PARAPHRASE, SEMANTICS, AND ONTOLOGY

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1. Introduction

Consider the following pairs of sentences:

(1) The average mum has 2.4 children.
(1*) There are 2.4x as many children as mums. [compatible with there being no average mum] (cf. Melia [1995])

(2) I saw myself in the mirror.
(2*) I saw my body in the mirror. [compatible with dualism]

(3) There is a crack in my favorite vase.
(3*) My favorite vase is cracked. [compatible with there being no cracks[1]] (cf. Lewis and Lewis [1970])

(4) Santa Claus does not exist.
(4*) 'Santa Claus' does not refer. [compatible with anti-Meinongianism] (cf. Donnellan [1974])

(5) It's possible for only two things to exist.
(5*) It's possible for only two "ordinary" things to exist. [compatible with compositional universalism] (cf. Lewis [1986])

(6) There is a chair in Ava's closet.
(6*) There are some simples arranged chair-wise in Ava's closet. [compatible with eliminativism about composite objects] (cf. van Inwagen [1990])

(7) A has reason to φ in C.
(7*) φ-ing in C is what A would desire if she had a maximally informed, coherent, unified set of desires. [compatible with naturalism] (cf. Smith [1997])

(8) Red is a color.
(8*) Necessarily, all red things are colored. [compatible with nominalism]

(9) There are no golden mountains.
(9*) There are no golden mountains spatiotemporally connected to me. [compatible with Lewisian modal realism] (cf. Lewis [1986])

(10) Joe freely chose to lie to Mary.
(10*) Joe's choice to lie to Mary was caused by his beliefs and desires. [compatible with determinism]

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[1]For ease of exposition I assume that cracks are not material objects.

These are examples of *reconciling paraphrases*: paraphrases that are intended to show that two apparently inconsistent claims are in fact consistent. The original sentence in each of the examples is in apparent conflict with the corresponding bracketed philosophical thesis. The second sentence is offered as a paraphrase of the first in order to reconcile it with that thesis—to argue that the apparent conflict between them is *merely* apparent. So anti-Meinongians paraphrase negative existentials in order to argue that they are consistent with there being no non-existent objects; David Lewis paraphrases ordinary truths apparently incompatible with modal realism or compositional universalism; nominalists paraphrase scientific and commonsense truths that apparently refer to or quantify over abstract objects; etc.

Philosophers sometimes intend their paraphrases to be *revisionary*—to replace something they thought was true but have been led to reject. When we cannot reconcile something we believe with the other things we take to be the case, we often look for such a revisionary paraphrase: a replacement truth in the neighborhood of what we now take to be a falsehood.

Such *revisionary* paraphrases are relatively unproblematic. A growing number of philosophers have come to doubt the legitimacy of *reconciling* paraphrases, however. This is because of the lack of "respectable" evidence that can be provided on their behalf. Specifically, these critics think that in order to be plausible, reconciling paraphrases must be accompanied by evidence that would be of interest to linguists, semanticists, or philosophers of language. Since reconciling paraphrases are almost never offered with such evidence, these critics maintain that such paraphrases can be dismissed as mere wishful thinking. The central thesis of this paper is that this concern is mistaken: for many paraphrases, a lack of such evidence is not even a concern, much less a condemnation.[2]

2. The Lack of Scientific Evidence Objection

As the above examples indicate, reconciling paraphrases are used in diverse areas of philosophical inquiry. They have been most discussed in connection with Quinean meta-ontology, but there is nothing special about that application. Philosophers use paraphrase to reconcile their theories with the other things they believe: their other philosophical theories as well as the deliverances of non-philosophical inquiry, especially common sense and science. Paraphrase is used to argue that the appearance of inconsistency between two claims is illusory—generated by the way the claims are formulated, and not by the content of the claims themselves. When it is possible to provide paraphrases of apparently inconsistent claims—paraphrases that do not themselves appear to be inconsistent—this gives us evidence that the apparent inconsistency between the claims is misleading. We produce such paraphrases, then, in order to undermine the appearance of inconsistency between the things we believe—typically, to defeat certain reasons for thinking that our philosophical theories are inconsistent with the non-philosophical facts.

[2]Another prominent worry about reconciling paraphrases is that a symmetry necessary for them to be successful—the symmetry of the "expresses the same claim" relation—necessitates a symmetry sufficient for them to be a failure: the symmetry of the "has the same (unwanted) implications" relation. This objection was raised most famously in Alston [1958], but also appears in Jackson [1980], Melia [1995], Yablo [1998], Burgess and Rosen [2005], Varzi [2007], Schaffer [2009], and Williams [2012]. See Keller [forthcoming] for a critical discussion.

Given the role of paraphrase in philosophical inquiry, it may seem surprising how indifferent many philosophers are to how their paraphrases are received by both ordinary speakers and language experts. Many paraphrases seem absurd if offered as reformulations that "say the same thing as" the sentences they paraphrase. For example, (6*) seems to be nothing if not revisionary in spirit. Even upon reflection, most speakers do not agree that (6) and (6*) are different ways of saying the same thing. And this commonsense judgement seems to be supported by the considered judgement of linguists and semanticists. But if (6*) doesn't express the fact expressed by (6), it is hard to see how it could be of any use in reconciling that fact with eliminativism about composite objects.

Accordingly, this and other examples of paraphrase face an objection from the lack of scientific evidence—henceforth the **(LSE) objection**. John Burgess and Gideon Rosen put the worry as follows:

> there is a total lack of scientific evidence in favor of any such [philosophical] reconstrual as a theory of what ordinary... assertions mean. Or at least, no [philosophers] favoring such a reconstrual have ever published their suggestions in a linguistics journal with evidence such as a linguist without ulterior [philosophical] motives might accept.[3]

This objection has recently been pushed against paraphrases like (5*) and (6*) by Daniel Korman:

> One often hears it said in conversation about universalism that the apparent conflict with folk discourse poses no serious problem, for the universalist can just say that the folk are restricting their quantifiers. What I have tried to show is that... this is a substantive semantic hypothesis... for which there seems to be no evidence... [Universalists] are not alone in trying to reconcile [apparently] revisionary metaphysical theories with discourse about material objects. For instance, many philosophers (but no linguists, to my knowledge) have endorsed the semantic hypothesis that such English sentences as 'there are tables in the next room', 'this piece of paper exists now', or 'this tree had fewer branches last year' have two uses in English: a "loose and popular" use on which they say something obviously true, and a "strict and philosophical use" on which they express substantive philosophical claims... there seems to be no... evidence for these semantic hypotheses...[4]

[3]Burgess and Rosen [2005], p.525.

[4]Korman [2007], p.332. See also Korman [2009] and Korman [2013]. Korman's worry about (5) is a straightforward instance of the LSE objection: that there isn't linguistic evidence for thinking that ordinary uses of (5) are implicitly restricted *à la* (5*). His worry about (6) is that there is no linguistic evidence for the existence of two uses of it: a "strict and philosophical" use where (6) expresses something inconsistent with eliminativism, and a "loose and popular" use where (6) expresses something along the lines of (6*). Since this concern is different than the objection discussed in the main text, let me indicate how what I say there does and does not respond to it. There is a growing consensus that (6) can have these two uses without being ambiguous. Rather, the two uses derive from special features of a certain context where (6) is sometimes uttered: the context of the metaphysics room. Many eliminativists claim that what is expressed by (6) in the metaphysics room is inconsistent with elimanitivism, but that what is expressed by (6) in ordinary contexts has the truth conditions of (6*). This paper tries to explain how ordinary utterances of (6) could have the truth conditions of (6*), but it doesn't address the question of why we should

And a similar concern seems to lie behind the following famous remarks by Saul Kripke:

> The philosopher advocates a view apparently in patent contradiction to common sense. Rather than repudiating common sense, he asserts that the conflict comes from a philosophical misinterpretation of common language—sometimes he adds that the misinterpretation is encouraged by the 'superficial form' of ordinary speech. He offers his own analysis of the relevant common assertions, one that shows that they do not really say what they seem to say... Personally I think that such philosophical claims are almost invariably suspect. What the claimant calls a 'misleading philosophical misconstrual' of the ordinary statement is probably the natural and correct understanding.[5]

Examples could be multiplied further—compare, e.g., Timothy Williamson's admonishments about philosophy being properly "disciplined by" semantics in *The Philosophy of Philosophy*.[6] The influence of the LSE objection is pervasive, and deservedly so: the worry it raises is a deep and important one. The crux of the objection is that the claims made by paraphrists are simply not credible, since they lack respectable (scientific) evidence—evidence that would be of interest to semanticists, linguists, or philosophers of language.[7] To put forth a reconciling paraphrase involves making a claim about meaning, but the arguments given in support of typical paraphrase proposals do not meet the argumentative standards of the disciplines that study meaning. Proponents of the LSE objection conclude that such paraphrases are based on nothing more than wishful thinking.

