Carnap's External Questions and Semantic Externalism

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ABSTRACT: What is it for an utterance of an expression to lack meaning? In this paper I address the issue along the lines of Carnap's seminal article "Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology". Carnap provides there an answer to the above question, which he then uses to argue that certain claims of metaphysics are meaningless. In the first section of the paper I present Carnap's argument for the meaninglessness of certain metaphysical claims. In the second section I argue that, although the argument is not compelling, the main virtue of Carnap's proposal is the strategy he develops for generating meaningless uses of language. In the third section I propose an externalist criterion of meaningless uses of expressions that relies on semantic externalist considerations. This, I argue, bears significant resemblances to Carnap's proposal. In the last section I discuss the applicability of the new criterion to the question concerning the meaning of metaphysical claims.

KEYWORDS: Carnap, external vs. internal questions, externalism, meaninglessness, metaphysics.

I. Carnap's dialectical purposes

One of Carnap's aims in his "Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology" (1950) is to argue that certain metaphysical claims are meaningless and so should not be taken as serious philosophical hypotheses.[1] Quine is one philosopher that Carnap has in mind. The crucial point of disagreement concerns the metaphysical consequences Quine draws from his criterion of ontological commitment. Quine famously argued in his "On What There Is" (1948) that it is neither the proper names of a theory, nor the general terms that occur

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in it, that express its ontological commitments. In the former case the reason is, according to Quine, that names are eliminable using Russell's theory of descriptions. In the latter case Quine invoked a behaviourist account of the meaning of general terms (Quine 1948: 11). Instead, he argued, "a theory is committed to those and only those entities to which the bound variables of the theory must be capable of referring in order that the affirmations made in the theory be true" (1948: 13–14). According to Quine, if mathematics quantifies over variables that receive numbers as values it expresses commitment to a metaphysical thesis, in particular, that there are numbers. Given that numbers are classes, and classes are abstract entities, Quine argues, mathematics expresses commitment to there being abstract entities.[2]

Carnap (1950) is not convinced by Quine's argument. He replies that it is a mistake to think that we can infer consequences pertaining to traditional metaphysics from the claims of existence that we find in specific areas of scientific discourse. A premise of Carnap's argument is that sentences such as 'There are numbers' can be understood in two ways:

> it is above all necessary to recognize a fundamental distinction between two kinds of questions concerning the existence or reality of entities. If someone wishes to speak in his language about a new kind of entities, he has to introduce a system of new ways of speaking, subject to new rules; we shall call this procedure the construction of a linguistic *framework* for the new entities in question. And now we must distinguish two kinds of questions of existence: first, questions of the existence of certain entities of the new kind *within the framework*; we call them *internal questions*; and second, questions concerning the existence or reality *of the system of entities as a whole*, called *external questions*. (1950: 206)

Questions such as 'Is there a white piece of paper on my desk?' or 'Did King Arthur actually live?' are internal to what Carnap calls the "the thing language", i.e. a linguistic framework in which we can talk about spatio-temporal things and events. These questions can be answered within the framework, in this case, by undertaking empirical investigation. Other questions, such as 'Are there spatio-temporal things?', when understood as internal to the "thing language", have a trivial affirmative answer. The same is true of 'Are there numbers?'. The answer to the latter question, considered as internal to the linguistic framework of mathematics, is trivial, as it is entailed by trivial mathematical claims such as 'There is a number greater than 5'.[3]

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[2] See Quine (1948: 13–14), but also his "On Universals" (1947: 78–80) and "Logic and the Reification of Universals" (1953b: 122f). It is this position that Carnap attacks, see Carnap (1950: 214–215; 215 n.5).

