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Inside and Outside the Ontology Room

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... a good notation has a subtlety and suggestiveness which at times make it seem almost like a live teacher.

—Bertrand Russell, Introduction to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*

But ordinary language is all right.

—Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue Book*

David Lewis spoke of “the philosophy room,”¹ and the term has gained some currency. But in philosophy's house there are many rooms, and one of them, more austere in design and more sparsely furnished than perhaps any of the others, is the ontology room.² (The ontology room is not the epistemology room or the philosophy-of-mind room, and it is separated by many rooms and many long corridors from the political-philosophy room.)

Let ‘discussants’ abbreviate ‘participants in discussions in the ontology room’. Discussants converse in a language I will call Tarskian. The vocabulary of Tarskian consists of closed or open sentences and closed or open terms of English (or some natural language) and the sentential connectives, brackets, quantifiers, variables³, and identity-sign of the vocabulary of first-order logic (so-called) with identity—perhaps supplemented by items from the vocabulary of various well-defined extensions of first-order logic with identity⁴.

More exactly: discussants do not always (or, I concede, usually) converse in Tarskian, but they are always *prepared* to.⁵ Discussants are prepared to translate any of their natural-language assertions into Tarskian, and, moreover, they will utter no sentence of a natural language unless they are prepared to accept its “obvious” translation into Tarskian (if it has one). For example, a discussant will not say, “She owns two very valuable paintings” unless he or she is prepared to say

$\exists x \exists y (x \text{ is a painting} \ \& \ \text{she owns } x \ \& \ x \text{ is very valuable} \ \& \ y \text{ is a painting} \ \& \ \text{she owns } y \ \& \ y \text{ is very valuable} \ \& \ x \neq y \ \& \ \forall z (z \text{ is a painting} \ \& \ \text{she owns } z \ \& \ z \text{ is very valuable} \ \rightarrow \ . \ z = x \vee z = y))$ ⁶.

Now it is hardly a profound discovery of modern formal logic that ‘ $\exists x x$ is a painting’ is logically deducible from that sentence of Tarskian. But this trivial logical fact is not without its non-trivial implications for the conduct of discussions in the ontology room. For discussants will not utter a sentence from which ‘ $\exists x x$ is a painting’ is demonstrably logically deducible unless they are prepared to say that something satisfies ‘ x is a painting’. (I *call* their language, or the language that they are always prepared to fall back on, Tarskian because the extension of a closed sentence of Tarskian—its truth-value—is a function, the function Tarski specified⁷, of its logical structure and the extensions of the natural-language sentences that occur within it.) And they are not prepared to say *that* unless they are prepared to have a serious metaphysical discussion about the objects that satisfy this open sentence. For they take seriously the implications of the fact that every object, every real thing, everything there is, has, for every property, either that property or its complement. A person willing to have a serious metaphysical discussion about paintings is a person willing to answer any serious metaphysical question about the properties of paintings—of the objects that supposedly satisfy ‘ x is a painting’. (Must a painting actually have been *painted*—or could a painting come about as the result of the random collisions of molecules? If a painting is vaporized, is the resulting cloud of atoms a thing that is no longer but *used to be* a painting? Suppose a painting by Duccio that represents the Last Supper has been modified by a later artist to include a figure representing Mary Magdalene; is it still the same painting? If not, has the original painting ceased to exist?—or does it still exist as a proper part of the new painting? Any discussant who is not willing to take questions like these seriously—who perhaps supposes that the concept “painting” is insufficiently “filled in” for such questions to have answers—will not use sentences that have ‘ x is a painting’ as a constituent and will protest if others do.)

The ontology room is many things, but one of the things it is—so I will contend—is a context of utterance⁸. Sentences that express a certain proposition when uttered, say, in a court of law or a meeting of the board of directors of an architectural firm or aboard the Clapham Omnibus may express a different proposition when uttered in the ontology room. Or so *I* say. And it is propositions, not sentences, that are true or false—or at any rate, sentences are true or false only vicariously: in virtue of the truth-values of the propositions they express. If, therefore, a sentence expresses different propositions in different contexts of

utterance, and if in some contexts of utterance it expresses true propositions and in others false propositions, there is no out-of-context answer to the question whether that sentence is true or false.

