the truth of quantified claims exhausts ontology while maintaining that we have philosophical reasons to reject the theories of biology, perhaps such theories are merely useful fictions. Here, however, I am assuming a naturalist constraint that rules out views like these.

prospects for advocates of the second kind of approach are particularly poor.)[10] There is no scope, then, for distinctively metaphysical or ontological debate about *e*.[11] This is a radically deflationary conclusion, suggesting that ontology is, as Burgess puts it, "simply a glorified taxonomy".[12]

My concern is that this kind of deflationism poses an unanswered challenge to the projects pursued by Sider and others. The worry is that the opponents of deflationism have assumed that reality has ontological structure without fully addressing deflationist scruples about this structure. The critical *anti*-deflationist move in this context is generalizing the notion of joint-carvingness to include quantifiers. Proponents of the Burgess-Rosen view, however, can resist this move. Sider takes the indispensability of quantification to our best accounts of the world to imply that there is a unitary quantificational structure.[13] But the deflationist might insist that quantification is a special case: it is *indeterminate* which precisification of "∃" is indispensable. Ideological indispensability, the thought goes, undermines deflationism only when we can determinately pin down the indispensibilium. Sider identifies two problems with this kind of proposal: first that it prevents us establishing the substantivity of various metaphysical disputes and second that it rules out a complete fundamental description of reality (Sider 2011, pp. 86–7, 183–7). But austere deflationists need not be troubled by these consequences: the non-substantiveness of various metaphysical disputes and lack of a complete description of the world were already implicit in their worldview.[14]

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[10] Burgess and Rosen 1997, pp. 231–6.

[11] This constitutes a rejection of what Kit Fine calls the "autonomy of ontology", denying the coherence of an approach that allows that settling the claims of science and mathematics in a rigorous quantified language need not yet settle questions about what things have being (Fine 2009, p. 159).

[12] Burgess 2008a, p. 95.

[13] Sider 2009, n.55 p. 417.

[14] There are, of course, alternatives to this kind of austere Quineanism. Schaffer 2009, for instance, develops a neo-Aristotelian view on which existence assertions are typically true but trivial, while interesting questions about what is fundamental remain. I favor my own approach here because I take it to be closer to an immanent critique of Burgess-Rosen style deflationism. One way to see this

The intuition on which this paper is based is that ontological pluralists are committed to treating ontological distinctions as thick and substantive in a way that provides the resources for responding to deflationist views like Burgess and Rosen's. To see why, consider a toy-example of a pluralist view: suppose that concrete things like my little finger and abstract things like $\sqrt{2}$ have being in different ways. The pluralist must insist that this proposal differs from the ontologically monist view according to which both $\sqrt{2}$ and my little finger have being in the same way, although the former is abstract while the latter is concrete. Put differently, the pluralist claims that we can make sense of the idea that there are different modes of being and that realizing some mode of being is distinct from merely instantiating a metaphysically interesting property (like being abstract). Pluralism thus commits its proponents to a substantial ontological thesis. My thought is that this commitment is sustainable only if the world is ontologically richer than **Equiv*** allows.

2. The conceivability argument

The main argument of this paper can be summarized as follows:

1. If pluralism is true, then there is a non-fundamental, general existential quantifier such that it is not a conceptual truth that this quantifier is a disjunction of the more fundamental quantifiers.

2. If there is a non-fundamental, general existential quantifier such that it is not a conceptual truth that this quantifier is a disjunction of the more fundamental

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is by noting that while both Schaffer and I require a commitment to distinctions of fundamentality, I understand such commitments to be implicit in ontological pluralism, which I in turn take to be mandatory for proponents of **Equiv** if metaphysics requires a multiplicity of quantifiers. By contrast, Schaffer's view relies on an independent grounding-theoretic ideology to motivate such distinctions.

quantifiers, then it is conceivable that a quantifier quantifies over things which do not have being in any fundamental sense.

3. If it is conceivable that a quantifier quantifies over things that do not have being in any fundamental sense, then ¬**Equiv***.

4. ∴ If pluralism is true, then ¬**Equiv***.

Below I defend the premises of this argument. Before doing so, however, it is worth saying something about the ideology in which they are couched. All involve the notion of fundamentality, which is contested in metaphysics and may not be acceptable to all.[15] Yet we need to be able to talk in terms of fundamentality if we are to explore the merits of ontological pluralism. For given an arbitrary quantifier "∃" and a predicate "P" we can always define a restricted quantifier "$∃_P$". We get a form of pluralism worth discussing only if we say that the more specific quantifiers introduced by the pluralist are not just restrictions of a universal existential quantifier, which in this context is cashed out by saying that the specific quantifiers are more fundamental than any broader existential quantifiers.