3. Why Care About Common Sense?

One might not see much value in responding to the LSE objection if one does not see any reason to care about reconciling common sense with our philosophical theories. I assume most readers will agree that it is good for our philosophical theories to be consistent with *science*—or at least, mature and successful science, which is what I am using 'science' to refer to here. Many examples of paraphrase, however, are attempts to reconcile our philosophical theories with things we believe for non-scientific reasons. And one might wonder why we should worry about reconciling our theories with such "commonsense" convictions. For example, given how unlovely (6*) seems as a paraphrase of (6), why doesn't van Inwagen simply put his theory forward as a *revision* of our ordinary way of thinking?

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believe that (6) is context sensitive in this way, nor the question of why or how the context of the metaphysics room has this effect on the content of (6). For (admittedly partial) answers to these questions, see Dorr [2005], Horgan and Potrč [2008], Fine [2009], Sider [2009], Sider [2012], Sider [2013], and van Inwagen [2014]. For criticism see Hirsch [2008] and Korman [2013]. Thanks to David Braun for stressing the difference between Korman's worries about (5*) and (6*).

[5]Kripke [1982], p.65

[6]Williamson [2007], p.285

[7]For the purposes of this paper, I do not distinguish between the evidence relevant to linguistics, semantics, lexicographers, empirically oriented philosophy of language, etc. I also don't worry about how to distinguish the "scientific" evidence appealed to by practitioners of these disciplines from the "non-scientific" evidence typically given by paraphrists. However the distinction is drawn, the relevant premise of the LSE objection is correct: the arguments normally given by paraphrists would not be of interest to typical linguists, semanticists, etc.

This is an important question, and van Inwagen's answer to it provides helpful background for the critique of the LSE objection to come. Van Inwagen says the following about why he wants to provide *non*-revisionary paraphrases of sentences like (6):

> ...there is what we might call Universal Belief: that body of propositions that has been accepted by every human being who has ever lived, bar a few imbeciles and madmen... Is the existence of chairs—or, at any rate, of things suitable for sitting on, like stones and stumps—a matter of Universal Belief? If it were, this would count strongly against my position, for any philosopher who denies what practically *everyone* believes is, so far as I can see, adopting a position according to which the human capacity for knowing the truth about things is radically defective. And why should he think that his own capacities are the exception to the rule?[8]

This is a close variant on the standard account of the importance of respecting "common sense", which is that ordinary convictions constrain our philosophical theorizing because we almost always have more evidence for such convictions than we do for our philosophical theories. A defense of this methodology would be out of place here, but note that van Inwagen *accepts* the existence of "Moorean facts", including the fact ordinarily expressed by (6). Van Inwagen claims, however, that such facts are consistent with his metaphysical theory, since in addition to accepting the *existence* of Moorean facts, he also accepts Moore's view of the *depth*, or lack thereof, of the Moorean facts. As David Armstrong puts it:

> Moore was always ready to insist on what we might call the *shallowness* of truistic or Moorean knowledge. The way he would have put it himself was that while, for instance, it is a truism that there is motion, nevertheless that knowledge could co-exist with ignorance of... the true *analysis* of motion. I will put his point by saying that we can know very well that motion exists, yet at the same time not know just what the true nature of motion is. Motion is an utterly familiar phenomenon, we know it when we see it, or feel it, but our understanding of it, I think, is very far from complete.[9]

As applied to (6), we might say that it is a Moorean fact *that* there is a chair in Ava's closet, but there is no Moorean fact about how to *understand* or *analyze* that claim—no Moorean facts about the nature of its *truth conditions* or potential truthmakers. To put things in linguistic terms, it may be a Moorean fact that 'there is a chair in Ava's closet' expresses a true proposition, but there is no Moorean fact about *which* proposition it expresses. Hence, there can be legitimate debate about what proposition that is, and what is required for it to be true. So there is room, at least in theory, for van Inwagen to claim that his philosophical theory is consistent with "commonsense" matters of universal belief, such as that there are things on which people sometimes sit. As we have seen, this is what he *does* claim, arguing that the belief ordinary non-philosophers express with 'there are chairs' is not contradicted by his metaphysical theory.

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[8]van Inwagen [1990], p.103.
[9]Armstrong [2006], p.160-1

The dialectical importance of van Inwagen's paraphrase lies in the fact that it provides him with a response to (6) and other such apparent counterexamples to his theory. But the cogency of this response rests squarely on the claimed equivalence between (6) and (6*). This is precisely the target of the LSE objection. Sentences seemingly "about" chairs like (6) are not synonymous, in any intuitive sense, with sentences about mereological simples like (6*). And of course no linguist has ever proposed that the two sentences are equivalent in meaning.[10]

Before we go any further, I want to make clear that my goal is not to defend van Inwagen's paraphrases, nor any of the other paraphrases given above. For a variety of reasons, I think that most of them are ultimately unsuccessful. For example, the strategy employed in (3*) doesn't generalize, and (2*) is unnecessary since dualism is false. As regards (6*), I think that it is at best correct if van Inwagen's ontology is correct, and I am skeptical about his ontology. My goal here is rather to defend the *approach* to paraphrase that lies behind these examples—to show that they do not fail simply because of a lack of linguistic evidence. Of course, they may well fail for independent reasons. I am only arguing that it is not, *in general*, a good objection to point out that there is no linguistic evidence supporting a paraphrase—that the success of a paraphrase is not something to be evaluated solely or even mainly in terms of the linguistic evidence that can be marshaled in its favor.

4. The Argument

There are three considerations that significantly blunt the force of the LSE objection. The first is that speakers often fail to say what they mean. The second is that widely-accepted metasemantic theses entail that there is not a delimited range of evidence relevant to the determination of meaning—anything, including metaphysics, can play a role. The third is that successful paraphrases do not need to preserve the semantic contents of the sentences they paraphrase, as long as they preserve their truth conditions.

4.1. **Speaker's Meaning and Semantic Content.** The first problem with the LSE objection arises from the distinction between semantic content and speaker's meaning. It is widely held that what a *speaker* means—the belief she intends to assert or convey with an utterance—is often different than the semantic content of the sentence she uses to express that belief, even relative to context.[11] Reconciling paraphrases, however, are attempts to resolve apparent conflicts between our *beliefs*. Reconciling the things we *say* is only of instrumental value. If our goal is to reconcile our philosophical theories with the other things we take to be the case, the semantic contents of our sentences are relevant only insofar as they correspond with the contents of our minds. But what a speaker says is imperfect (albeit important) evidence about what she thinks, even when she's speaking sincerely, since what a

[10]As indicated above, Dan Korman has repeatedly pushed this objection against van Inwagen's paraphrases. Related objections are pushed in Mackie [1993], Hawthorne and Michael [1996], and Merricks [2001].

[11]Scott Soames, e.g., writes, "the semantic content of a sentence doesn't always determine what is asserted and conveyed by literal uses of it. Sometimes more than the semantic content is asserted or conveyed, and sometimes the semantic content isn't asserted at all." (Soames [2008]) Similar conclusions have been defended in Kripke [1979], Grice [1989], Bach [2001], Recanati [2004], and Cappelen and Lepore [2005]. Jason Stanley is perhaps the sharpest critic of this approach. See, e.g., Stanley [2007a] and King and Stanley [2005].

speaker intends to communicate is underdetermined by the semantic contents of her utterances. Since we can have evidence about what a speaker believes that goes beyond our evidence about the semantic contents of her utterances, a lack of *semantic* evidence that a speaker intends to communicate φ in uttering S does not entail that we have no *respectable* evidence that φ is the belief she intends to communicate in uttering S.

Consider, for example, (2) and (2*). Avowed substance dualists will say things like 'I saw myself in the mirror', 'I was strapped into my seat', etc. Does the fact that professed dualists utter such sentences without visible reservation show that they are not dualists after all, or that they are inconsistent dualists? Of course not. When a dualist makes such utterances, she means only that she saw her body in the mirror, that her body was strapped in, etc. If I know that the speaker is a dualist, I will know that is all she means. Dualists who thus speak with the vulgar need not be presupposing a revisionary semantic theory of the first person indexical, however. Rather, their uses of such sentences can be explained by the fact that the dualistically acceptable paraphrases are unwieldy, and that if any confusion arises, it can be easily cleared up. A similar phenomenon occurs when one says things like 'I'm parked in the B lot' in order to communicate that *one's car* is parked in the B lot. As a rule, utterances of 'I' refer to the speaker, and never to her automobile, but familiar Gricean mechanisms explain why 'I'm parked in the B lot' can be used to communicate what it does.[12] As David Lewis once said, "abuse of language makes for easier communication than circumlocution or neologism... I trust that [my audience] will understand [what] I mean...".[13]

Similar considerations apply to (1)/(1*) and (3)/(3*). If the speaker takes them to be mere stylistic variants, the "linguistic evidence" is irrelevant to whether (3*) is a good paraphrase of (3), or (1*) is a good paraphrase of (1). For example, I have a belief about the proportion of children and mums, and I make decisions about whether to express that belief using (1) or (1*) for purely stylistic reasons. Similarly, I have a belief about my vase's being damaged in a certain way, and my decisions about what sentence to use to express that belief are based on style rather than substance. The most that linguistic considerations can show is that the semantic contents of the sentences I use to express my picture of the world would change if I replaced (1)-(3) with (1*)-(3*). They cannot show that speaker's meaning would not be preserved. In cases (1)-(3), the paraphrist has a certain belief, and from her perspective the starred versions are simply different ways that she might express that belief.