This would be a boringly obvious point if philosophers did not persistently resist its implications for ontology. Its obviousness, boring or not, is easily illustrated. Consider, for example, the question, ‘Is the sentence “The star Alnilam is near the star Mintaka” true or false?’ This question has no out-of-context answer. In some contexts the sentence ‘Alnilam is near Mintaka’ expresses a true proposition, owing to the salience in those contexts of the fact that (from the point of view of speakers in those contexts) the angular separation of Alnilam and Mintaka is less than 2 degrees. In other contexts of utterance, it expresses a false proposition, owing to the salience in those contexts of the fact that the distance between the two stars is about 100 times the local average distance between a star and its nearest stellar neighbor. In other contexts still, it expresses a true proposition, owing to the salience in those contexts of the fact that the distance between them is only about one three-hundredth the diameter of the galactic lens. (I could go on.)

The point may be boringly obvious, but it is, as I say, resisted. It is resisted when it is applied to the existential sentences of the kinds that figure in ontological disputes. I will presently give some examples of this “resistance.” But my examples will require some stage setting.

In *Material Beings*⁹ I endorsed a meta-ontological position that implied that the sentence ‘Chairs exist’ expressed a different proposition in the context I am now calling “the ontology room” from the one it expressed in the context I called (and will call now) “the ordinary business of life.”¹⁰ Let us give these two contexts the nicknames “inside” and “outside.” Now a philosopher sensitive to the way language is actually used may raise the following objection to this thesis about ‘Chairs exist’: it is hard to imagine someone “outside” actually using the sentence ‘Chairs exist’ to make an assertion. But the objection can be met, for, though it is indeed not entirely easy to imagine this, it can be done:

“You and I may be brothers, but no two people could be less alike. *I* have devoted my life to working for peace and justice, and *your* only goal in life is to get rich selling furniture.”

“What can I say? I deal in reality and you deal in dreams. Chairs exist. Peace and justice don’t and never will.”

I say that the sentence ‘Chairs exist’, when spoken by my imaginary hard-headed cynic—when spoken “outside”—, expresses a different proposition from the one it

expresses “inside.” And (I further say) if the hard-headed cynic happened also to be a metaphysician, and if he were at some other point in his life engaged in a debate “inside” about the metaphysics of artifacts, *he* would be making different assertions when he uttered ‘Chairs exist’ “outside” and when he uttered that sentence “inside”—assuming, of course, that he *would* say, “Chairs exist” when he was “inside.” (If discussants agree about what proposition is expressed by ‘Chairs exist’ “inside,” it does not follow that they will agree about the truth-value of that proposition. In fact, it’s very likely that they’ll disagree: they’re *philosophers*.)

I am one of the philosophers who, when he is “inside” says, “Chairs do not exist.” And yet, in my view, the proposition that would be expressed by ‘Chairs exist’ if it were uttered “outside” in circumstances like those I imagined in the preceding paragraph is *true*. Let us call the proposition expressed by ‘Chairs exist’ “inside” and “outside,” respectively, the “inside proposition” and the “outside proposition.” Few philosophers if any agree with my contention that the inside proposition and the outside proposition are distinct propositions: most philosophers who have any opinion on the matter at all would say that someone who said, “Chairs exist” in the course of a discussion of the ontology of artifacts would be saying the same thing as my imaginary cynic was when he said, “Chairs exist.” (If there is anyone who agrees with me on this point in the philosophy of language, that philosopher may well disagree with me about metaphysics, for the great majority of present-day metaphysicians will insist that the inside proposition is true. But among the many philosophers who affirm the identity of the inside and the outside proposition, there are a few who agree with me about the metaphysics of artifacts: these philosophers adopt what is fashionably called an “error theory” of the sentences we use when we are speaking about artifacts “outside”: they will say that—with some obvious exceptions like “I wanted to sit down, but there was no chair”—the propositions those sentences express are false. Here I can point to an actual example: Trenton Merricks.¹¹) But—I say—not only are the inside and the outside propositions distinct, but it is only in the ontology and meta-ontology rooms that anyone has ever so much as *considered* the inside proposition. In my view, only metaphysicians (or at any rate only people who have been exposed to discussions of the metaphysics of artifacts) have ever considered—ever entertained, ever grasped, ever held before their minds—the inside proposition.

The following table may be useful for keeping the positions of the philosophers mentioned or alluded to in the preceding paragraph straight.