The other substantial primitive is "conceivability". Importantly this term should not be understood psychologistically, it describes in the first instance not the feeling that some scenario is credible or epistemically plausible, but rather a kind of modality; to be conceivable is to be conceptually possible. The bounds of conceptual possibility are in turn understood to be fixed by (logical) consistency with facts about what it is to fall under a given concept. An upshot of this is that there is little difference between conceptual truth and truth by definition, assuming (plausibly) that to define

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[15] For discussions of fundamentality see: Bennett 2017, pp. 102–86, Fine 2001, Fine 2009, McDaniel 2017, pp. 195–222, Schaffer 2009, Sider 2011, pp. 105–65, and Wilson 2014 among others.

a concept is to describe what it is to fall under that concept (see note 22 below). As I am understanding it, then, it is conceivable that Catalonia might be independent or that Ian McKellen might win an Oscar, but inconceivable (*de dicto*) that spinsters might be married. By stipulation, *T* is a conceptual truth iff it is not conceivable that not *T*; conceptual truth is thus the dual of conceivability.

3. Articulating pluralism

My task in this section is to argue for the first premise. Let's start by considering in general terms what it is to be a pluralist about any kind of subject-matter. Plausibly, to count as a pluralist view about a topic *X*, a theory must hold *both* that there are multiple versions of *X*ness, but also that *each* such version counts fully as a kind of *X*ness. A pluralist about knowledge, for instance, must maintain that there are multiple kinds of mental states each of which has a valid and equal claim to being *knowledge*. Otherwise, the pluralist view in question will collapse either into the eliminativist view that there is no such thing as *X*ness or the monist view that there is just one way to be *X* (although there may be other closely related phenomena in the vicinity). The same requirement arises for the ontological pluralist. If there are many ways of being (as the ontological pluralist requires), then these ways of being must have something substantively in common in virtue of which they count equally as ways of *being*.

A further question is whether the commonality holding between the various specific ways to have being itself gives rise to a generic way of being. There is reason to favor an affirmative answer to this question. For one thing, this is the line that pluralists themselves seem to have generally preferred.[16] A comparison with alethic

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[16] It's worth noting that there is not universal agreement among ontological pluralists on this point: Caplan 2011 rightly draws our attention to the diversity of different forms of pluralism. In his metaphor

pluralism, the view that there are many ways to be true, helps to show why they might have taken this approach: suppose that there are multiple truth properties, $F_1, ..., F_n$, and further that there is some important respect, T, in which $F_1, ..., F_n$ resemble one another.[17] We can use the higher-order property T to define a more general kind of property F_T, where something instantiates F_T iff it instantiates a property F_i that satisfies T.[18] We can now ask whether F_T should count as a form of truth. The answer to this question should again be affirmative: after all, anything that instantiates F_T is true and it is their satisfying T that constitutes the commonality unifying $F_1, ..., F_n$. We might hesitate here because if we allow that F_T is a form of truth, our view may seem to collapse into a form of alethic *monism*. The natural solution for pluralists is to allow that F_T is a kind of truth, but to insist that it is less fundamental than $F_1, ..., F_n$; it is the latter that are the fundamental alethic states on this picture and since they are multiple, this view counts as a kind of pluralism.[19]

Analogously, it seems that the ontological pluralist should allow for the existence of a less fundamental, generic way of being that includes each specific way of being.[20] The generic way of having being is simultaneously less fundamental than the more specific ways of being and also the commonality that consists in each more specific

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(which analogizes modes of being to boxes) only some pluralists accept that their various ontological boxes must be contained within a generic ontological box. I think that my argument should put pressure on those views that reject a generic form of being *insofar* as they want to be pluralist about the thing of interest to ontologists. It is not obvious, though, that all the historical figures discussed by Caplan satisfy the last condition. See also note 20 below.

[17] This corresponds to what is known as "moderate pluralism". So-called strong pluralists deny that there is any unity to the various truth predicates. But strong pluralism faces powerful objections and, for this reason, is not widely believed. See Pederson 2012, pp. 590–2.

[18] F_T might correspond to what Wright calls "minimal truth", Wright 1992, chapter 2.

[19] See Pederson 2010, pp. 106–8 for a view of this kind.