It might be objected that semantics or linguistics tells us that these apparently different ways of expressing that belief are not in fact different ways of expressing it, but subtly different ways of refining, revising, or misstating it. So, for example, by formulating my belief about the vase using (3), I say something that entails that there are cracks, but if I use (3*), I do *not* say anything that entails that there are cracks. If this is the case, then there is no way for me to avoid committing myself

[12]Stanley [1998] convincingly argues against various attempts to explicate the equivalence between (2) and (2*) *semantically*, but that there are no objections to a semantic treatment of 'I'm parked in the B lot'. Whether 'I'm parked in the B lot' has a literally true semantic content is not central to the above argument, however. My suggestion is that it is possible for dualists to use sentences like (2) as a shorthand way to communicate the content of sentences like (2*), independently of the literal semantic content of (2). But if this is possible, it is very likely actual.

[13]Lewis [1997], fn.1.

to an ontology of cracks unless I stop asserting (3). But then, since the particular (fine-grained) claim I happen to have been asserting is not one I have any special attachment to, there is no cost to giving it up—I only used (3) as a means to express my (coarse-grained) thought about my vase being cracked. If that sentence has baggage that I do not wish to carry, I may simply drop it in favor of another expression that does *not* have that baggage, such as (3*). In other words, even if (3*) does not express the same proposition as (3), they will both serve equally well to express my belief about the vase, and *that is all that matters* for a reconciling paraphrase to be a success. *Mutatis mutandis* for (1) and (1*).

The upshot of all of this is that, even if it can be established that the paraphrase and the original sentence are not *semantically* equivalent, they might still be equivalent in all the ways that matter from the perspective of the speaker—just as good for verbally communicating her conception of the world, and indeed, for telling the whole truth from the perspective of the speaker. Given that there are a variety of different linguistic vehicles that I *regard* as able expressions of some particular thought of mine, determining whether there is a linguistic vehicle that expresses that thought in a way that does not entail anything I reject will be a philosophically important endeavor. While paraphrases in this sense will be semantically revisionary, they will not involve revising my conception of reality. Rather, they will be tools for reconciling the commitments of my discourse with the commitments of my thought.

4.1.1. *Speaker's Intentions and Semantic Content.* The argument in the previous section assumed that there can be a significant gap between what a speaker means and the semantic content of the sentence she utters, and in particular that the semantic content of (2) in the mouth of a dualist is *not* what she actually means: that she saw her body in the mirror. In this section I will show that the LSE objection fares no better if we relax that assumption.

In order to narrow the gap between speaker's meaning and semantic content—and in particular to maintain that (2) has the same semantic content as (2*) in the mouth of a dualist—we are almost certainly going to have to let speaker's *intentions* make significant contributions to the determination of semantic content.[14] But since the speaker's intentions are often neither determined by nor reflected in the linguistic evidence, it follows that the linguistic evidence does not wholly determine the semantic contents of our sentences. For example, there is not any special linguistic evidence that a dualist means (2*) when she utters (2). If her audience does not know the speaker is a dualist—and if they themselves take materialism for granted—they will naturally think that she believes that she "literally" saw herself

[14]Wettstein [1984] argues persuasively that speakers' intentions are not needed to account for the reference of standard indexicals and demonstratives. But as the contributions of "context" get more complicated, this becomes a much more difficult thesis to defend. For example, in the accounts of complex demonstratives (like 'that man') in Kaplan [1989a] and King [2001] and in the account of quantifier domain restriction in Stanley and Szabo [2000], speakers' intentions play a significant role in getting us from the conventional meaning of an expression to what is expressed in a given context. Furthermore, speaker's intentions are plausibly responsible for disambiguation. As Bach [2000] argues, "...it is hard to see how the context, rather than the speaker's intention, could determine which of several like-sounding sentence he is (intends to be) uttering. If after a terrible round a golfer utters 'I hate my clubs', the sentence he is uttering could, if he so intended it, contain the word 'club' meaning social group. Of course, this won't be obvious to his audience, who will misidentify the sentence as one containing the word 'club' meaning golf stick." (fn.14)

in the mirror. But an audience that knows the speaker is a dualist will interpret her *à la* (2*).

Why will the dualist's audience interpret her in that way? One plausible explanation is that they will be guided by a principle of charity: a presumption of truth or reasonableness. Such a principle would take *everything* we know about both the speaker and the world into account, since what is true or reasonable to believe depends on the totality of the evidence. So, if charity is an interpretational constraint, there isn't a special delimited set of linguistic data that is privileged with respect to finding correct interpretations. Anything and everything might be relevant.

In fact, a presumption of truth or reasonableness will plausibly direct us to accept certain paraphrases, at least if we grant for the sake of argument that the corresponding philosophical theories are correct. For example, if eliminativism is correct, interpreting sentences such as (6) *à la* (6*) will maximize the number of truths spoken. Less obviously, such an interpretation would maximize reasonableness as well. For what evidence do the ordinary folk (or scientists, for that matter) have that eliminativism is false? By all appearances, they don't have *any*: it is not an empirical claim, and we can safely assume that most non-philosophers are unfamiliar with the relevant metaphysical arguments. Hence, a presumption of reasonableness would yield the conclusion that we should not interpret non-philosophers to be taking a stand on this matter of abstruse metaphysics when making casual or even scientifically informed pronouncements about what there is. We should rather interpret such utterances as being neutral between the various competing theories of composition. This in turn supports van Inwagen's paraphrases, since they are neutral with regard to theories of composition. Independently of whether there are chairs, there are certainly simples arranged chair-wise.[15]

4.1.2. *Hard and Easy Cases.* So the LSE objection fails in cases (1)-(3). There seems to be an important difference between examples (1)-(3) and (5)-(10), however. In (1)-(3) and to some extent (4), ordinary speakers will typically grant that the paraphrase "says the same thing" as the original sentence—that they are two different but equivalent ways of "putting things". To ordinary speakers, these paraphrases seem intuitively correct. Linguists might demur, but given that the purpose of paraphrase is to reconcile the things we believe, the speaker's beliefs take priority over linguistic theory. Ordinary speakers, however, do *not* take (5*)-(10*) to be mere reformulations of (5)-(10). Such paraphrases are not pre-theoretically or intuitively correct. So the distinction between speaker's meaning and semantic content does not look like it will be of much use in defending these examples against the LSE objection. It is worth stressing, however, that (1*)-(3*) are not just toy examples—they are real paraphrases put forth by philosophers attempting to show that their picture of the world is coherent. If paraphrase can be vindicated in cases like (1)-(3), the LSE objection fails. What I aim to show in the following sections is that it doesn't only fail in "easy" cases like (1)-(3), but also in "hard" cases like (5)-(10).

[15]Accepting van Inwagen's paraphrases does require us to take a stand on a matter of abstruse fundamental physics, however: for his paraphrases to work, matter must be fundamentally particulate rather than "gunky". (See Sider [1993]) If there were paraphrases that remained neutral on the metaphysics *and* the physics that would be ideal. Unfortunately there aren't.

4.2. **What is "Linguistic Evidence"?** According to the proponents of the LSE objection, a sufficient amount of *linguistic* evidence is an important prerequisite for the success of a paraphrase. The first problem with the LSE objection as it applies to hard cases like (5)-(10) is that widely held views in semantics and metasemantics hold that the semantic facts are determined (in part) by the truth about metaphysics.[16] Such theories entail that the *total* linguistic evidence goes beyond the kind of "pure" linguistic evidence appealed to in typical linguistics papers—and that the total linguistic evidence may include metaphysical considerations. Standard forms of *semantic externalism* are the most well-known theories of this kind.

4.2.1. *Semantic Externalism.* As a result of work by Saul Kripke, Hillary Putnam, and Tyler Burge,[17] many philosophers have become convinced that the facts about meaning are determined in part by things external to the mind. For example, there is an important sense in which 'water' and 'H_2O' have the same meaning.[18] This fact, however, was discovered by chemists, not linguists. And the *reason* this fact was not discovered by linguists is that it is a fact about the world, not linguistic practice. Just so, if, as reliabilists hold, 'Smith knows that Jones owns a Ford' means that Smith's belief that Jones owns a Ford is true, non-gettierized, and the product of a reliable mechanism, then this is a fact discovered by epistemologists, not linguists. And the reason this fact (if it is a fact) wasn't discovered by linguists is that it is a fact about knowledge, not language.[19] But if chemists have discovered a kind of meaning equivalence between 'water' and 'H_2O', and if epistemologists have discovered a kind of meaning equivalence between 'knowledge' and 'non-gettierized true belief produced by a reliable mechanism', then it is hard to see why a metaphysician couldn't (in principle) discover a kind of meaning equivalence between 'chair' and 'simples arranged chair-wise'. It might be *false* that there is any such equivalence, of course, but it is not clear why the fact that it does not have *linguistic* evidence in its favor is any more relevant here than in the knowledge and water cases.