<u>Most metaphysicians</u>	<u>Merricks</u>	<u>Van Inwagen</u>
The inside and the outside propositions are identical	The inside and the outside propositions are identical	The inside and the outside propositions are distinct
<i>and therefore</i>	<i>and</i>	<i>and</i>
The inside proposition is true	The inside proposition is false	The inside proposition is false
<i>because</i>	<i>and therefore</i>	<i>and</i>
The outside proposition is true.	The outside proposition is false.	The outside proposition is true.

(Merricks would say that the inside proposition and the outside proposition are “both” the proposition that I call the inside proposition. That is, he would say that both “inside” and “outside” ‘Chairs exist’ expresses the proposition that, in my view, that sentence expresses only “inside.” I *think* that most of “most metaphysicians” would agree with him, but I will let the individual members of that class speak for themselves.)

Here is one argument among many I have given for the conclusion that the inside proposition and the outside proposition are distinct. The inside proposition entails the proposition

Chaireg Some chair-shaped regions of space are exactly occupied by a material object,

and the outside proposition does not entail *Chaireg*. The inside proposition entails *Chaireg* because the inside proposition is true only if something satisfies ‘*x* is a chair’, and nothing could satisfy ‘*x* is a chair’ unless it were a material object that exactly occupied a chair-shaped region of space. The outside proposition, however, can be true even if nothing satisfies ‘*x* is a chair’. I could put this point by saying

that “outside” speakers are not only not speaking Tarskian, but are not committed to the “obvious” translations of their sentences into Tarskian. (The thesis that ‘ $\exists x x$ is a chair’ is an “obvious” translation of ‘Chairs exist’ into Tarskian is, if not established, then at least strongly supported, by the following fact: If, in a course in elementary formal logic, students were given the following exercise

Symbolize ‘Chairs exist’; use the scheme of abbreviation

$C\alpha$: α is a chair,

the instructor would accept no answer from them but some alphabetic variant of ‘ $\exists x Cx$ ’.) Tarskian is, by design, a semantically extensionally combinatorial language (hereinafter, a combinatorial language): the semantical values of sentences are their extensions (‘truth’ or ‘falsity’ or various set-theoretical objects), and the semantical value/extension of a sentence is a function of its logical structure and the semantical values/extensions of the natural-language sentences and terms that occur within it. A necessary condition for a language’s being combinatorial is that its sentences have an unambiguous “logical structure.”¹² The logical structure of sentences of Tarskian is not only unambiguous but manifest: each of them wears its logical structure on its sleeve. (For example, the logical structure of ‘ $\exists x x$ is a chair’ is what that sentence has in common with all the members of an infinite class of sentences that includes itself, ‘ $\exists z z$ est une chaise’, ‘ $\exists x x$ is an elephant’, and ‘ $\exists y y$ is a solution to the hypergeometric differential equation’. You could call it ‘ $\exists \alpha \phi \alpha$ ’. You could call it ‘the logical structure displayed by all and only those closed sentences that are existential quantifications on a natural-language sentence in which one variable is free’. Whatever you call it, it’s manifest.) If the sentences of any natural language have anything that can usefully be called a logical structure, they do not wear it on their sleeves. In the ontology room, in order to avoid having to conduct our conversations entirely in Tarskian, we conventionally impose a logical structure on certain of our natural-language sentences: if a sentence has an “obvious” Tarskian translation, it has the logical structure of that translation—a consequence of the more general “inside” convention that a natural-language sentence expresses (in that context of utterance, in the context “inside”) the proposition expressed by its obvious Tarskian translation. But that same sentence, when used “outside”—when used in a context in which those conventions are not in force—, does not, in general, have that logical structure or express that proposition.

The thesis that natural-language sentences, when used “outside,” do not necessarily have the logical structures of their “obvious” Tarskian translations, can

be established by reflection on any of a wide variety of examples. (Established to *my* satisfaction. Other philosophers will flatly deny that reflection on these examples establishes anything of the kind. The reflections I offer will at least show why I have been led to accept this thesis.) I will examine one such example, the case of statements “about shadows.”

Consider the following “outside” conversation.

“How do we know that they have anti-aircraft missiles?”

“From inspection of satellite images of the area. Some of the shadows we can see in those images can only be interpreted as the shadows of Russian SA-21 Growler missile launchers.”