[20] A different possibility is the view that Builes 2019 calls "hybridist", which holds not that the generic way of being is *less* fundamental than the more determinate ways of having being, but that they are all *equi*-fundamental. The hybridist view, though, has significant problems of its own. As Builes points out it involves redundancy at the fundamental level, thus violating a non-redundancy constraint that many philosophers have found plausible. Moreover, it is vulnerable to several other objections developed by Merricks 2019.

way of having being being a way of *having being*.[21] Importantly, this generic notion must also be more than a mere disjunction of the various specific ways of having being. (As I am using the expression, some concept X is a "mere disjunction" just in case it is a conceptual truth that to be X is to instantiate one or more disjuncts of a given disjunction that otherwise have nothing substantial in common.) For mere disjunctions are not enough to establish genuine similarity of the kind required here. Jacques Chirac and the Talladega Superspeedway share the property of being either Chirac or the Talladega Superspeedway, but this alone does not establish that they have anything metaphysically interesting in common. Similarly, if we want to be pluralists about being, it cannot be a conceptual truth that the generic notion of being is a mere disjunction of specific ways of having being, since a mere disjunction of this kind does not count as a genuine commonality (cf. McDaniel 2017, p. 25).[22]

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[21] This agrees with the recent literature on pluralism, where it is widely agreed that pluralists require a generic notion of being. Merricks 2019 argues simultaneously that pluralists need a generic notion of being and that they must reject such a notion and accordingly concludes against pluralism. His respondents have generally wanted to argue that pluralists need and *can* invoke generic being, see Builes 2019; Rettler 2020; Simmons 2022. A different kind of pluralist, however, might not accept this claim. According to "neo-Fregean" pluralism, the true theory of metaphysics must be given in a higher-order language in which entities belong to specific, disjoint "types" (see e.g. Lederman 2024). In this framework, no two things in different types are in the scope of a single quantifier. Given something like **Equiv***, we get a radical form of ontological pluralism, but the very structure of the view rules out a generic notion of being. Since this kind of type-theoretic approach raises a whole host of further issues, orthogonal to my argument, I am setting it aside for the present discussion.

[22] A reader might object here: being a cousin is not defined as *being either a first cousin or a second cousin,...* yet the concept of "being a cousin" is not wholly disjunctive. But it is a conceptual truth that anyone who is a cousin is either a first cousin or a second cousin,...etc. Likewise, even if the generic notion of being isn't *by definition* a disjunction of more specific forms of being, it might still be a conceptual truth that to be generically is also to have being in some more specific way. This objection invites us to distinguish between definitional and conceptual truths. (Cf. Fine 1994, especially pp. 2–3, pp. 13–14, and Rosen 2015.) The idea is something like the following: it is true by definition that to be X is to be Y just in case it is part of the ground of a thing t's being X that t is Y.

This objection does not succeed in the present context: if it is a conceptual truth that something has being generically iff it has some specific way of being, then this must hold in virtue of facts about what it is to fall under the relevant concepts: either t has being generically because this is part of what it is for t to have being in some specific way or vice versa. The second possibility is inconsistent with pluralism (it collapses into a kind of ontological monism), so the pluralist must favor the first possibility. But this closes the gap between definitional and conceptual truth suggested by the objector.

In the ideology favored by both pluralists and their critics, ways of being are expressed quantificationally and I will assume likewise here. (If **Equiv*** holds then this assumption is trivial.) Accordingly it follows that some G has being$_1$ iff $\exists_1 xGx$, where the subscripted "1" stands for one of the various ways to have being. A generic way of being is thus expressed by a *general quantifier*. The foregoing argument therefore suggests that:

1. If pluralism is true, then there is a non-fundamental, general existential quantifier such that it is not a conceptual truth that this quantifier is a disjunction of the more fundamental quantifiers.

But this just is premise 1 from the argument of section 2.

4.   Conceiving of being

This section defends premise 2:

2. If there is a non-fundamental, general existential quantifier such that it is not a conceptual truth that this quantifier is a disjunction of the more fundamental quantifiers, then it is conceivable that a quantifier quantifies over things which do not have being in any fundamental sense.

We can begin to motivate this claim by considering cases of "worldly indeterminacy". If there is indeterminacy of this kind, then some entity e could conceivably be blue without being any specific shade of blue. For we can imagine that e's color corresponds to a region of a multidimensional color space (say, hue × saturation × brightness) but not to any particular point within this region (Rosen and Smith 2004, p. 188). Cases like these introduce the unfamiliar idea that a determinable—in this case "blue"—could

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conceivably be instantiated without any of its determinates—here, particular *shades* of blue—being instantiated.[23] The idea underpinning premise 2 is analogously that, if the general quantifier is as premise 1 requires, then something could conceivably have being generically without having being in a fundamental sense. Importantly here we should eschew interpretations of "having being in a fundamental sense" which rigidify that notion to the ways of having being fundamentally speaking that are *in fact* instantiated. For it seems conceivable that there could be various fundamental kinds of being, even if those kinds of being aren't realized in reality. The intended interpretation of premise 2 therefore requires a stronger reading on which something could conceivably have being in a fundamental sense even if it is not in the domain of one of the quantifiers that *actually* correspond to fundamental ways of being.