[3] According to Carnap, 'There are numbers' in the internal sense is an *analytic* sentence (Carnap 1950: 209), since it follows from the also analytic sentence '5 is a number'. So is

But these questions can also be understood as *external* to a linguistic framework. The claims that traditional metaphysicians make are precisely of this kind: they are external to the linguistic frameworks to which they normally belong. The sentence 'There are physical objects', in the sense in which the metaphysician considers it, is external to the framework of "the thing language". 'There are numbers', in the metaphysician's sense, is external to the framework of mathematics. By uttering this sentence, the metaphysician is not aiming at asserting the trivial truth that the mathematician takes for granted. She does not wonder whether *mathematics* admits numbers or not, but commits herself to a different claim, and in particular, a substantive view about certain constituents of reality.

The consequence of drawing the internal-external distinction is that "the acceptance of a linguistic framework must not be regarded as implying a metaphysical doctrine concerning the reality of the entities in question" (Carnap 1950: 214–215). To believe so would be, according to Carnap, to confuse the internal sense (the one that 'There are numbers' has as internal to mathematics) with the external sense (the one that the metaphysician wants to assign to it). The sentence, considered as internal to mathematics, is true but it does not imply Platonism about numbers (or classes, or universals). In this way Carnap rejects Quine's view that a theory is ontologically committed to stipulating the existence of the kind of entities that would function as values for the variables over which the theory quantifies.

But Carnap does not stop here, as he goes on to argue that the metaphysician's sentences are actually *meaningless*, precisely for being external. The metaphysician's questions and answers, although they create the illusion of expressing thoughts, are nothing but the result of a failed attempt to make meaningful assertions. The only meaningful questions of existence are those asked *within* the particular linguistic frameworks to which the terms that the metaphysician uses belong ('physical object', 'number', 'property', 'proposition' etc). But as such they are trivial questions with trivial answers, and are not what the metaphysician is after.[4] The mistake of traditional metaphysics

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'There are properties', when interpreted as internal to the "the system of thing properties", because it follows from the analytic sentence 'Red is a property'. Also 'There are propositions' is analytic, when interpreted as internally to a semantic framework that admits quantification over propositions, since it follows from an analytic sentence such as 'That Chicago is large is a proposition'. For a discussion of these claims of analyticity see Soames (2009: 431–435). I agree with Haack (1976: 462) that ultimately these theses about analyticity do not play a role in Carnap's argument to the effect that metaphysical claims are meaningless.

[4] Ekain Garmendia pointed out to me in personal communication that, of course, it is not the case that all internal existence questions are trivial: 'Does phlogiston exist?', or 'Does anti-matter exist?' are examples of such non-trivial, but substantial, internal existence questions.

is to try to reverse the order: instead of introducing a linguistic framework and *then* making existence claims within that framework, the metaphysician takes ontological questions as *prior* and *independent* to the introduction of any linguistic framework. She considers that a framework "is legitimate only if it can be justified by an ontological insight supplying an affirmative answer to the question of reality" (Carnap 1950: 214).

Not all external questions are meaningless. Carnap distinguishes *practical* from *theoretical* external questions and answers. An example of the former are questions concerning the adequacy of a linguistic form, such as: 'Shall we introduce the predicate 'number' in our language with such and such a semantics?'. Practical question are external but nevertheless meaningful, because in that case the expressions of the language are not used, but mentioned. Theoretical questions, on the other hand, purport to be about matters of fact. 'Are there numbers?' in the metaphysician's intended interpretation is a theoretical (or factual) external question. It is these questions, which purport to be at the same time theoretical and external, that cannot receive an answer, according to Carnap, because they are meaningless.

In sum, I take it that Carnap's (1950) anti-metaphysical argument can be reconstructed as having the following structure: the first premise is that metaphysical claims, such as 'There are numbers', are meant in the external sense (as theoretical external questions and answers). The second premise is that all theoretical external sentences are meaningless. Therefore, comes the conclusion, the sentences of metaphysics are meaningless.