If the proposition expressed by the final sentence of this conversation is the proposition expressed by its obvious Tarskian translation, then what the second speaker has said can be true only if something satisfies ‘*x* is a shadow’. But (a) what the second speaker asserted might very well be true, and (b) *nothing* satisfies ‘*x* is a shadow’. (You and I, reader and author, now have one foot in the ontology room because we are considering an ontological thesis as an example: discussions in the meta-ontology room, naturally enough, sometimes involve examination of ontological theses.) There *are* no shadows. There are photons and there are regions of space whose physical content would prevent photons from passing through them (“opaque regions”) and there are regions on the surfaces of things on which no photons (or fewer photons than might have been expected) are falling at some given moment because some photons that had been “on course” to fall on those surface-regions were absorbed by the content of an opaque region before they could reach those surface-regions. There are such things as these, yes—at least given that there are regions of space and regions on the surfaces of things. And if there really are surface-regions, some of them are sometimes “shadowed” or “in shadow.” *Being in shadow* is an attribute of some surface-regions; it is a universal, an abstract object, the common feature of all shadowed surface-regions.¹³

In my view, it would be simply *absurd* to say that anything satisfied ‘*x* is a shadow’ or to say (“inside”), “Shadows exist” or “There are shadows.”¹⁴ It is, I say, simply impossible to assign a coherent set of properties to “satisfiers” of ‘*x* is a shadow’. (At least if it is impossible for a non-shadow to be a former shadow; at least if shadows can move across surfaces.) But suppose that some poetic soul—Gerard Manley Hopkins, let us say—had one morning entered the following *pensée* in his journal: “If the world were emptied of light, it would be emptied of shadow as well—and I should mourn the loss of shadows almost as much as I should mourn the loss of light. But light exists! Shadows exist! All praise be to

thee, O Lord, who hast created both light and shadow!” In that case, Hopkins’s sentence ‘Shadows exist’ would have expressed a true proposition—in serene indifference to the falsity of the (or the non-existence of a) proposition expressed by ‘ $\exists x$ x is a shadow’.

And why do I insist that “outside” utterances of ‘Chairs exist’ and ‘Shadows exist’ express truths—given that I say that “inside” utterances of these same sentences express falsehoods? Well, I suppose I am enough of a Wittgensteinian to think that it is not possible for very much of what we say “in the midst of life” to be false. And I suppose that I mostly agree with Eli Hirsch about the “truth-conditions” of English sentences “about chairs”—or, as I should prefer to say, about which of the sentences “about chairs” spoken in the ordinary business of life express true propositions and which of them express false propositions. And this remark conveniently brings me to the topic of Eli Hirsch, who is one of the examples I promised of a philosopher who resists the implications for ontology of the boringly obvious thesis that the same sentence can express different propositions in different contexts of utterance. (I don’t mean that he “resists” the boringly obvious thesis; of course he accepts it; I mean that he resists what I say are its implications for ontology.) It is this resistance that leads him to classify me as a purveyor of a “revisionary ontology.” A revisionary ontology, Hirsch tells us, is one that entails the following proposition:

Many common sense judgments about the existence or identity of highly visible physical objects are a priori necessarily false.¹⁵

But how can my ontology be, in this sense, revisionary when one of its central theses is that most of the judgments people make about highly visible physical objects are *true*? When my wife said to me yesterday, “The chair you said you’d carry upstairs is still in the living room,” what she asserted was (*I say*) true. True *without qualification*. True *when taken straightforwardly and literally*. True *tout court*. True *simpliciter*. True *full stop*. True *period*. Not “true in the loose and popular sense but false in the strict and philosophical sense,” but *just true*. When my hard-headed cynic said, “Chairs exist,” what he said was true—true *without qualification* (etc.). Now Trenton Merricks is a revisionary ontologist in exactly Hirsch’s sense (a label I am sure he will not only accept but glory in), but I am no more a revisionary ontologist in the sense of Hirsch’s definition than Hirsch is¹⁶. So how can he say that I am one? Insofar as there is an answer to this question in “Against Revisionary Ontology,” it is relegated to a footnote (note 16, p. 106):

Closely related to this distinction [the distinction between “true in the loose and popular sense” and “true in the strict and philosophical sense”], and

equally obscure, is van Inwagen's attempt to distinguish between what a sentence expresses "in the ordinary business of life" and what it expresses "in the philosophy room." Van Inwagen, *Material Beings*, 98-107, and "Reply to Reviewers," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 53 (1993): 709-19 at 711. For a critique of van Inwagen's crypto-revisionism, see Merricks, *Objects and Persons*, 162-70.