The analogy with determination is useful because it helps to exemplify this stronger reading and thus to highlight why premise 2 might, on first inspection, strike you as surprising. My burden is to show that something could have being generically (i.e. determinably), without having being in any specific (i.e. determinate) sense. On some views this conclusion is literally contradictory—views that understand determinables as disjunctions of their determinates for instance—and, even on weaker views, it is common to assume the impossibility of being determinably F without instantiating any determinate of F in part defines the relation of determination.[24] In what follows, I assume against views like these that it is at least conceivable that something could be determinably F without being determinately F.[25]

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[23] Cf. Wilson 2013 who espouses a theory of indeterminacy along these lines.

[24] For views of the first kind see the discussion of reductionism in Wilson 2023; for views of the second kind see e.g. Funkhouser 2006, p. 549. Note though that ideas like premise 2 are not completely unprecedented: McDaniel 2017, pp. 140–69, and Simmons 2022, p. 1278 defend similar thoughts.

[25] This implies a controversial but not wildly heterodox view of determinables. Fales 1990, p. 228, for example, argues that certain mental states may be determinably but not determinately F: I imagine a hen is speckled without imagining it has some number n of speckles; Wilson 2013, p. 371 notes

Let's begin by distinguishing three views of determination: on one view, determinables are reducible to their determinates. Standard versions of this idea identify determinables with disjunctions of their determinates. I'll call the kind of determinables described by this view determinables$_1$. A second view takes determinables to be non-reducible to their determinates, but insists that the extension of a determinable is necessarily identical to the extension of the maximal disjunction of its determinates. Call determinables satisfying this analysis determinables$_2$. Finally, a third view takes determinables to be non-reducible and further holds that the extension of a determinable could conceivably differ from the extension of the maximal disjunction of its determinates. Call things of this kind determinables$_3$. To establish premise 2, I need to show that generic being is a determinable$_3$. The argument is by elimination (note that the three foregoing views of determination form a jointly-exhaustive partition): I'll suggest it can't be either a determinable$_1$ or determinable$_2$ and draw the conclusion that generic being is a determinable$_3$ and so can conceivably differ extensionally from the disjunction of specific forms of being.

Consider first the possibility that generic being might be a determinable$_1$. We can lean here on a thread from section 3. I suggested there that the pluralist must countenance a generic kind of being, while maintaining against the monist that generic being is less fundamental than other ways of being. I also argued that if generic being is to constitute a genuine form of commonality, then it must be non-arbitrary. This means that generic being must enjoy a degree of conceptual independence from the more specific forms of being it subsumes; otherwise, nothing would distinguish the assemblage of different forms of being from a miscellaneous collection, unified only by virtue of

that a particle in a quantum superposition might be interpreted as instantiating a determinable spin property, without instantiating one of its determinates.

being collected. And conceptual independence of this kind seems to preclude the possibility that generic being could be reducible to a disjunction of determinate ways of being. Therefore generic being cannot be a determinable$_1$.[26]

Next I need to show that generic being is not a determinable$_2$. To do that, I'll need to say more about what exactly a quantifier is. We can take our lead here from generalized quantifier theory. In this context, a quantifier Q is defined as a function from a set $\mathcal{M}$ to a class of subsets of $\mathcal{M}, Q^{\mathcal{M}}$. The quantifiers that we have been discussing so far are all existential quantifiers. In the framework just introduced, existential quantification is the function from $\mathcal{M}$ to non-empty subsets of $\mathcal{M}$.[27] For the pluralist, though, things are more complicated: if our quantifiers $Q_1, \ldots Q_n$ correspond to distinct ways of being, then they must represent distinct functions. For example, perhaps Q_a corresponds to the being of abstracta. In that case, we should understand Q_a as the function from $\mathcal{M}$ to non-empty subsets of abstracta in $\mathcal{M}$.

So far, I have spoken loosely of the "domain" of a given quantifier and speculated about whether an entity could fall into this domain. We can now make such talk more precise. Let's assume that any possible world uniquely determines a set $\mathcal{M}$ that we can call a "universe". What I am calling the "domain" of a quantifier Q_i is the union of the sets in its image at a given world, i.e. the set $\bigcup Q_i^{\mathcal{M}}$. With this apparatus in hand, we are in a position to see why generic being cannot be a determinable$_2$. Take the corresponding quantifier, GQ. And let's use "DQ" to refer to the quantifier defined as the disjunction of fundamental quantifiers. If GQ is a determinable$_2$ then necessar-

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[26] McDaniel 2017, pp. 50–3 discusses a very similar problem: how could being be unified analogically in the absence of a focal specification (a central way to be that is more fundamental than the others). Although he offers two "tests" for analogical unity, McDaniel's view is ultimately that the difference between analogically unified properties and mere disjunctions is potentially "brute", we won't always be able to explain what a property's unity consists in. As I interpret him, one upshot is that analogical properties are not determinables$_1$.