II. An assessment of Carnap's argument

Some of the most widely discussed attacks on Carnap's strategy for identifying nonsense consist in questioning the coherence of the internal-external distinction.[5] I find Carnap's distinction coherent, although I think he frames it in terms that are potentially misleading. For instance, at times he formulates it as a distinction between two *senses* of a particular question (1950: 209, 210, 213). Talk of two senses of a sentence begs the question against his own point that external questions and sentences do not have a sense, as they are meaningless. Carnap (1950: 213) also talks about questions of existence as being *ambiguous*. But again, I think this is misleading: generally, an expression is said to be ambiguous if it has two linguistic meanings when interpreted in accordance with the semantic rules of the same language. But

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[5] The *locus classicus* of such criticism is to be found in Quine's (1951b) "On Carnap's Views on Ontology". See Soames (2009), Yablo (1998) and Price (1997), but especially Haack (1976: 468), Bird (1995: 48–49) and Alspector-Kelly (2001: 106) for a discussion of these objections, and why they fail.

that is not the difference between Carnap's internal and an external questions. Finally, in other places Carnap frames his distinction in terms of internal vs. external *questions/assertions* (1950: 206–209; 212). This is, I think, equally misleading, as it suggests that the very same question or assertion could be taken as external or internal. But this is obviously not what Carnap means.

I think it is more accurate to frame Carnap's distinction as one between internal/external *interpretations* of an utterance of an expression (or internal/external *uses* of an expression, in the sense that it is used with the intention to be interpreted either internally or externally to a certain framework). Strictly speaking, it is *interpretations* that are internal or external to a linguistic framework, not questions and assertions. I use in what follows Carnap's terminology of 'internal/external questions/assertions' only as a shorthand for 'questions/assertions resulting from an internal/external interpretations'.[6]

Although I find Carnap's distinction coherent, I agree with the general trend among Carnap's commentators to regard his argument as failing to establish its conclusion.[7] The reason why I find Carnap's argument unconvincing is that he does not offer a compelling reason to believe his second premise, in particular, that an interpretation is meaningless simply in virtue of being external to a particular framework. Let me elaborate on this point.

First, notice that for an interpretation of a sentence S to be external to the language L is simply for it to be interpreted by semantic and syntactic rules alien to L. However, an utterance is not meaningless just because we do not interpret it according to the rules of a particular language. So why think that it is meaningless? One reason could be that the metaphysician interprets her use of certain expression-*forms*[8] as external to *all* languages in which E is assigned a meaning. Interpreting an expression-form is assigning to it a

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[6] I am aware that the presentation of Carnap's position in the previous section and the discussion of it in this one are not free of certain interpretive choices. For an alterative reading of Carnap's position, see Price (1997) and Thomasson (forthcoming), who believe a viable Carnapian position *is* available through interpreting the internal-external distinction in terms of *the use-mention* distinction. However, as they acknowledge, this proposal departs significantly from Carnap's original intentions. Chalmers (2009: 80–81) interprets Carnap's distinction as one between two different *evaluations* of the same sentence, and not a distinction between two sentences, resulting from different interpretations. See also Yablo (1998) for a further development of Carnap's distinction as one between literal and figurative (or 'make-believe') speech. More relativist interpretations are also possible, under which Carnap's frameworks are not simply languages, as I have taken them to be, but rather *perspectives*, the sorts of things relativists appeal to. Eklund (forthcoming) develops and criticizes this position.

[7] The list of authors that believe Carnap's argument is not compelling is large. See Haack (1976: 465) and Eklund (forthcoming) for particularly insightful discussions. According to Eklund, "the overall conclusion can perhaps be summarized as follows: Carnap's importance for contemporary ontology is overstated."

[8] Expression-forms are phonetically, but not syntactically and not semantically, individuated. So two languages can be said to have in their vocabulary the same expression-form, but

linguistic meaning, and for that it is necessary to make use of one linguistic framework or another. An interpretation that is external to all linguistic frameworks is, strictly speaking, no interpretation at all.