I must leave it to the reader to judge whether the distinction is obscure. But what does Merricks—my second example of a philosopher who resists the implications of the boringly obvious point for ontology—have to say?¹⁷ The central, or at least an essential, premise of his critique of what Hirsch calls my crypto-revisionism is this:

According to van Inwagen, when ordinary folk say (for example), "There are chairs," they assert the proposition that there are things that are arranged chairwise. And that is *not* the proposition that the ordinary folk express when they say, "There are chairs."¹⁸

If we call the proposition that there are things arranged chairwise "the neutral proposition,"¹⁹ we can say that Merricks ascribes to me the position that the outside proposition is the neutral proposition. But that is not in fact my position. In my view, the outside proposition is *not* the neutral proposition.²⁰ I do not deny, however, that the outside proposition and the neutral proposition are, for all they are *two* propositions, intimately connected. One connection between them is this: neither entails *Chaireg* and neither entails the proposition that $\exists x$ x is a chair.²¹ But there is more: in my view, the outside proposition and the neutral proposition have *all* the same entailments, for they are true in exactly the same possible worlds.

The relation between the outside proposition and the neutral proposition can—I contend—be usefully compared to the relation between the proposition that

the present king of France is bald

and the proposition that

for some x , x is male, x now reigns over France, and, for any y (if y is male and y now reigns over France, then y is identical with x), and x is bald.

(By the proposition that the present king of France is bald, I mean the proposition that a present-day French royalist would assert if he or she said, in a debate with

other royalists about the claims of the many pretenders to the French throne, “*Le roi actuel de France est chauve.*”) ²²

I have no stake in any theory about how to individuate propositions, but it seems evident to me that these really are *two* propositions; and it seems equally evident to me that those two propositions are true in just the same possible worlds.

Exactly the same thing is true, I contend, of the outside proposition and the neutral proposition. But if those two propositions have all the same entailments, does it not follow that the outside proposition is also “neutral”—that the outside proposition commits those who assert it neither to the existence nor the non-existence of things that satisfy ‘*x is a chair*’? I should not want to maintain, as a general principle, that if the proposition *p* is neutral with respect to some ontological thesis, and if the proposition *q* is true in the same possible worlds as *p*, then *q* is neutral with respect to that thesis. (Consider the proposition that Solomon and Socrates are both wise and the proposition that Solomon and Socrates both participate in the universal *wisdom*. If platonism is necessarily true, then these two propositions are true in the same possible worlds, but it is at least a defensible position that the former is neutral with respect to the existence of universals and the latter is not.) But whether or not the metaphysical neutrality of the outside proposition follows from its necessarily having the same truth-value as the metaphysically neutral proposition that there are things that are arranged chairwise, I think that the outside proposition *is* metaphysically neutral. In my view, the metaphysical neutrality of the outside proposition can be established by a very simple observation: it is made true by such states of affairs as *that* (pretend, reader, that I am speaking rather than writing, and that, as I spoke the words ‘such states of affairs as *that*’, I made an ostensive gesture in the direction of some things arranged chairwise²³). On this point, Hirsch agrees with me: there being things arranged chairwise is sufficient for the truth of what is expressed by ‘Chairs exist’ in everyday circumstances. (He denies, however, that this point on which the two of us agree implies that what that sentence expresses in everyday circumstances is consistent with the non-existence of composite inanimate material objects.)