[27] The exposition of generalized quantifier theory here follows Westerståhl 2019.

ily anything in the domain of GQ is in the domain of DQ and vice versa—I take this to be what it means to speak of quantifiers being "coextensive"—that is to say, if in all worlds, $GQ^\mathcal{M} = DQ^\mathcal{M}$. If, though, necessarily $GQ^\mathcal{M} = DQ^\mathcal{M}$ then, given the account of quantification I have just been sketching, $GQ = DQ$, in which case GQ is a determinable$_1$. In other words, GQ is a determinable$_2$ just in case it is a determinable$_1$. I have argued it is not a determinable$_1$, it follows that it is not a determinable$_2$.

The foregoing argument might seem too quick. We held, in effect, that quantifiers are individuated intensionally and so denied that there is a gap between the general quantifier's being reducible to a disjunction of fundamental quantifiers and its merely being necessarily coextensive with this disjunction. Our argument does *not* imply that *any* determinable$_1$ is a determinable$_2$, but merely that *in the present case* no distinction between these two kinds of determinable can be sustained. Still it would be nice to have something more to say in its defense. One possible objection would be to argue that while there is a possible universe $\mathcal{M}$ such that $GQ^\mathcal{M} \neq DQ^\mathcal{M}$, this universe is necessarily inaccessible. Perhaps, that is, the modal constraints that govern claims about the possible domain of a quantifier are more restrictive than those that are operative when we are individuating quantifiers. Given, though that premise 2 requires only a conceivable difference in the domains of the relevant quantifiers and that conceivability is an extremely (perhaps maximally) permissive modality, it is hard to see how this kind of objection could be sustained.

Alternatively, we might want to argue that quantifiers should be individuated *hyperintensionally*. This would mean rejecting generalized quantifier theory since mathematically any two functions which map the same values to the same elements of the codomain are identical. Since generalized quantifier theory is an orthodox and fruitful

piece of formal linguistics this would be a cost.[28] More generally, it is hard to see how my opponents could be entitled to a hyperintensional account of quantification. Proponents of the view I oppose are skeptical about the possibility of ontologically innocent quantification in part because it introduces a mysterious distinction between being and existence for which there is no naturalistically respectable evidence. But the same goes, *mutatis mutandis*, for hyperintensionally distinguished quantifiers. Conversely, if quantifiers can differ hyperintensionally, then it seems that being and existing could also differ hyperintensionally, in which case **Equiv** would be false. I conclude that the defenders of **Equiv** are in no position to reject an account that individuates quantifiers intensionally and thus that the "quick" argument of the penultimate paragraph is in good standing: generic being is not a determinable$_2$. By elimination, it follows that generic being is a determinable$_3$, which in turn implies the truth of premise 2.

We might nonetheless worry that this argument overgeneralizes. To see why such worries are misplaced, recall the alethic pluralism I discussed in section 3. Given the argument of that section, alethic pluralists should, I claim, deny that minimal or generic truth is a determinable$_1$. But they are not forced to think that generic truth is a determinable$_3$ unless they are committed to thinking that truth properties must be individuated intensionally. Particularly important in this context is the *tu quoque* argument that I gave above against my would-be opponents. Such opponents, I suggested, are not in a position to insist that quantifiers could be individuated hyperintensionally given the considerations that motivate their ontological deflationism. Unless alethic pluralists accept an analogous kind of deflationism, there is no equivalent threat to a version of their view that insists that minimal truth is a determinable$_2$.[29]

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[28] See e.g. Barwise and Cooper 1981.

[29] As it happens, there is a view that does treat minimal truth as something like a determinable$_3$—see the discussion of "plain truth" in Pederson 2012, p. 597 and also n.11 p. 597. The motivations for this view

5.   Fundamentality and ontology

In this section, I will argue for premise 3:

> 3. If it is conceivable that a quantifier quantifies over things that do not have
>
> being in any fundamental sense, then ¬**Equiv***.