Many "hard cases" of paraphrase are at least partially motivated by such externalist considerations. Paraphrases are typically proposed after a philosopher makes a (purported) discovery about the nature of the world. It is only as a result of her discovery about the world that she then makes a claim about meaning—it is the

[16] *Metasemantics* aims to explain how expressions come to have the meanings they have, while *semantics* aims to pair meaningful expressions with their meanings in a way compatible with our knowing them. (See, e.g., Lewis [1970] and Speaks [2011].) One way of thinking about the argument of this section is as an argument for "metasemantic liberalism"—the thesis that the truth of ordinary utterances containing a term are compatible with large degrees of error in our ordinary understanding of that term. See Sider [2013] for a discussion of metasemantic liberalism and its relation to eliminativism. Note that metasemantic liberalism is also consistent with *internalist* conceptions of semantics: see §4.3 for discussion. Thanks to Louise Antony for suggesting that I explore the relationship between the conclusions of this paper and semantic internalism.

[17] See Putnam [1975], Burge [1979], and Kripke [1980].

[18] After all, they have the same intension. Of course, many contemporary Russellians deny that 'water' and 'H_2O' have the same semantic content. But this just offers further support for the argument in §4.3.

[19] See Williamson [2007] for a detailed defense of a generalization of this thesis. If you don't think that necessarily equivalent contingent sentences with the same subject mater are semantically equivalent in any interesting sense, you should also deny that paraphrases need be semantically equivalent, in which case the LSE Objection has no force. See §4.3.

change in her conception of reality that underwrites the change in her theory of meaning. For example, certain compatibilists claim to have discovered that choices caused by one's beliefs and desires can be both free and determined. As a result, such compatibilists hold that 'Joe freely chose to lie to Mary' means nothing more than that Joe's choice to lie to Mary was caused by his beliefs and desires. If this analysis is correct, it was discovered on the basis of metaphysical theorizing, not semantics. But if the evidence for such meaning equivalences comes from outside semantics proper, a lack of *semantic* evidence cannot be a significant objection to the compatibilist's claim about meaning. The phenomenon of semantic externalism looks like it straightforwardly contradicts a critical assumption of the LSE objection: that the metaphysical facts do not play a role in the determination of meaning. If controversial truths about metaphysics are relevant to the determination of semantic content (because of semantic externalism), then a "pure" semantic theory that ignores the results of metaphysical inquiry will be based on an unrepresentative subset of the evidence. If this is the case, paraphrase proposals that conflict with such "pure" semantic theories may be better supported by the *total* evidence than paraphrases that comport with such theories.

4.2.2. *Metaphysical Intrusion: Use.* But how, exactly, can semantic externalism be used to buttress the kind of "non-scientific" paraphrases given by van Inwagen and others? In the cases discussed above, it is relatively clear how the metaphysical facts bear on the semantic ones: the facts about metaphysics are (partly) determining the facts about use. As a matter of fact, we *use* 'water' to refer to what is in fact H_2O, we apply 'knowledge' to what are in fact non-gettierized true beliefs produced by reliable mechanisms, and we use 'free choice' to refer to actions that are caused by the beliefs and desires of the person who performs them.[20] This illustrates one important kind of 'metaphysical intrusion', whereby semantics is contaminated by metaphysics: the facts about use depend (in part) on the metaphysical facts, and the facts about meaning depend on the facts about use. Hence, the truth about metaphysics will be partly determinative of the truth about semantics.

Let's look at how this would apply to the composition cases. If we assume that Lewis's compositional universalism is true—that for every two things there is a whole composed out of them—it follows that we use our quantifiers restrictedly, just as Lewis claims. If universalism is true, we do not typically *use* 'there is' to quantify over everything there is—indeed we almost never do so. Similarly, if van Inwagen's eliminativism is correct, and there are no non-living composite objects, it follows that we use expressions like 'table' and 'chair' in more or less exactly the way van Inwagen describes—that is, we use them in the presence of and hence presumably to designate what are in fact nothing more than simples arranged table-wise and chair-wise. These are just specific examples of a general principle: in order to determine what the facts about use are, *we have to determine what there is.* If there are no rabbits, the natives do not use 'gavagai' in the presence of rabbits. If there are no undetached rabbit parts, the natives do not use 'gavagai' in the presence of undetached rabbit parts. If all that exists are mereological simples arranged in different configurations, the natives use 'gavagai' in the presence of certain such configurations and in the presence of nothing else.

[20]Assuming for the sake of argument that H_2Oism, reliabilism, and compatibilism are true.

Hence, if meaning supervenes to any important extent on use, a layman's—or, indeed, a linguist's—judgements about what we mean or are referring to when we utter sentences like (6) or (5) are going to be largely determined by, and hence worth little more than, a layman's or linguist's judgements about the correct principle of composition. What we use our words in the presence of depends on what there is. As Timothy Williamson quipped, "What there is determines what there is for us to mean."[21]

Before moving on, I want to underscore the importance of the hypothetical nature of this defense of Lewis and van Inwagen's paraphrases. I have argued that *if* van Inwagen or Lewis are right about composition, their claims about semantics are much more plausible. Whether composition never, always, or merely sometimes occurs does not make an observable difference. For all the empirical evidence shows, and hence for all any non-metaphysician knows, the actual world *is* a world where universalism or eliminativism is true. Just for the sake of argument, assume that van Inwagen is right about what exists. How could that possibly threaten the truth of our ordinary discourse about tables and chairs? Is our language really so fragile as that? After all, if our world is a van Inwagen world, the word 'chair' was introduced precisely to talk about what are in fact just simples arranged chair-wise. And if this is the case, it seems hard to deny that sentences like (6) will often express truths—it's just that they will express truths more perspicuously expressed by sentences like (6*).[22]

4.2.3. *Metaphysical Intrusion: Meaning Magnetism.* A second way in which metaphysics intrudes upon semantics is through the phenomenon of meaning magnetism. According to the doctrine of meaning magnetism, of the different candidate meanings an expression might have, certain meanings—the *natural* ones—are intrinsically more likely to be meant than others. Natural meanings "carve reality at its joints": things falling under natural kinds such as *electron* and *green* are objectively similar, as opposed to things falling under non-natural kinds such as *in Arizona* and *grue*. These natural meanings have a "magnetic" effect on the determination of meaning: the magnetic effect of these special meanings can settle indeterminacies in how expressions are used, and can even override use in some cases. So, since *greenness* is more natural than *grueness*, if we find a linguistic community in which 'grün' is often uttered in the presence of things we would call "green",

[21]Williamson [2007], p.20

[22]Some think that the problem with (6*) is that it interprets the 'there is' in (6) as a plural quantifier, not that it interprets 'chair' as referring to simples arranged chair-wise. Sider [2013] takes this to be the main obstacle to this sort of paraphrase, and argues that giving up on the view that 'there is' expresses the standard (singular) existential quantifier is a significant price. But that is a price I am afraid we will just have to pay, since this appealing semantics for 'there is' fails for independent reasons. Evidently, 'there is' sometimes expresses a plural quantifier, as in 'There is a family living next door', 'There is a class that meets here at noon', 'There were 24 Allied infantry divisions that fought in the Battle of the Bulge', etc. 'Family', 'class', and 'division' appear to be plural referring expressions: since families, classes, and divisions can change in size, they cannot be identified with sets. (Similar problems beset the idea that they are mereological sums. And if families etc. are individuals, what individuals could they be if not sets or sums?) But despite the plural nature of the referents of 'family' etc., they are grammatically singular, and ordinary English allows them to be (the values of variables) bound by 'there is'. Of course, there are many examples where 'there is' seems to express a plural quantifier, "binding" grammatically plural expressions, such as 'There are students forming a circle on the quad' and 'There are critics that admire only each other'.

an interpretation according to which 'grün' means *green* is to be preferred to one according to which 'grün' means *grue*, despite the fact that they accord equally well with use. Note that this principle guiding interpretation derives from a principle about meaning: it is the fact that *green* is intrinsically more likely (or "eligible") to be *meant* than *grue* that makes *interpreting* 'grün' as meaning *green* preferable to interpreting it as meaning *grue*.

The doctrine of meaning magnetism might usefully be compared to the idea that simplicity is a theoretical virtue. It is widely accepted that, of all the theories that are compatible with the evidence, certain of those theories—the simple ones—are antecedently more likely to be correct. And indeed, we sometimes prefer a simpler theory to a more complicated one that fits better with the empirical evidence. Meaning magnetism doctrines claim that, just as simplicity is an external constraint on theory choice in general, there is a special external constraint on semantic theory choice: naturalness.