But if the outside proposition is, as I contend, neutral, how does it differ from the proposition I have been pleased to call “the” neutral proposition? The difference between the two propositions is grounded in a difference between the sentences that express them. The sentence ‘There are things that are arranged chairwise’ is an *artificial* sentence, and it was designed by its artificer (myself) to *represent itself as* metaphysical neutral, to *look* metaphysically neutral, to *wear its metaphysical neutrality on its sleeve*—and, whether the sentence ‘Chairs exist’ is metaphysically neutral or not, it was not designed to look metaphysically neutral. It was not designed to look metaphysically neutral because it was not designed at all. As I said in *Material Beings*,

But language did not evolve for the purpose of guiding philosophical speculation. That's not what it's *for*. (This is a point about the biological history of language. But almost the same point can be made about the histories of particular languages. Languages do not evolve for the purpose of guiding philosophical speculation. That's not what they're *for*.) (p. 130)

And 'Chairs exist' does *not* represent itself as metaphysically neutral. Nor does it represent itself as metaphysically partisan. It does not represent itself as having any metaphysical implications at all (or at least none more controversial than, e.g., 'There is something, and not, rather, nothing' and 'There is a certain amount of organization in the material world'). Which is not to say that it *has* no metaphysical implications. Perhaps it has just the metaphysical implications that I have denied it has. Perhaps I have gone badly wrong and the proposition it expresses "outside" *does* entail such propositions as *Chaireg* and the proposition that composite inanimate material objects exist. After all, Merricks thinks so and Hirsh thinks so (albeit they disagree about the truth-value of those propositions)—and, like Sorensen, they are highly intelligent, serious, and extremely able philosophers. But, since 'Chairs exist' does not wear its logical structure on its sleeve (if it indeed has anything that can usefully be called a logical structure), it is possible for there to be an ongoing, substantive meta-ontological debate about what proposition it expresses and whether that proposition has metaphysical implications and, if it does, what they are. This paper is a contribution to that debate.

¹ “If our official theories disagree with what we cannot help thinking outside the philosophy room, then no real equilibrium has been reached.”—*Philosophical Papers*, Volume 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. x.

² Adjoining the ontology room is the meta-ontology room. That is where we are now. One remark that I have heard more than once in the meta-ontology room is that I have no right to call the ontology room by that name—I ought to call it the *Quinean* ontology room or some such. Well, we all have a right to our opinions, however ill-judged they may be.

³ Variables occur in Tarskian mostly within the open sentences or open terms of some natural language (‘y is a chair’, ‘die Mutter von z und x’); I list them as a separate vocabulary-item because a variable can also occur within a quantifier-phrase (‘ $\forall z$ ’, ‘ $\exists x$ ’) or beside the identity-sign.

⁴ Plural variables (‘the xs’, ‘the zs’) and plural-quantifier phrases (‘For some xs’, ‘For any zs’), for example. The important question of the place of modal operators in discussions in the ontology room raises issues I choose not to address in the present essay.

⁵ David and Stephanie Lewis’s classic dialogue “Holes” (David Lewis, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-9) is a marvelously instructive fictional representation of a discussion in the ontology room, and it nicely illustrates the interplay of natural language and Tarskian in such discussions. The point at which the two *dramatis personae*, Argle and Bargle, become “discussants”—enter the ontology room—is very clearly marked: it occurs at the point at which Bargle cries, “Got you!”

⁶ Or perhaps to say that with the final universal quantification omitted—for the English sentence was ambiguous. (Natural-language sentences often contain ambiguities that translations into Tarskian have to resolve one way or the other. That is one reason for the qualification “if it has one” a few sentences back in the text.) If two or more sentences of Tarskian that are not logically equivalent are equally good candidates for the office “obvious translation of” a natural-language sentence that some discussant has uttered, the discussants must always be prepared to choose one of them and to declare that, for the remainder of their discussion, that natural-language sentence will be understood to express the proposition expressed by agree-upon Tarskian sentence. (Some sentences have *no* obvious translation into Tarskian—other than themselves, as “atomic” sentences, of course. Using a sentence that represents itself as involving the concept of “being” or “existence” but whose employment of that concept cannot be represented in terms of the existential quantifier—‘Being is, not being is not’ and ‘There are things of which it is true that there are no such things’ seem to me to have that feature—is a solecism in the ontology room. Any discussant convicted of such a solecism will apologize for wasting the time of the other discussants and ask that the offending

sentence be stricken from the record. The fact that this is one of the rules in force in the ontology room is one of the more important motivations for the meta-ontological remark I mentioned in note 2.)