But if this what Carnap has in mind, it looks like his argument equivocates on 'external': the claim that *external uses are meaningless* is plausible only if 'external' is taken in an *absolute* sense, as external to all linguistic frameworks. On the other hand, the claim that *the metaphysician's utterance of 'There are numbers' is external* is only plausible if 'external' is taken in a *relative* sense: as external to the framework of mathematics.

It is plausible to think that the metaphysician's existential claims are external to the framework of particular sciences. While the scientist postulates things such as numbers, propositions, but also laws of nature, species or strings, the metaphysician asks whether there is anything that these concepts stand for, and if so, what is the nature of their referents, whether they are fundamental building blocks of reality etc. We may agree with Carnap that the metaphysician wants to know whether such things exist in a neutral, *extra-theoretical* sense, and not whether mathematics quantifies over numbers, biology over species, and string theory over strings. In doing this she steps outside all particular scientific theories, and interprets her sentences as external to all scientific frameworks. But even if the sentence-forms that the metaphysician uses are not meant to be interpreted and evaluated by appeal to the linguistic rules and methods of evaluation of any particular science, this does not mean that there is no possible linguistic framework relative to which they are interpretable. In particular, it is plausible to think that the metaphysician interprets her question 'Are there numbers?' relative to a particular linguistic framework that shares many syntactic and semantic features with that of mathematics. Arguably the mathematician and the metaphysician mean the same by 'number' and the other words in the question, with the exception of the meaning they assign to the existential quantifier. Arguably, the two languages interpret 'exist' by assigning different semantic properties to it.[9]

So why are the metaphysician's claims not to be taken as internal to a particular linguistic framework specific to metaphysics? Carnap seems to admit this is a position in the logical space, but at the same time to believe it is not one where the metaphysician is to be found. He suggests the meta-

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not the same expression. That is, they assign to the same expression-form different syntactic and semantic properties.

[9] Again, there are alternative options of interpreting Carnap's point here. As suggested in Price (2009: 330–335), even if the mathematician's and the metaphysician's respective notions of existence are different, the difference need not amount to assigning different *meanings* to the word, as I have assumed. This point affects the way Carnap should be interpreted relative to the reason why the metaphysician's use of language is meaningless. As Cappelen (2013: 26) observes, Carnap is not particularly clear on this point.

physician does not provide a linguistic framework relative to which her utterances could be interpreted: "Unless and until they [the metaphysicians] supply a clear cognitive interpretation, we are justified in our suspicion that their question is a pseudo-question" (Carnap 1950: 207). Indeed, *if* the metaphysician fails to provide a *new* linguistic framework in which the question is to be interpreted, and assuming she interprets the question as external to the language of mathematics, it lacks meaning. But Carnap does not show that she fails to do so. He only argues that her utterances are *not* to be interpreted by the semantic rules of a scientific framework. And this is insufficient to support his radical anti-metaphysical conclusions.[10] So, on the present reading of Carnap's argument, his deflationary claims vis-à-vis metaphysics are not warranted.

However, I take it that the present discussion of Carnap's position suggests that he has succeeded in producing a view of what it takes for a use of an expression-form to be meaningless. Carnap's strategy for generating meaningless uses of expression-forms (call it Carnap's Strategy, or CS for short) could be formulated as follows:

> (CS) *If a speaker uses an expression-form E externally to all existent linguistic frameworks, and the speaker fails to provide a new linguistic framework for E, then her use of E is meaningless.*

It seems to me Carnap has correctly identified a way in which utterances can fail to be linguistically meaningful. I have focused here on *semantic* interpretation, and have left out of CS any reference to syntactic rules, although these are also required in interpreting an expression-form. A claim similar to CS holds concerning syntactic interpretation of expression-forms. However, Carnap's (1950) focus is on semantically, not syntactically, uninterpretable utterances. Moreover, CS amounts to only *one* approach to how language use can generate semantic uninterpretability. There are other ways in which a use of an expression-form can fail to be meaningful. Furthermore, there are various notions of *nonsense*, not all of which involve meaningless uses of language (Diamond 1981: 95–96).[11]

Although correct as it stands, I think CS is unsatisfactory for various reasons. First, we want to know more about the conditions under which the antecedent of CS is true, and so the conclusion that a speaker's use of an expression-form is meaningless is warranted. Second, we are interested not only

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[10] The principle of verification that Carnap defended in the 1930's, e.g. Carnap (1932) and Carnap (1935), was meant to do precisely the job of showing why there cannot be a linguistic framework for metaphysics. But no analogous principle plays that role here.