This doctrine has been famously defended by David Lewis and Ted Sider.[23] If true, it provides a reply to Putnam's Model Theoretic Argument for anti-realism,[24] a solution to the New Riddle of Induction and Hempel's Paradox,[25] and a response to Kripke's skeptical argument in *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*.[26] Because of these and other reasons, increasing numbers of philosophers are coming to find the doctrine congenial. My aim here, however, is just to illustrate the way in which meaning magnetism makes semantics beholden to metaphysics.

To see this, think about what sort of constraints meaning magnetism puts on semantics. According to the doctrine, the prior probability of a meaning assignment being correct is a function of its naturalness. Interpretations according to which predicates express natural kinds are to be preferred to those that do not. If naturalness is a constraint on meaning, it is plausible that there will be situations where maximizing the naturalness of an interpretation will conflict with the goal of maximizing fit with use. Just as we sometimes accept a simpler scientific theory over a more complex one that fits somewhat better with our empirical observations, so might we accept a semantic theory that assigns more natural meanings over one that assigns less natural meanings but which fits somewhat better with use. Consider theories of the meaning of 'fish' as it was used by our English-speaking ancestors. People once *used* the word 'fish' to refer to animals that lived in the water, and in particular they used it to refer to whales. There are two possibilities for interpreting these ancestors of ours: we can interpret their uses of 'fish' as expressing (and generally correctly applying) the property *animal that lives in the water*, or we can interpret them to have been sometimes mistakenly applying the

[23]See Lewis [1983], Lewis [1984], Sider [2009], and Sider [2012]. Davidson's principle of charity serves as sort of an ur-meaning magnetism doctrine: truth is an "external" constraint on the meaning of sentences. This constraint is relatively uncontroversial, at least once it has been qualified in the usual ways.

[24]In Putnam [1977]. See Lewis [1983] and Lewis [1984] for how meaning magnetism provides a response.

[25]See Hempel [1945], Goodman [1955], and Quine [1969] for the problem. Sider [2012] argues that meaning magnetism provides a solution.

[26]In Kripke [1982]. See Lewis [1984] for how meaning magnetism provides a response, and Hawthorne [2007] for doubts about some of these applications of the doctrine, at least as it was articulated by Lewis.

more natural property *cold blooded aquatic vertebrate with gills*.[27] The doctrine of meaning magnetism says that, all else being roughly equal, we should take the latter route, since the cold blooded and gilled aquatic vertebrates form a much more natural kind than the animals that live in water. And this verdict appears correct: we *discovered*, rather than *decided*, that whales are not fish.

If you are hesitant to "reinterpret" our ancestors' uses of 'fish' in this way, consider whether you are willing to "reinterpret" their uses of 'people'. Did they not speak falsely when they denied the personhood of black or female humans? Not if 'person' meant *white male landowner*, or some such nonsense. But if we are willing to say that our ancestors were wrong about what it is to be a person, we should be willing to say that they were also wrong about what it is to be a fish. Human beings of all sexes, classes, and colors are now, were, and ever will be persons—such distinctions divide our species in unnatural ways. And whales are not, never were, and never will be fish—lumping together mammalian and other aquatic animals results in a less natural hodge-podge. Both of these examples, then, are cases of naturalness trumping use. For if our ancestors were wrong about whales being fish, then it is wrong to interpret them as meaning *animal that lives in the water* by 'fish', even though that interpretation fits better with the way in which they used the word.

The upshot of meaning magnetism for theories of paraphrase is that, if naturalness imposes an external constraint on semantic theorizing, and if this constraint can trump use, the fact that a paraphrase proposal clashes with patterns of normal use (and with the results of semantic theorizing built upon such data) is not a sufficient reason to conclude that the paraphrase is a failure. For there may be facts relevant to the determination of meaning that these semantic theories are not taking into account: the facts about naturalness. The facts about naturalness, however, depend on the truth about metaphysics. So a semantic theory developed without regard to the results of metaphysical inquiry will be based on a non-representative subset of the evidence.

According to meaning magnetism, a correct theory of meaning must maximize fit *both* with facts about use—the behavior of the linguistic community—*and* facts about non-linguistic reality. If the facts are such that a seemingly outlandish paraphrase is the interpretation that ranks highest with respect to naturalness, then some degree of conflict with use may have to be tolerated.

4.2.4. *Concluding Remarks About Semantic Externalism.* I have argued in this section that one reason the LSE objection fails in hard cases like (5*)-(10*) is that linguistic meaning (externally conceived) is itself determined in part by the metaphysical facts. If a philosopher accepts a controversial but correct metaphysical theory, this theory may have implications for semantics that will not be recognized by those unconvinced of the truth of the theory. These implications may arise *via* the metaphysical theory implying unrecognized conclusions about use or eligibility—and perhaps in currently unrecognized ways as well. The important

[27]The things that have the latter property are much more objectively similar than the things that have the former. This was (roughly) the justification for classifying whales as fish in Linnaeus's *System of Nature* (1776). Contemporary biologists characterize *genera* and *species* by their causal histories and place on the tree of life rather than on the basis of phenotypic traits. In the case of whales, the end result is of course the same.

point is that there *are* such implications. Even if it is not apparent how metaphysical conclusions could have a *direct* bearing on semantics, these widely accepted ideas about metasemantics show how they can have an *indirect* effect.

There is not, then, a delimited domain of evidence relevant to the determination of meaning. Since the "respectable" (scientific) evidence—the evidence considered by typical linguists, semanticists, and philosophers of language—*is* limited, it follows that some real evidence is not "respectable". And we have seen that metaphysics can provide such non-respectable but real evidence: surprising metaphysical theories can lead to surprising semantic conclusions.

It is worth noting that this conclusion does not conflict with the argument of §4.1. The contrast in §4.1 was not between internalist and externalist conceptions of semantic content, or between semantics and metasemantics, but between semantic content and speaker's meaning—between the "literal" meaning of a sentence (in context) and the thought the speaker intends to communicate when she utters it. This distinction is of course compatible with an externalist conception of the content of that thought. The final problem with the LSE objection, to which we now turn, is something that semantic internalists and externalists alike can endorse.

4.3. **Truth Conditions and Semantic Content.** The third problem with the LSE objection is that the success of a paraphrase does not hinge on the *semantic* equivalence of the paraphrase and the original sentence or belief, but merely on their *truth-conditional* equivalence. If we use the term 'proposition' to refer to the semantic contents of sentences (in context), we may say that successful paraphrases do not need to express the same proposition, as long as they express propositions with the same truth conditions.

Propositions, or semantic contents, are one kind of "sentential meaning". The proposition expressed by a sentence is a function of the sentence's conventional (linguistic) meaning and the context in which it is uttered. These conventional or linguistic meanings are another kind of sentential meaning,[28] and a third aspect of sentential meaning is cognitive significance. While it is widely hoped that cognitive significance can be reduced to or explained by one of these other kinds of meaning, as of now the relationship between cognitive significance, linguistic meaning, and semantic content is a matter of controversy. The important point for our purposes is that successful paraphrases need not preserve *any* of these kinds of meaning.[29]

The first thing to note is that sameness of linguistic meaning is neither necessary nor sufficient for sameness of semantic content. Sentences with the same linguistic meaning can express distinct contents—e.g., 'I am hungry' said by you and me—and sentences that express the same content can have different linguistic meanings: e.g., 'John is hungry' and 'I am hungry'. Insofar as "linguistic evidence" is evidence about linguistic meaning, it is not required for a paraphrase to be credible, since it is clear that successful paraphrases do not need to preserve linguistic meaning.

What is less clear, but no less true, is that successful paraphrases do not need to preserve semantic content either, as long as they preserve truth conditions. According to the widely held view that propositions are *structured*, sameness of semantic

[28]These two kinds of meaning roughly correspond to what Kaplan [1989b] calls *character* and *content*, and (subsententially) to what Frege [1952/1892] calls *sense* and *reference*.

[29]Of course, the "purely linguistic evidence" bears on more than just linguistic meaning. The evidence marshaled by linguists, semanticists, and philosophers of language is often useful for determining semantic content as well.

content is sufficient, but not necessary, for truth-conditional equivalence.[30] On this view, 'My favorite vase is empty' and 'Nothing is in my favorite vase' will be truth-conditionally, but not semantically, equivalent. The two sentences have the same truth condition—they are true in exactly the same circumstances—but structured propositionalists hold they have distinct semantic contents. This is shown (they say) by the fact that the semantic content of the former, but not the latter, can be combined with the semantic value of 'and so is my favorite jar' to yield something well-formed and meaningful.[31]

Of course, distinct propositions cannot have different truth conditions according to standard forms of *un*structured propositionalism, which identify the proposition p expressed by sentence s (in context) with the set of possible worlds at which s is true.[32] Propositions, on this theory, are less finely individuated than they are on structured propositionalism. However, if unstructured propositionalism is true, sentences with very different intuitive meanings can have the same content, and hence the same truth condition: for example, if David is Ava's father, then 'David is a bachelor' and 'Ava's father is an adult unmarried male' are true in the same worlds. And so on this view there is not even a *prima facie* problem with claiming that paraphrases with very different intuitive meanings have the same content, and so the same truth condition. If anything, one might object that unstructured propositionalism makes paraphrase too easy.