⁷ *Mutatis mutandis*: Tarski was of course concerned with formal languages in which semantic values are assigned to items like ‘ q ’ and ‘ $Gxxy$ ’—sentence schemata, I should call them—and not to items like ‘Snow is white’ and ‘Tom loves x more than y loves x ’. As constituents of a sentence of Tarskian, ‘Tom loves x more than y loves x ’ and ‘Tom loves y more than x loves y ’ are related precisely as ‘ $Gxxy$ ’ and ‘ $Gyyx$ ’ are related as constituents of a sentence (-schema) in the language of first-order logic.

⁸ This primary topic of this Introduction is “the ontology room as context of utterance,” and little is said about the many other things the ontology room is. A philosopher who read this essay without having read much else in analytical ontology or meta-ontology might wonder why anyone would insist that ontological debates should be conducted (at least “potentially”) in Tarskian. “Holes” (see n. 5) is a very concise response to the question ‘Why insist that ontological debates be conducted in Tarskian?’, but, since ‘Do holes exist?’ is not one of the great, historically important ontological questions, the power of that essay may be lost on anyone who is suspicious of the idea that Tarskian should be the official language of the ontology room. I refer the reader to “Being, Existence, and Ontological Commitment,” particularly section 4, and “A Theory of Properties,” particularly section 2, for an extended defense of conducting ontological discussions in Tarskian. (The label ‘Tarskian’ and the phrase ‘the ontology room’ are not used in those two essays, but the ideas those words stand for—expressed in different terms—have a prominent place in both.) The description of the ontology room in this Introduction leaves unanswered many questions that are (in effect) answered in those essays. For example: “When you speak of ‘the obvious translation’ of a natural-language sentence into Tarskian, it’s not at all clear what you mean. Consider the natural-language sentence ‘If everything has a size, then everything has a shape’. Do not that sentence itself, the sentence ‘Everything has a size \rightarrow everything has a shape’ and the sentence ‘ $\forall x (x \text{ has a size}) \rightarrow \forall x x \text{ has a shape}$ ’ all count as ‘obvious translations’ of that sentence into Tarskian? The third of these seems to be what you would call ‘the obvious translation’ of ‘If everything has a size, then everything has a shape’ into Tarskian. But on what ground do you ‘privilege’ that translation?”

⁹ Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990. See particularly the Preface and §10.

¹⁰ “The ordinary business of life” comprises a vast number of contexts of utterance, and not all of them are due to the indexical elements present in the sentences in

which that business is conducted—not all of them are such simple, straightforward contexts as “Windsor Castle” and “March 11th, 1877” and “Queen Victoria.” (For that matter, the ontology room is not really a single context of utterance. ‘I do not accept your second premise’ obviously expresses different propositions in different contexts of utterance *within* the ontology room.) Consider, for example, the case of the different propositions that might be expressed by ‘The star Alnilam is near the star Mintaka’ in various ordinary-business-of-life contexts. I am nevertheless going to assume that for our purposes “the ordinary business of life” (and “the ontology room” as well) can usefully be treated as *a* context of utterance.

¹¹ See Trenton Merricks, *Objects and Persons* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001).

¹² If natural languages are combinatorial, it is in some much more subtle and complex way than Tarskian, for two occurrences of what most people would unreflectively call the same sentence of (e.g.) English sometimes “represent” sentences (sentence-types) that have radically different logical structures. If English is a combinatorial language, therefore, we must suppose that distinct sentences of English are on various occasions “represented” by visually and aurally identical strings of English words. If, for example, I say to you, “Landing planes can be dangerous” when you propose to go for a stroll on an airport runway, and Suzy says to you, “Landing planes can be dangerous” when you propose to land a 747 without proper training, then (if English is a combinatorial language), it must be that Suzy and I have uttered two different sentences. And, in any case, Tarskian is combinatorial (only) *in relation to* the (somehow given) extensions of the natural-language sentences and terms that are constituents of its sentences. In relation to what is a natural language combinatorial? If that question has an answer, it is a subtle one.

¹³ Might shadows simply *be* shadowed surface-regions, then—or “maximal” ones, ones that are not parts of a larger shadowed surface-region? Might “being a shadow” be an *office* that surface-regions occasionally occupy? (I leave out of account here the fact that ‘shadow’ has both a two-dimensional and a three-dimensional use—as ‘The moon entered the earth’s shadow’. What I say about the two-dimensional use could easily be adapted to the three-dimensional use.) Well, that’s a possible “move”—although it would imply (remember that I am speaking “inside” and that someone who made that move would also be speaking “inside”) that shadows never move across the surfaces of things and that some non-shadows are former shadows.