[11] One such notion is that of a *category mistake*. Magidor (2009: 558–561) offers a rich discussion of category mistakes, and argues that in some cases they should be equated with truth-valueless sentences, not meaningless ones.

in a mechanism for *generating* meaningless utterances, but also in *recognizing* them as such. This should be useful in assessing Carnap's claim that the meta-physician's use of existence questions is meaningless. In the next section I develop a more sophisticated version of CS within an externalist meta-semantic framework, which offers a good starting point to address these issues.[12]

III. Externalism and meaninglessness

In terms of a distinction Stalnaker (1997: 535) proposes, externalist meta-semantic considerations are *foundational*, and not *descriptive*. They offer an account of the facts that need to obtain in order for linguistic expressions to have a particular meaning. In Stalnaker's words, they aim at discovering "what it is about the capacities, customs, practices, or mental states of a speaker or community of speakers that makes it the case that an expression has the semantic value that it has" (Stalnaker 1997: 542). In what follows I briefly introduce externalism, and focus on those aspects of it that are relevant to my purposes.[13]

The paradigmatic externalist view concerning proper names, as Kripke formulates it, imposes three conditions that need to be fulfilled in order for a use of a proper name to have a referent: 1) a successful initial baptism, performed either by ostension or by description; 2) a chain of uses of the name that preserves the reference; and, finally, 3) the condition (or conditions) that a language user must fulfil to become a competent user of that name. Competence requires that, "When the name is 'passed from link to link', the receiver of the name must, I think, intend when he learns it to use it with the same reference as the man from whom he heard it" (Kripke 1980: 96). It is not a condition on competence that the speaker have descriptive knowledge that determines the object named as the referent of the name. Whenever the speaker uses the name with the intention to refer to whatever is the referent of the name in the linguistic community, the speaker succeeds in referring to the object named.[14]

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[12] An anonymous referee points out (if I understand him or her correctly) that, apart from the question concerning what *makes* an external use meaningless, there is a related question: why do we *seem* to understand external existential claims like "There are propositions"? The referee suggests an answer to this question: we *wrongly* think it has meaning because we think of an external question by analogy with something that does have meaning, in particular, its internal counterpart. This is an interesting suggestion. However, it is not my intention to discuss in this paper the phenomenological question concerning the source of the appearance of understanding that meaningless expressions may have.

[13] See Wikforss (2008) for an overview of different externalist theses.

[14] Other authors formulate similar competence conditions, for instance Soames (2002: 70) and Sainsbury (2005: 113).

Kripke (1980), Putnam (1975a), Devitt (1981) and others extend these meta-semantic considerations to natural kind terms such as 'water' and terms for physical magnitudes such as 'temperature'. The extension of these terms is fixed by mechanisms that have a social and historical dimension, in ways that are analogous in important respects with the case of proper names. The conditions for competence are also similar in that they do not require that the speaker have descriptive knowledge that would enable her to identify instances of that natural kind.

