Easy Ontology

1. Idea: ontological questions settled by analytic truths

E.g., the question of holes is definitively settled by the fact that "if a shirt is perforated then there is a hole in that shirt" is analytic. Ontology is "easy" because it is easy to know what is analytic. (View is *not* that the existence of holes is *caused by* language use.)

1.1 Schiffer on pleonastic entities

> If Lassie is a dog then Lassie has the property of being a dog

Schiffer imagines a linguistic community that does not speak of properties, asks what it would take for them to come to know that properties exist, and answers:

> What it would take, and all that it would take, would be for them to engage in a certain manner of speaking, a certain language game—namely, our property-hypostatizing practices, in particular our property-yielding something-from-nothing transformations.… How can merely engaging in a linguist, or conceptual, practice give one knowledge of things that exist independently of that practice? Because to engage in the practice is to have the concept of a property, and to have the concept of a property is to know a priori the conceptual truths that devolve from that concept, such as the conceptual truth that every dog has the property of being a dog. (2003, p. 62)

1.2 NeoFregean philosophy of mathematics(Wright, 1983)

> If the Fs and the Gs are equinumerous, then the number of Fs equals the number of Gs

1.3 Thomasson on fictional entities, works of art, and material objects:

> Our literary practices…definitively establish the existence conditions for fictional characters… According to those criteria, what does it take for an author to create a fictional character? This much is clearly sufficient: That she write a work of fiction involving names not referring back to extant people or characters of other stories, and apparently describing the exploits of individuals named…(2003, 148)

2. Analyticity

Truth by convention the conventions governing a sentence somehow suffice on their own to produce the sentence's truth

definitional constraint a sentence (or inference) that plays a certain distinctive role in helping to determine the meaning of a chosen term or terms—roughly: when

determining the meaning of T, it is very important for an interpreter to interpret T so that the sentence (inference) comes out true (truth-preserving)

- 'all bachelors are unmarried': definitional constraint on 'bachelor'

- a sentence expressing transitivity of '=': definitional constraint on '='

- rules of ∧-introduction and -elimination: definitional constraints on '∧'

- 'nothing is both red and green all over': definitional constraint on 'red' and 'green'

Definitionality can be trumped.

- 'There is absolutely no space between two objects in contact'

- 'Every free action is undetermined by the past+laws'

- Sentences of the form $P \vee \sim P$

Revisionary definition of 'analytic' True + definitional

- does not require truth by convention

- might be shallow but needn't be. Contrast the following:

  (Y) A thing is a yard long iff it is three feet long
  (P) $\forall x \forall y \forall z [(x < y \wedge y < z) \rightarrow x < z]$ ("parthood is transitive")

- differs from analyticity as traditionally conceived, because neither epistemically secure nor "trivial"

3. Against easy ontology

  (T) If some simples are arranged tablewise then there exists a table

All linguistic reflection can deliver is the conclusion that (T) is definitional. But (T)'s definitional status might be trumped—in particular, by some joint-carving meaning.

(T)'s definitional status cannot be trumped in this way if quantifier variance is true. So the view seems to require quantifier variantism.

References

Schiffer, Stephen (2003). *The Things We Mean*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Thomasson, Amie L. (2003). "Fictional Characters and Literary Practices." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 43: 138–57.

Wright, Crispin (1983). *Frege's Conception of Numbers as Objects*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press.