Assume the antecedent of 3. I will now try to show that the consequent follows. If it is conceivable that there exist things that do not have being in any fundamental sense then *either* these things do not have being at all *or* they have being non-fundamentally. The first disjunct implies ¬**Equiv*** and thus the truth of 3. So the opponent of 3 must adopt the second alternative. But while this option might seem to save **Equiv***, my contention will be that appearances here are misleading. Let's say that things that do not have being in any fundamental sense, but do have being non-fundamentally, have being merely generically. In what follows, I am going to argue that there is a distinctively *metaphysical* sense in which merely generic being is non-fundamental that the exponent of **Equiv*** cannot capture in quantificational terms.

When we say that merely generic being is non-fundamental one thing we might mean is that a quantifier corresponding to merely generic being does not form part of our fundamental ideology. But this can't be the intended sense here. To see this, notice first that the fundamental is generally understood to be complete in the sense that the world can be fully described without remainder using only fundamental vocabulary.[30] Yet consider now the (conceptually possible) world where there is something that has being merely generically. At this world, we need the *non-fundamental* general

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are, however, very different from those under consideration; the critical point is that alethic pluralists are not forced *by a version of the foregoing argument* to regard minimal truth as a determinable$_3$.

[30] See Sider 2011, p. 105.

existential quantifier to fully describe reality; without it, we could not quantify over the things that have being merely generically. Nonetheless, insofar as we are ontological pluralists, we must maintain that generic being is less fundamental than the other ways of having being at this world.[31] So the non-fundamentality of generic being and hence also of *merely* generic being (the latter being defined in terms of the former) must consist in something other than its ideological role.[32]

It is natural to instead construe the non-fundamentality of merely generic being in metaphysical terms. After all, the reason for insisting that merely generic being must be non-fundamental derives from our (assumed) commitment to ontological pluralism and pluralism is a substantively metaphysical view. There are various ways we might try to fill in this metaphysical account of non-fundamentality: perhaps merely generic beings have a lesser degree of being or perhaps they are further from reality.[33] For the purposes of our argument, we need not choose; regardless of the details, I claim that this *metaphysical* kind of non-fundamentality cannot be captured quantificationally.

The key assumption underpinning this thought is that quantifiers are essentially formal or logical bits of language. (Or, more specifically, that my interlocutors must regard quantifiers as such.) Again we can draw on generalized quantifier theory: in this framework quantifiers are interpreted, semantically speaking, as functions from a universe to a class of subsets of that universe. The problem for defenders of **Equiv*** is that, *qua* functions, quantifiers can't capture the distinctively metaphysical dependency we are trying to express.[34] In itself, a function is ultimately just a kind of association be-

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[31] I assume that pluralism is necessarily true if true. Cf. note 36 below.

[32] We could appeal here to McSweeney's distinction between ideological and ontological realism. In these terms, my thought is that in the case at hand the antecedent of premise 3 rules out a version of ideological realism. See McSweeney 2019, pp. 119–20, 134.

[33] See respectively McDaniel 2017, pp. 146–54, 195–222 and Fine 2001, especially p. 26.

[34] For Sider, this line of argument contains a solecism: he is careful to emphasize that when we say that ∃ is fundamental, we are asserting neither that a bit of language is fundamental nor that the semantic value of this expression is fundamental. Rather we are affirming that fundamentally the world has a

tween things—set-theoretically, a set of ordered pairs. Some functions (associations) may be more joint-carving than others in the sense that a perspicuous ideology will hew the world using a given set of associations (functions) rather than some other set. But as we've seen, this is not the kind of non-fundamentality at issue when it comes to merely generic being. Let's help ourselves to a quantifier ranging over all and only things that have being merely generically—$\exists_{MG}$. What we want to say is that anything in the domain of $\exists_{MG}$ has being in a non-fundamental sense. But *qua* function, all that $\exists_{MG}$ expresses is the association between these things and the universe $\mathcal{M}$ determined by some possible world . This won't suffice to capture the kind of dependency at issue because a thing's ontological status, its way of being, is not associational but intrinsic to the thing itself.

The defender of **Equiv*** may object at this point. Predicates (for instance) are interpreted model-theoretically as subsets of a universe, but we use them to represent properties even though (arguably at least) being red involves more than being the member of some set. Something similar should hold for quantifiers. Put differently, generalized quantifier theory is a piece of *formal* semantics; it doesn't tell us what quantification *means*, but just provides a model for studying its logic.[35] The problem is that proponents of **Equiv*** are not entitled to this move. Recall from section 1, that their view is that there just isn't an independent ontological structure out there to be hewed. Ontology is a mere taxonomy that drops out of theories of natural science whenever such theories are articulated in languages with a certain (quantified) structure. For them, then, for our world to have quantificational structure just is for it to be apt for

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certain structure (Sider 2011, p. 91). I do not see this as inconsistent with the argument I am trying to give: my complaint is directed against a kind of deflationism to which Sider's view is a counterpoint. Sider can take quantifier fundamentality to be more than linguistic because he is committed to a kind of ontological realism. My opponent enjoys no such luxury.