So if unstructured propositionalism is true, the LSE objection fails. But if *structured* propositionalism is true, semantic equivalence and truth-conditional equivalence come apart. If truth-conditional equivalence is all that is required for a paraphrase to reconcile one's philosophical theory with the non-philosophical facts, then the LSE objection fails *no matter what* form of propositionalism is true. And truth-conditional equivalence *is* all that is required for a paraphrase to be successful: if x is consistent with y, and y is true in the same worlds as z, then x is consistent with z, independently of whether y and z have the same semantic content. So truth-conditionally but not semantically equivalent paraphrases can be used to demonstrate consistency.

As far as I know, this fact has never been explicitly acknowledged, although paraphrists sometimes gesture in its direction. Van Inwagen, for example, notes that his paraphrases are not *synonymous* with the sentences they paraphrase, but claims that they still "describe the same fact". He writes:

> When the ordinary man utters the sentence 'Some chairs are heavier than some tables'... he expresses a certain proposition, and one that is almost certainly true... it does not appear to me to be wholly unintelligible to say that the [paraphrase] "describes the same fact" as the first... For all that, it does not seem right to say that the two sentences are identical in meaning...[33]

It isn't obvious what it means to say that two sentences "describe the same fact", but one way to understand this claim is as an attempt to indicate what kind of meaning or content van Inwagen takes his paraphrases to preserve. He

[30]Structured propositionalism is defended in, e.g., Russell [1903], Salmon [1986], Soames [1987], and Braun [1993].
[31]Similarly with 'and my favorite jar is too', etc.
[32]Unstructured propositionalism is defended in, e.g., Stalnaker [1984] and Lewis [1986].
[33]van Inwagen [1990], p.112-13

is indicating that while they do not preserve linguistic meaning or cognitive significance, they do preserve an "external" or "worldly" dimension of meaning. I suggest that he is gesturing at the fact that *truth conditions* must be preserved by successful paraphrases.[34] This distinction between the aspects of meaning that successful paraphrases must preserve, and those that they need not, is important: many of the objections to hard cases of paraphrase like van Inwagen's make false assumptions about just this question.

The distinction between truth conditions and other kinds of meaning has played a key role in advancing debates in other areas of philosophy as well, including the debate between "tensers" and "de-tensers" in the philosophy of time. As L.A. Paul writes:

> Although ordinary language and folk intuition are normally characterized in terms of tensed sentences, the original advocate of the tenseless theory of time (the old tenseless theory of time) held that all tensed sentences (and their tokens) could be translated by tenseless sentences.... However, as the result of developments in the philosophy of language in the area of demonstratives and indexicals, it soon became apparent that tenseless sentences could not translate all tensed sentences... As a result, detensers have developed new versions of the tenseless theory of time... Detensers now admit that tensed sentences or their tokens are not translatable into tenseless sentences but argue that, nevertheless, tenseless characterisations of the truth conditions of tokens of tensed sentences can adequately capture the meaning of tensed sentences.[35]

The fact that tensed sentences can be provided with de-tensed truth conditions—truth conditions that are identical with the truth conditions of tenseless sentences—is now generally thought to be sufficient for tenselessly "accounting for" the facts typically stated in tensed language. Establishing a more demanding kind of *synonymy* between tensed and tenseless sentences is not necessary in order to defend the non-existence of tensed facts. Mere sameness of truth conditions is enough to show that tensed sentences are not needed to tell the whole truth, and hence that the ideology of tense is dispensable.

Modal-reductionist analyses in terms of possible worlds are another example where the distinction between truth conditions and linguistic meaning has proved important. David Lewis held that 'Necessarily, 2+2=4' can be analyzed as the claim that it is true in every world that 2+2=4. Such analyses are not plausibly

[34]While semantic content is more "external" than linguistic or conventional meaning, we've seen that paraphrases needn't preserve semantic content, since (as van Inwagen notes) successful paraphrases can express different propositions than the sentences they paraphrase.

[35]Paul [1997], p.54. Dean Zimmerman characterizes the dispute similarly: "The new B-theorists are... not nearly so ambitious as the old. They do not see themselves as in the business of providing tenseless sentences that 'mean the same thing as' tensed sentences, by any reasonable standard of meaning equivalence. The new B-theorists admit that the propositions we grasp include temporally perspectival ones, and that they cannot be traded in for temporally non-perspectival ones without falsifying the phenomena that are to be explained: namely, the nature of propositional attitudes like belief, and of the thought expressed in tensed sentences. But they believe—and I am inclined to agree—that the ability to give... de-tensed truth conditions for an important class of tensed assertions is enough to justify their claim to have given a theory of the most basic sort of temporally perspectival thinking, and to have done so without positing a privileged present." Zimmerman [2005], p.425.

construed as proposals about semantic content, however. They aim, rather, at providing de-modalized (i.e., de-*mystified*) truth conditions for our modal talk. If, as such reductionists hope, the notion of a possible world can be specified without recourse to the ideology of modality, we will then be able to tell the whole truth—including all the modal facts—without the use of modal ideology, simply by talking about possible worlds. In order to reconcile the truth of sentences containing modal language with the non-existence of *sui generis* modal facts, what is required is only that every true modal sentence be truth-conditionally equivalent with a non-modal sentence, not that every true modal sentence be *synonymous* with a non-modal one.[36]

Although the importance of distinguishing between synonymy and truth-conditional equivalence has been recognized in these debates, its significance has not been fully appreciated in discussions of paraphrase. Trenton Merricks, for example, objects to van Inwagen's paraphrases as follows:

> [A]sk yourself—*why* is eliminativism striking and surprising? It cannot be because of its revisionary practical or empirical consequences; it has no such consequences... Instead, eliminativism is striking and surprising simply because—and this is the obvious answer—it contradicts what nearly all of us believe.[37]

There are two problems with what Merricks says here. First, while it seems plausible that a necessary condition on my being surprised to find that p is that I do not already believe p, there are at least two different ways to not believe p. One is by believing not-p, but another is by being agnostic about p. Lottery winners are surprised to find that they have the winning ticket, even though they presumably did not believe that the ticket was a loser when they bought it. If p is a claim about fundamental ontology, we should take seriously the possibility that ordinary folk and even philosophers who are not metaphysicians do not believe that p is false, but rather have no pre-theoretic opinion about p for one's metaphysical theory to contradict. They may still manage to be surprised by the metaphysical theory, if it was not something they expected to be true. Perhaps most people come reject van Inwagen's theory of composition when exposed to it. (After all, most people are exposed to the conclusion without argument.) But this doesn't have any untoward implications: many true claims about which the fold are agnostic would, if presented to them without argument, be rejected, even if a *Meno*-style line of questioning would lead them to change their minds. Examples will be controversial, but consider 'There is some beer in the fridge', uttered in a context where inspection reveals a small puddle of beer in the fridge.

The more important problem with Merrick's objection, however, hinges on the distinction between cognitive significance, semantic content, and truth conditions. The difficulty is that it is not even clear that a necessary condition on being surprised to find that p is that we not already believe p. Whether this is so depends on how we individuate belief contents. For example, I might be surprised to find that *I* am on fire even though I already believe that John Keller is on fire. Lois might be surprised to find that Clark Kent can fly even though she already believes

[36]Zimmerman [2005] discusses the parallels between the modal and temporal cases, and in particular the way in which distinguishing between linguistic meaning and truth conditions is essential for properly understanding both the tenseless theory of time and modal reductionism.
[37]Merricks [2001], p.163.

that Superman can fly. I might, at 3:00, be surprised to find that the meeting is *now*, even though I already believe that the meeting is at 3:00. And so on. In each of these cases, it is debatable whether the *proposition* that is found surprising is a proposition the agent already believes, and hence whether the sentences that express them have the same semantic content. While it seems impossible to be surprised by something *cognitively equivalent* to something one already believes, it is easy to be surprised by something *truth-conditionally equivalent* to something one already believes. For example, 'Clark Kent can fly' and 'Superman can fly' clearly have the same truth condition, independently of whether they express the same proposition. But since all that is being claimed for van Inwagen's paraphrases is that they are truth-conditionally equivalent to the originals, surprise cannot be used to argue against this equivalence. For it may be surprising that sentences with differing cognitive significance are truth-conditionally equivalent.

Of course, the objects of the attitudes are plausibly individuated more finely than by truth-conditional equivalence, and so the above cases will not be ones where one is surprised to learn a proposition one already believes. But to do the work he needs them to, van Inwagen's paraphrases need not express identical propositions as the sentences they are paraphrasing, as long as they express propositions with identical truth conditions. And it is beyond reasonable doubt that we might be surprised to learn something truth-conditionally equivalent with something we already believe: the above examples establish that.