But the externalist considerations are even wider in scope. Kripke sets the basis for a socio-historical theory of *linguistic meaning* in general, and not only of reference. As Joseph Almog notes,

> The historical chain preserves the linguistic meaning of any expression. In the case of names, all there is to this meaning is to stand for the given referent. *Ergo*, the chain preserves the fact that the name stands for that referent. (1984: 482)

The case of referential expressions is just a particular case of a more general claim concerning the determination of linguistic meaning. Tyler Burge makes the same point without using the metaphor of the chain of users linked to one another: the conventional linguistic meaning "may vary with the individual's environment, even as the individual's activities, individualistically and nonintentionally specified, are held constant" (Burge 1986: 273). In Burge (1986) and Burge (1989) he defends anti-individualistic conclusions concerning semantic properties. He proposes an externalist view of the linguistic meaning of a large class of expressions applicable to empirical objects, stuffs, properties, and events.[15]

According to this general externalist perspective on meaning, the factors that individuate the linguistic meaning of expressions include non-individualistic facts, and so may vary with the individual's environment. Depending on the version of the thesis, the relevant environmental facts are *social* facts concerning linguistic practice and/or *physical* facts concerning the unobservable essential properties of the entity, stuff or event the speaker refers to. As Donnellan (1993) points out, these two versions of externalism need to be carefully distinguished.[16] For present purposes I shall assume that the meaning of expression E (at least for certain categories of expressions) *depends* on the speaker's social environment (and *varies* with the social environment) and in particular, on the linguistic practice of using E in the speaker's linguistic

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[15] Burge (1989: 283) discusses this thesis in relation to a wide class of expressions, including 'tiger', 'water', 'mud', 'stone', 'tree', 'bread', 'knife', 'chair', 'edge', 'shadow', 'baby', 'walk', 'fight'.

[16] And they also need to be distinguished from the claim that use *determines* meaning. The externalist thesis is a thesis about dependence, or variation. It is different from, although compatible with, the former thesis about determination.

community, even if all the facts about the speaker's personal history as well as physical constitution, individualistically and nonintentionally characterized, are held constant.

A consequence of this broadly construed social externalism concerning the determination of meaning is that there are certain relations between linguistic competence and social practice. In particular, an individual can achieve competence in using an expression E even if she does not have access to any correct description of the relevant social facts. In particular, the speaker need not have the ability to identify the linguistic practice as the practice of using the word in such and such a way, following such and such semantic rules. This parallels the externalist claims about competence with proper names and natural kind terms: the reference of these expressions varies with facts about the *physical* (in this case) environment that are normally not accessible to the speaker; therefore, the competent speaker need not have access to these facts, i.e. possess uniquely identifying descriptive knowledge of the referents. On a social externalist view, the semantic properties vary with *social* facts about linguistic practice in the relevant language community that need not be accessible to the individual. Therefore, a competent user may lack an account of the semantic rules that members of the relevant social community follow. Having an explicit account of the semantic properties of a word is not required for linguistic competence with that word. As Burge puts it, speakers need not have the ability to offer a correct "explication" of the meaning of the words, where a speaker's explication of the meaning of a word is "what the individual would give, under some reflection, as his understanding of the word" (1989: 282). In other words, in order for a speaker's utterance of an expression-form E to have the linguistic meaning that E has in the relevant linguistic community (to be the word with that form) the speaker need not have access to a correct characterization of the meaning assigned to E by that linguistic community.

This is a negative thesis, concerning what competence does *not* require. What *is* required for competence? Gareth Evans (1982) suggests an answer to this question, building on Kripke's account of initiation into the use of a proper name. He argues that Kripke's point about names is an instance of a more general principle that is not particularly concerned with the preservation of reference. The fact that "individual speakers exploit general practices" is true of many other semantic properties. He formulates the following "general principle":

> if a speaker uses a word with the manifest intention to participate in such-and-such a practice, in which the word is used with such and such semantic properties, then the word, as used by him, will possess just those semantic properties. This principle has as much application to the use by speakers of words like

'agronomist', 'monetarism' as the like as to their use of proper names. (Evans 1982: 387)

This point is sometimes made in terms of having the right 'deferential intention'. As Putnam (1975) argued, not everyone in a linguistic community has the correct criteria of application of all the words in the language. This is what he calls The Universal Hypothesis of the Division of Linguistic Labour:

> Every linguistic community… possesses at least some terms whose associated 'criteria' are known only to a subset of the speakers who acquire the terms and whose use by the other speakers depends upon a structured cooperation between them and the speakers in the relevant subsets. (1975: 228)

The speakers in the relevant subsets are what Putnam calls 'the experts', i.e. those who do posses the correct application conditions and have virtually perfect mastery of the word. But one need not be an expert in elms in order to use the word 'elm' correctly. Instead, one must have a deferential intention, that is, the intention to use the word with whatever criteria of application experts assign to it, and consequently, to be disposed to be corrected by experts in one's application of the word. Having the right deferential intention allows one to use an expression-form with the meaning it has in the linguistic community to which one defers. This is not only a *sufficient* condition for such use – as Evans points out in the above quote – but also a necessary condition for the use of an expression (unless one is an expert, in Putnam's sense of the term). The social dimension of linguistic meaning *requires* the speaker's participation in the relevant practice.

If having the right deferential intentions is a necessary condition for a non-expert's use of words to have the customary meaning they have in the relevant linguistic community, then the following thesis suggests itself (call it the No Deference Principle, or NDP for short):

> (NDP) If a non-expert uses an expression-form E without the manifest intention to participate in a linguistic practice P in which E is used with a certain linguistic meaning, her use of E does not acquire the linguistic meaning it has in P.

To say that a use of an expression-form E does not acquire a particular linguistic meaning is not yet to say that it is meaningless. However, if the speaker does not assign to the expression-form E a *new* meaning – independently of what meaning it has in P – we do have evidence for a meaningless use of E. It is not NDP alone, but NDP in conjunction with these additional circumstances, that leads to the conclusion that her use of E is meaningless. That is, the way a non-expert uses an expression-form leads to meaninglessness if she lacks the right deferential intentions and, at the same time, does not stipulate a novel meaning to her use of the expression-form.

IV. NDP and metaphysics

I have initially advertised myself as presenting a strategy for generating and identifying meaningless uses of expressions that bears important similarities to Carnap's own proposal. Does the result meet the expectations? I think it does. Using an expression-form E as *internal* (in Carnap's sense) to an existent language L in which E receives a meaning parallels the notion of using E with the intention that E be interpreted relative to some existing linguistic practice P_L in which E receives a meaning. That is, an internal use is a use governed by deferential intentions. To use E as *external* to L is to use E *without* reliance on the corresponding linguistic practice P_L. That is, external uses may be characterized as uses in which S does not have the intention to participate in linguistic practice P_L in which E is used with a certain linguistic meaning. An external use, under certain conditions, is meaningless, according to Carnap. It is meaningless if S uses E externally to *all* existent languages, and does not provide a new meaning to E. The externalist strategy I propose, based on NDP, also finds evidence for lack of meaning in those cases in which the speaker does not defer to the relevant linguistic community or any *other* linguistic community, and at the same time does not stipulate a novel meaning to the expression-form. So, I suggest there is a really significant parallel between the two strategies. Therefore, the proposal I have developed may be seen as an interpretation of CS from an externalist metasemantic perspective.[17]

The theoretical benefits of this interpretation of CS is that it suggests a way in which Carnap's insightful but rather enigmatic distinction between internal and external uses could be understood. But does it shed some light on Carnap's claims that the metaphysician's use of existence sentences is