[35] Cf. Burgess 2008b.

description using the kinds of functions comprised in generalized quantifier theory. Philosophers of this stripe, can't claim that quantifiers encode extra-linguistic information, while denying that there is information of this kind to be encoded.

The antecedent of premise 3 commits us either to the existence of non-beings or to the existence of merely generic beings. The first alternative falsifies **Equiv*** immediately. I've also argued that merely generic beings are dependent in a distinctively ontological way that cannot be expressed quantificationally. The remainder of the argument follows swiftly: merely generic beings would have an ontological property or status without a quantificational correlate. But in that case, there are conceivably ontological facts that are not exhausted by the quantificational facts and so **Equiv*** is falsified by the second alternative also. Premise 3 follows.

6.   From ¬Equiv* to ¬Equiv

I have been defending the premises in the conceivability argument which I presented in section 2. Since this argument is valid, if my defense of its premises succeeds, it follows that if pluralism is true, then **Equiv*** must be false. But this isn't yet sufficient to establish my goal, which was to show that pluralism was inconsistent with **Equiv**. In this section, I will show how the arguments against **Equiv*** might nonetheless also point to the falsity of **Equiv**.[36] My strategy will be twofold: first I will show how the falsity of **Equiv*** undercuts potential arguments that might be offered in support of **Equiv**; second I will offer an outline for a positive argument from ¬**Equiv*** to ¬**Equiv**.

With regard to the first task, we should observe that if **Equiv*** is false, then **Equiv** becomes a substantive metaphysical thesis for which independent argument must be

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[36] This is a strong claim: it amounts to insisting that **Equiv** is true only if it is conceptually true. Most claims are not like this. But on reflection it may not be unreasonable to hold that some fundamental metaphysical claims are either false or conceptually true. Cf. Nolan 2011, pp. 323–334.

given. Such arguments may be available: **Equiv** may be more parsimonious than the alternatives or it may provide the most elegant way to pick out the subject matter of ontology. For instance, the friend of **Equiv** will probably need fewer primitives in their ideology. But since **Equiv*** is false, there is no conceptual presumption in favor of **Equiv** (cf. Hazen 1993). Moreover the falsity of **Equiv** opens up the possibility of ontologically innocent quantification and so abductive arguments in its defense must be balanced against whatever theoretical gains are realized by the possibility of ontologically non-committal non-fundamental quantification.

This is all the more significant since the defenders of **Equiv** have not typically given abductive arguments in defense of their view.[37] It does not follow, of course, that such defenses would be unsustainable. But proponents of this kind of approach are nonetheless somewhat handicapped: if **Equiv** is not a stipulation (in which case **Equiv*** would hold also), then—setting abduction aside—it is hard to see what positive arguments could be advanced in its favor. A positive argument would presumably consist of showing that there are reasons to think that being and existence (in the technical sense in which I am employing these terms here) should be identified. But as we will see shortly, the *opposite* looks to be true. Instead, the most promising approach for defenders of **Equiv** is to argue that the alternative, ¬**Equiv**, is untenable. In the final section, though, I will undercut such arguments by showing *how* **Equiv** might be false.

First, however, let's turn to the second part of the case against **Equiv**, which requires sketching a positive argument from ¬**Equiv*** to ¬**Equiv**. I will suggest that there are a number of apparent counterexamples to **Equiv**, cases where things seem to exist without having being. So long as **Equiv*** is an epistemic possibility, these counterexamples are dialectically inefficacious: defenders of **Equiv** can reject them as conceptu-

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[37] Quine 1948 is a partial exception to this generalization.

ally incoherent. But if **Equiv*** is false, then a would-be defeater of this argument by counterexamples is eliminated, leaving the initial cases as evidence against **Equiv**.[38]

Consider then some of the proposed counterexamples. Some are straightforward: most speakers of English will be happy to say that there are various ways to the store. If pressed to explain their commitment to "ways to the store" though, they are apt to deny that such ways are comprised in their ontology. They will likely say that they didn't really mean that such "ways" *exist*. In the ideology I favor in this paper, such assertions should be parsed as denials that these ways to the store *have being*. Similarly, it is true that "there are many difficulties incumbent in the study of philosophy". But *that* truth is surely not enough to establish that such things as "difficulties" have being.