If the claims ordinarily expressed by (6) and (6*) are true in the same circumstances, then (6) is compatible with van Inwagen's theory if (6*) is, independently of their seemingly obvious difference in semantic content. So if (6) and (6*) have the same truth condition, van Inwagen's theory does not contradict the kind of ordinary beliefs one might report using sentences like (6). Of course, for this to be correct, the existence of a composite object in the closet cannot be required for the truth of (6) (uttered in ordinary contexts). For all I have argued here, this may be false. As I said at the end of §3, I am arguing only that paraphrases like van Inwagen's are not sunk by the LSE objection, not that they ultimately succeed.[38]

4.3.1. *An Objection.* The importance I have assigned to the distinction between truth conditions and semantic content might seem puzzling, given that the aim of semantics is often taken to be the specification of truth conditions, and since the LSE objection is sometimes explicitly formulated in terms of truth conditions. Jason Stanley, for example, has objected to certain nominalistic paraphrases of arithmetic on the grounds that they do not give an adequate account of the truth conditions of arithmetical discourse. According to Stanley, it is a constraint on arithmetical paraphrases that they account for the fact that "we are able smoothly to grasp the truth conditions of novel arithmetical sentences on the basis of our familiarity with their parts."[39] Stanley is discussing fictionalist paraphrases such as 'According to the fiction of arithmetic, there are two primes between 5 and 13', but his objection would apply equally well to other prominent paraphrase strategies. His worry is that such nominalistic paraphrases have utterly alien truth conditions, involving fictionalist operators like 'According to the fiction of arithmetic'. Such

[38]But see §3, 4.2, and 4.3.1 for reasons why (6) and (6*) may well have the same truth condition (*if* van Inwagen is right about composition), and fn.4 on the importance of distinguishing between the meaning of (6) in ordinary and metaphysical contexts.

[39]Stanley [2001], p.41

truth conditions are not smoothly grasped by competent speakers, since they aren't grasped by competent speakers at all, save a few philosophers with an axe to grind. The sentence 'there are two primes between 5 and 13' *appears* to be ontologically loaded—if its truth condition is ontologically innocent, how would ordinary speakers (or semanticists, for that matter) ever know it? As Stanley puts it, "the defender [of the paraphrase] cannot in principle give a successful account of how we could assign ontologically innocent truth conditions to ontologically promiscuous discourse."[40]

Of course, we might, following Chomsky, endorse semantic internalism and reject the idea that it is the job of semantics proper to specify truth conditions.[41] But if we are working within a truth-conditional framework, Stanley's objection appears devastating, since competent speakers do not recognize the truth-conditional equivalence of typical paraphrases. To respond to the objection, it is necessary to distinguish between two kinds of truth conditions, or at least two ways of grasping a sentence's truth condition. For language to be learnable, linguistic meaning—what's grasped by competent speakers—must be compositionally determined. But such compositionally determined truth conditions are not plausibly identified with the kind of truth conditions of interest to metaphysicians, epistemologists, etc. These more philosophically interesting truth conditions appear to be neither compositionally determined nor grasped by competent speakers. For in what sense of truth conditions do we "smoothly grasp" the truth conditions of sentences like 'Santa Claus does not exist', '2+2 = 4', 'Smith knows that Jones owns a Ford', or 'Joe freely chose to lie to Mary'? Certainly not in a philosophically interesting one. Stanley is sometimes explicit about the fact that semantics concerns what he calls the "*intuitive* truth conditions" of sentences (in context).[42] Davidsonian bi-conditionals are statements of such "intuitive" truth conditions: the kind of truth conditions that competent speakers must grasp. But Davidsonian bi-conditionals do not actually specify, in a philosophically interesting sense, the conditions under which a sentence is true. Since I took high school German, I know, for example, that 'Smith weiß, dass Jones einen Ford besitzt' is true if and only if Smith knows that Jones owns a Ford. That might suffice for me to know the *linguistic meaning* of 'Smith weiß, dass Jones einen Ford besitzt'—for me to *understand* the sentence—but it certainly doesn't mean that I know in an articulable sense the conditions under which 'Smith weiß, dass Jones einen Ford besitzt' is true. The most important reason for this is that I do not know in an articulable sense the conditions under which it is true that Smith knows that Jones owns a Ford. If I did, I'd be a famous epistemologist.

On a Davidsonian approach, then, intuitive truth conditions, or what might be called *semantic* truth conditions, have to be distinguished from what I'll call *metaphysical* truth conditions: philosophically interesting specifications of the conditions under which something is true.[43] Being competent English speakers, we know the semantic truth conditions of most English sentences. We are at the same time ignorant of the *metaphysical* truth conditions of most of the things we think and say.

[40]Stanley [2001], p.44

[41]See, e.g., Chomsky [2000], Pietroski [2005], and Glanzberg [forthcoming in 2014].

[42]'Intuitive truth conditions' appears to be Stanley's label of choice in his more recent work—in both the introduction to Stanley [2007a], and in Stanley [2007b].

[43]My thinking about this distinction has been influenced by Sider [2012], although Sider's conception of metaphysical truth conditions diverges significantly from the one I defend here.

Davidsonian bi-conditionals can be somewhat plausibly taken as statements of semantic truth conditions, since competent speakers will typically know and accept paradigmatic Davidsonian bi-conditionals such as "There is a chair in Ava's closet' is true if and only if there is a chair in Ava's closet', "Joe freely chose to lie to Mary' if and only if Joe freely chose to lie to Mary', etc. Such bi-conditionals do not, however, tell us everything about what the world has to be like for there to be a chair in Ava's closet or for Joe's choice to be free. Must Joe's choice be undetermined? Must there be a chair shaped substance in Ava's closet, as opposed to merely some particles arranged chair-wise? Davidsonian bi-conditionals do not even attempt to answer these questions.[44] For this reason, the kind of truth conditions produced Davidsonian meaning theories cannot be identified with the kind of truth conditions that successful paraphrases must preserve.

On the other hand, the distinction between semantic and metaphysical truth conditions seems to break down if we think of semantic truth conditions *ontologically*, as the set of (perhaps centered) worlds where a sentence is true. This second approach to truth conditions essentially identifies truth conditions with "coarse-grained" unstructured propositions. Now, if truth conditions are sets of possible worlds, there is no room for there to be any sort of ontological distinction between those sets as specified by our semantic theories and by our philosophical analyses: the set of worlds where a sentence is true is the set of worlds where a sentence is true. Nonetheless, it remains the case that the specifications of this set produced by typical semantic theories will be as philosophically uninformative as Davidsonian bi-conditionals were: i.e., 'Joe freely chose to lie to Mary' is true at the worlds where Joe freely chose to lie to Mary, etc. If we think of metaphysical and semantic truth conditions as sets of worlds, the sets themselves will of course be identical—the only difference will be in the way that we grasp or are acquainted with those sets. So on this way of thinking it would perhaps be better to talk about "semantic knowledge" of truth conditions, as opposed to a deeper kind of "metaphysical knowledge". Semantics aims at producing semantic knowledge of truth conditions, while while our philosophical analyses aim at something more.[45]

Call the set of worlds where 'Joe freely chose to lie to Mary' is true ψ. There is nothing *wrong* with philosophically uninteresting semantic specifications of ψ; I am only arguing that such specifications do not shed much light on the actual conditions of membership for that set. And likewise with the set of worlds where (6) is true. Rather obviously, 'There is a chair in Ava's closet' is true at the set of worlds where there is a chair in Ava's closet, but what is required of a world in order for that sentence to be true at it? To describe its truth condition as "the set of worlds where there is a chair in Ava's closet" leaves us in the dark regarding whether there must be a single chair-shaped entity in the closet, or whether (6) might be true if in the closet there are nothing but simples arranged chair-wise.

[44]Note as well that Davidsonian bi-conditionals—if taken to be statements of semantic truth conditions—must be "interpretive". There is no such requirement on statements of metaphysical truth conditions: indeed, in most or all cases, statements of metaphysical truth conditions will *not* be interpretive: after all, we don't know the metaphysical truth conditions for many sentences we *understand* perfectly well.

[45]Devitt and Sterelny [1999] argue that the meaning of a sentence is "its mode of presenting its truth condition." (p.114) Perhaps semantic knowledge of truth conditions requires only that the speaker grasp the truth condition under *some* mode of presentation, while metaphysical knowledge requires grasping the truth condition under a metaphysically perspicuous mode of presentation.