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[17] An anonymous referee suggests that my interpretation of Carnap's distinction between internal and external uses as a distinction between deferential and non-deferential uses does not do justice to what Carnap had in mind. For Carnap an external question is a question posed from outside – and not from within – a certain linguistic framework. But, crucially, at the same time it is a question *about* the framework. They are "questions concerning the existence or reality *of the system of entities as a whole*" (Carnap 1950: 206). And so, construing externality as lack of intention to participate in a certain linguistic practice seems to leave out the idea that questioning the existence of the system as a whole makes no sense. I plead guilty on this accusation. I have left out this aspect of Carnap's characterization of external questions because I am not sure what exactly to make of it: if the external use of 'Are there numbers?' is indeed *meaningless*, then it does not make sense to say that it is a question concerning the reality of the system of numbers. It is simply meaningless. It may *purport* to be about a system of entities, or it may give that impression to a friend of metaphysics. But that is a wrong impression, if Carnap is right. Second, my concern here is primarily with *the reason why* external questions are meaningless. On my interpretation, the fact that they (purport to) question the existence of the system of entities is not the source of their meaninglessness. So I have not put much emphasis on this aspect.

meaningless? This is a delicate issue, and a careful and detailed discussion of it goes beyond the purpose of the present paper. But the strategy for generating meaningless uses of expression-forms based on NDP points at a way in which Carnap's claims about metaphysics could be assessed. In particular, to say that the metaphysician's use of 'Are there numbers?' is *external* to any linguistic framework in which this expression-form receives an interpretation is to say that the metaphysician *refuses to defer* to any linguistic practice in which this expression-form receives meaning. Assuming that the only relevant linguistic practice in this case is that of mathematics, the claim is that the metaphysician refuses to defer to the linguistic practice of mathematics for the meaning of the question. Moreover, we may agree that the focus of the debate is the way the metaphysician uses 'exists', and not any of the other words of the question. This is what Carnap suggests as well, given that all his examples of external questions and sentences involve existential claims. So it looks like it is the use of 'exists' (and its variants in English) that makes all the difference between an internal and an external interpretation of 'Are there numbers?'.

This diagnosis is supported by externalist considerations: the metaphysician does exhibit in many ways her intention to use 'number' precisely as the mathematician uses it, and so to participate in the same linguistic practice (for instance, by quoting, referring to, and explicitly or implicitly subscribing to, claims that mathematicians make about numbers). By this she expresses her intention to talk about whatever mathematicians talk about when they use the word 'number'.

But what about 'exists'? In line with Evans's remark quoted above, the metaphysician must have the *manifest* intention to participate in the linguistic practice of mathematics. How could such an intention become manifest? One way is for the metaphysician to explicitly say that she intends to use the word in precisely the way the mathematicians use it, and to mean precisely what he means by it. Typically, this is not the case. But she need not do so in order to defer. A deferential intention need not be conceived as a consciously entertained and explicitly formulated mental state. It is not as if the metaphysician need to consciously think *in foro interno* that she uses the expression-form with whatever meaning it has in mathematics, or to express such intention publicly.

The other way in which the metaphysician could make manifest her intention to participate in the linguistic practice of mathematics with respect to existential questions and sentences is for her to *use* the word precisely in the way it is used in mathematics. Now, it may be argued that she does not do this. When the mathematician claims numbers exist she does not make a trivial claim – the one that follows logically from the claim that 5 is a number. Instead, she tends to attribute to numbers a special kind of property, maybe one in the vicinity of *reality*. But, assuming there is a difference between the

respective uses of 'exists', are these sufficiently different as to warrant the conclusion that she does not have the manifest intention to defer?

And, if indeed she does not defer, is it not the case that the metaphysician manages to introduce a *new* meaningful use for 'exists'? The radical antimetaphysical conclusion follows *only* if the metaphysician does not defer but at the same time fails to provide a new meaning to her use of 'exists'. Only in that case we are warranted to conclude that her question is meaningless. She certainly does not introduce a novel meaning to 'exists' by stipulation, but it may be argued that her *use* of 'exists' determines a new meaning to the word.

These are intricate questions that I mention here but which I do not pursue in detail. Pursuing them requires discussing issues related to the epistemology of intention attribution and the nature of the deferential intention, which go beyond the scope of this paper. However, what I do hope to have achieved here is indicate a promising way in which Carnap's distinction between internal and external uses of expressions could be interpreted and his anti-metaphysical conclusions assessed.

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