Other cases are more developed. McDaniel (McDaniel 2017, pp. 140–69) argues that holes, shadows, and other absences have being in a way that is "truly degenerate", they are "almost nothings" and "beings by courtesy". He is motivated by the intuition that holes are somehow less than fully real *and* that there is a hole in the middle of at least one doughnut. I agree with McDaniel that both of the foregoing conjuncts look true. And while his own proposal is not strictly inconsistent with **Equiv**—having being by courtesy still is, ultimately, a way of having being—there is arguably a stronger intuition that it fails to fully capture precisely because it is consistent with **Equiv**. The intuition is that holes don't have being at all. After all, intuitively to be a hole just is to be some kind of bounded interruption in the being of some substance. We can capture

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[38] The point must be made carefully: any counterexample to **Equiv** is also a counterexample to **Equiv***. It nonetheless seems to me that appeals to **Equiv** in this context beg the question, while appeals to **Equiv*** do not. The thought is that being question-begging requires more than merely making assumptions that entail the relevant conclusion since we would otherwise rule out all deductively valid arguments. I conjecture that what in fact matters is the degree of overlap in subject-matter between conclusion and premises. The cases I introduce in this section have nothing to say about conceivability. As such, they arguably share a subject matter with **Equiv** but not with **Equiv*** (or at least not to the same degree). Appealing to **Equiv** to answer such cases is thus question-begging in a way that appealing to **Equiv*** would not be.

this second intuition by going further than McDaniel: insisting that while there are shadows and holes, these do not have being by courtesy and so do not have being at all. But this conclusion *is* inconsistent with **Equiv**.

Cases like these seem powerful to me; denials that the relevant English platitudes—statements like "there's more than one way to get there"—are true look correspondingly ad hoc. The default response is that such intuitions are *incoherent*. But this response requires the truth of **Equiv*** and I argued above that **Equiv*** is inconsistent with pluralism. In that case, though, the foregoing examples bear with full force against the proponent of **Equiv** who must either give up her thesis, expand her ontology to include a whole host of dubious entities, or abandon her pluralism.

7.   Conclusion: going beyond Equiv

If the argument I outlined above succeeds, then if pluralism is true there could be things that do not have being. This might seem like a reductio of pluralism, since it is *prima facie* obscure how the fact that there are some *G*s could fail to be sufficient for the *G*s to have being. What extra "ingredient" could be required to bring those *G*s that there are within the fold of ontology? In this concluding section, I will suggest one way to give content to the stipulative distinction between being and existence that I introduced at the beginning of the paper.

One place to start is with the intuition that supervenient entities are "an ontological free lunch".[39] For those who share such a view, the physicalist who can show that mentality supervenes on physical states has a more *parsimonious* view than their dualist rival for whom mental and physical states are modally independent. Since, though,

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[39] The phrase is Armstrong's, Armstrong 1997, p. 12,

supervenient things need not be identical to the things on which they supervene, traditional views of parsimony don't support this judgment.[40] For example, according to a version of Ockham's famous razor, what matters for evaluating a theory's parsimony is simply the number of things posited by that theory. But, in part because the Ockhamite verdict looks wrong in the present case, a number of contemporary proposals reject the dictum that everything that exists according to a theory makes an equal contribution to that theory's parsimony (or unparsimony, as the case may be).[41]

Assuming that these proposals are on the right lines, we have a way to make sense of the extra element that might be required for a thing to have being. A theory is parsimonious to the extent that it does not make undue ontological demands of the world. (I take this to be what it *means* for a theory to be parsimonious.) I want to tentatively propose that we can make sense of what else is required for an existent to have being by appeal to the ways that theories may differ in their parsimoniousness. According to this proposal, we can understand something *s* as having being just in case whenever there exists such a thing as *s* according to a theory *T*, then *T* is ipso facto less parsimonious. This suggestion does of course take us beyond the anti-Ockhamite intuition, which in itself does not require us to assert that non-fundamental things do not have being. Rather the thought is that anti-Ockhamite principles of parsimony are tracking some kind of ontological demandingness and that it could be this demandingness that provides the extra "ingredient" required for something to have being. Importantly, the proposal here is merely meant to provide a conceptual route for ascribing content to the notion of "having being". To make parsimony facts the metaphysical ground

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[40] This holds true whether we are talking about qualitative or quantitative parsimony, since the dualist recognizes more modally independent kinds of states than the physicalist.

[41] Arguments against the Ockhamite approach are given in Bennett 2017, pp. 220–5, pp. 226–8, and Schaffer 2014. For a response see Da Vee 2020.

of our metaontology seems objectionably backwards. But the proposal here is just that we have an implicit concept of ontological *weight* that is *disclosed* in our reasoning about ontological parsimony and that ontological weightiness could be the difference between mere existence and having being.

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