Appreciating the distinction between semantic and metaphysical truth conditions is critical for understanding the conditions for a paraphrase to be a success, since, as we saw above, successful paraphrases must only have the same (metaphysical) truth conditions as the original.[46] Proponents of the LSE objection, however, seem to have something like linguistic meaning, semantic content, cognitive significance, or semantic truth conditions in mind as what a successful paraphrase must preserve. These are all much more transparent to competent speakers than metaphysical truth conditions, since metaphysical truth conditions aren't transparent at all. We certainly do not grasp them simply in virtue of understanding a sentence. But the equivalence of metaphysical truth conditions is what matters for evaluating the kind of paraphrase proposals under consideration in this paper. If I do not believe that there are φs, the challenge I face is to tell the whole truth without saying anything that entails that φs exist. If I have specified exactly which world is actual, there is a reasonable sense in which I have told the whole truth, or at least the whole contingent truth. But for the purposes of specifying which world is actual, all that is required of (6*) is that necessarily, (6*) is true if and only if (6) is. You might think that, since necessary truths may have intuitively distinct metaphysical truth conditions, equivalence of metaphysical truth conditions requires something more fine-grained than necessary equivalence, such as logical equivalence. Perhaps so, but it is clear is that full-blown *semantic* equivalence is not required. Many semantically inequivalent sentences are necessarily (and even logically) equivalent.[47]

Please note that this argument is no indictment of semantics. As noted above, learnability concerns must constrain our theories of linguistic meaning, since linguistic meanings are what language users learn. Normal language users, however, have little or no idea what is metaphysically required for the truth of the sentences they understand. So (knowledge of) linguistic meanings cannot plausibly be identified with (knowledge of) metaphysical truth conditions.

The distinction between metaphysical and semantic truth conditions has recently been defended by Sarah-Jane Leslie. She writes:

> I would suggest that these worldly truth specifications—these descriptions of how the world must be for the sentence to be true—should not be mistaken for semantically derived truth conditions... [If] a dispositionalist theory of color is correct... 'Bob is red'... is true if and only if Bob is experienced as red by standard observers in standard conditions. This is a specification of the circumstances in the world that must obtain for 'Bob is red' to be true. Such a specification does not tell us anything about the semantically derived, compositionally determined truth conditions for 'Bob is red' ... for Bob to be experienced as red by standard observers in standard conditions, there must exist standard observers to experience him

[46]Even this is too strong. Extensional equivalence between referring expressions is enough in certain cases—specifically, when that extensional equivalence is guaranteed by the other parts of one's theory. For example, 'My daughter is playing' and 'Maggie is playing' are (for me) simply two different ways of describing the same fact. See §4.1.

[47]I.e., many sentences that express distinct structured propositions have the same intension—and indeed, many sentences that express distinct structured propositions are logically equivalent. For example, 'All green things are green' and 'All red things are red', are logically but not semantically equivalent. Plausibly, but more contentiously, so are 'My favorite vase is empty' and 'There is nothing in my favorite vase'.

> as such... metaphysically speaking, the truth of 'Bob is red' entails the existence of standard observers. It is in no way part of semantic competence to recognize that the truth of 'Bob is red' entails that there exist standard observers, however. This is not plausibly a semantic entailment, but merely a metaphysical one.
>
> The semantic truth conditions for 'Bob is red' may well be no more than Red(Bob). This respects the compositional structure of the sentence... For this reason, and others, it is very often desirable to simply disquote individual expressions when giving semantic truth conditions. Any further analysis of individual expressions very often belongs to metaphysics rather than to semantics...[48]

Some might worry that the distinction between semantic and metaphysical truth conditions is spurious, a desperate move made by metaphysicians who have painted themselves into a corner. If Leslie is correct about there being reasons for drawing such a distinction that are internal to semantic theorizing, this concern is mistaken. The arguments of semantic internalists like Chomsky, who do not even think that knowledge of *semantic* truth conditions is the product of mere linguistic competence, provide further evidence that the distinction can be motivated within linguistic theorizing itself.

Before moving on, I would like to briefly discuss how the conclusion of this section meshes with the idea that there are Moorean facts, such as the fact that things move. Armstrong, following Moore, held that this fact was "shallow"—that we could be sure that things move while being ignorant of the true "analysis" of motion. One way of thinking about this would be to say that while we know the semantic truth condition for 'The Earth is moving'—and know that it is satisfied!—we may yet be ignorant of that sentence's metaphysical truth condition. Semantically, 'moving' is a predicate—it takes only one argument. We know, however, that from a deeper scientific or metaphysical perspective, motion is a relation. The Earth is moving relative to some frames and at rest relative to another.

But how, we might ask, did the semantically *predicative* phrase 'moving' become associated with its fundamentally *relational* application condition, given that we only became aware of the relational nature of motion long after the meaning of 'motion' was established? That's a fascinating and difficult question of metasemantics, and I won't pretend that I know its answer.[49] But I want to close this section by noting that *whatever* the answer is, a similar answer presumably explains how, if a dispositionalist theory of color is correct, 'Bob is red' became associated with

[48]Leslie [2008], p.43-4. Leslie remarks in another paper that the distinction "is quite intuitive, though it is rarely drawn." (Leslie [2007], p.386.) The intuitiveness of the distinction is evidenced by the fact that a variety of similar distinctions have been defended in the literature: in addition to Sider [2012], see, e.g., Hawthorne and Cortens [1995] (between two goals of paraphrase), Hawthorne and Michael [1996] (between two conceptions of logical form), and King [2002] (again between two conceptions of logical form). Williams [2010] gives a "theory of requirements" that closely resembles a theory of metaphysical truth conditions (see also Williams [2012], and a distinction between semantic truth conditions and metaphysical truth*makers* is defended in Cameron [2008a] and Cameron [2008b]. As Leslie indicates, these defenses have been largely, and lamentably, ignored. (I thank Stephen Neale for drawing my attention to this aspect of Leslie's work.)

[49]Although I suppose it has something to do with semantic externalism, naturalness, and use.

its metaphysical truth condition—and if van Inwagen is correct, how (6) became associated with the truth condition reflected by (6*).

5. Conclusion

Let me briefly summarize what I have argued in this paper. There are three reasons why paraphrases advanced without the support of "scientifically respectable" linguistic evidence may still be correct. First, in cases where speaker meaning and semantic content diverge, it can be granted that philosophers often do not have linguistic or otherwise scientific evidence for their paraphrases. This is irrelevant to the success of those paraphrases, however, since the goal of a reconciling paraphrase requires only that it preserve speaker-meaning—the belief that the speaker intends to communicate with her utterance. Furthermore, only one aspect of speaker meaning must be preserved at that: the paraphrase must have the same metaphysical *truth conditions* as the paraphrased. If this point is conceded, the LSE objection loses its force, since metaphysicians, not semanticists, are the relevant experts when it comes to determining whether two sentences have the same metaphysical truth conditions. For example, it is metaphysicians, not semanticists, who are in a position to authoritatively speculate about whether, say, 'Joe freely chose to lie to Mary' is true in the same worlds as 'Joe's choice to lie to Mary was caused by his beliefs and desires'—or whether 'there is a chair in Ava's closet' is true at the same worlds as 'there are some simples arranged chair-wise in Ava's closet'.

This point about truth conditions holds even when speaker meaning and semantic content do not diverge, since even if a speaker utters a sentence that expresses exactly what she means, not every aspect of meaning needs to be preserved by a paraphrase—sameness of truth conditions is enough. And again, it is metaphysicians, not semanticists, who are experts about sameness of (metaphysical) truth conditions.

Finally, we've seen how semantic externalism casts doubt upon a key assumption behind the LSE objection: that there is a special class of respectable, linguistic (as opposed to metaphysical) evidence which should carry most or all of the weight in our evaluations of paraphrase proposals. Because the facts about use partly determine the facts about meaning, and the metaphysical facts partly determine the facts about use, there is no principled way to delimit a domain of evidence untainted by metaphysical considerations. For example, if van Inwagen's metaphysical theory is correct, this will push us towards accepting his theory of the metaphysical truth conditions of (6). Considerations of this kind will only be amplified if naturalness is a constraint upon semantic theorizing, since the facts about naturalness are metaphysical facts. For these reasons, revisions in our metaphysical theories will often lead to revisions in our semantic ones—or at least, revisions in our theories about the metaphysical truth conditions of our sentences.

If all this is correct, there is a good explanation of the fact that philosophers do not typically offer semantic evidence in support of their paraphrase proposals: they are not making claims about the semantics of the sentences we utter. Rather, they are making claims about the metaphysical truth conditions of the *things we believe*. As we have seen, such metaphysical truth conditions are distinct from linguistic meanings or semantic contents. We all know what 'Smith knows that Jones drives a Ford', 'Joe freely chose to lie to Mary', etc. *mean*, linguistically speaking. What we do not know, with sufficient clarity, is what it takes for them to be true.

Whatever respectable "scientific" evidence we have concerning linguistic meaning, we are largely in the dark about the metaphysical truth conditions of our talk and thought. Platonsim, Aristotelianism, Cartesian Dualism, Reductive Physicalism—not to mention Leibniz's monadology and various forms of monism—all paint radically different pictures of what is required by the truth of, say, 'There is a chair in Ava's closet'. If the metaphysical truth conditions of this sentence were transparent, it would be transparent which (if any) of these theories was correct. But it isn't, so it ain't.

The lack of scientific evidence objection, then, is a failure. Neither semantics nor any other science is first philosophy—semantic inquiry must be conducted in tandem with metaphysics and philosophy more generally, not prior to it.

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