¹⁴ If Cicero will forgive me: Nothing so absurd can be said that some *highly intelligent, serious, and able* philosopher had not said it. Roy Sorensen, a highly intelligent, serious, and *extremely* able philosopher has said just these things in his

brilliant book *Seeing Dark Things: The Philosophy of Shadows* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Sorensen calls the thesis that shadows do not exist ‘eliminativism’ and confronts it with a series of counter-arguments and difficulties. The reader can perhaps infer that I am unmoved by his case against eliminativism.

¹⁵ Eli Hirsch, “Against Revisionary Ontology,” in *Quantifier Variance and Realism: Essays in Metaontology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 96-103. The definition of ‘revisionary ontology’ occurs on p. 101.

¹⁶ My “official theory” does not, therefore, disagree with what I cannot help thinking outside the ontology room. (Cf. n. 1.) The beliefs that I have inside and outside the ontology room about the kinds of things that exist are, in fact, exactly the same. In particular: wherever I am, I accept both the outside proposition and the denial of the inside proposition. (Of course, if I *speak* a sentence that expresses the denial of the inside proposition, that linguistic act ensures that I am “inside.” But I take it that at the moment at which I was attending to my wife’s all-too-true statement about the chair that was still in the living room, I then believed that $\sim \exists x$ x is a chair in whatever sense it is that I then believed that the atomic number of iron was 26 and that Montreal was north of New York.

¹⁷ See Merricks, *op. cit.*, especially Ch. 7, §I (“False Folk Beliefs”), pp.162-170.

¹⁸ These are not Merricks’s words; they are my paraphrase of a position he ascribes to me.

¹⁹ “Neutral” in that those who assert it commit themselves thereby neither to the thesis that something satisfies ‘ x is a chair’ nor to the thesis that nothing satisfies ‘ x is a chair’. Remember that ‘There are things that are arranged chairwise’ does *not* mean ‘There are things that are arranged chairwise *and* things that are arranged chairwise never compose anything’. The proposition that $\exists x$ x is a chair is not only consistent with but entails the proposition that there are things that are arranged chairwise.

²⁰ “Well, then,” asks the exasperated interlocutor, “what proposition *is* the outside proposition if it’s not the proposition that that there are things that are arranged chairwise?” And I reply: “It’s the proposition that ‘Chairs exist’ expresses when it is used in the ordinary business of life. You speak English, don’t you? If you do, you know what proposition that is.” I suspect that this reply will not satisfy Trenton, as I’ll call the exasperated interlocutor. I suspect that what Trenton wants me to do is to offer a *philosophical paraphrase* of ‘Chairs exist’ (in its ordinary-business-of-life sense)—something *like* ‘There are things that are arranged chairwise’ but which, unlike that sentence, *does* express the outside proposition. But, by the nature of the case, I can’t do that: any sentence that would count as a philosophical paraphrase of ‘Chairs exist’ (etc.) would *not* express the outside proposition.

²¹ Merricks seems to suggest that because I do not think that ‘Chairs exist’ (used “outside”) means ‘ $\exists x x$ is a chair’, my position implies that ‘exists’ means different things “inside” and “outside.” (Merricks, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-170. But I may have Merricks wrong on this point. I’m not sure I understand what he says on those pages.) As David Lewis would say, Not so. It is my firm opinion that there is only one thing for ‘exists’ to mean and it means that one thing whenever and wherever it is used. My position is that, as I have said, ‘Chairs exist’ does not have the logical structure of its obvious Tarskian translation (which is, of course, ‘ $\exists x x$ is a chair’). Consider this analogy. In the ontology room, Norma the Nominalist says, “There are no universals. There are horses, but the species *Equus caballus* does not exist. There are green things, but no such thing as the color green or the property viridity. Many people are wise, but wisdom does not exist (for ‘wisdom’ denotes a universal if it denotes anything).” So: in the ontology room, Norma uses ‘Wisdom exists’ to express the proposition that $\exists x x = \text{wisdom}$ —a proposition that is false if nominalism is, as she supposes, true. But in non-philosophical conversation, everyone, Norma included, uses ‘Wisdom exists’ to express the proposition that $\exists x x$ is wise—a proposition that, or so she supposes, does not commit those who affirm it to there being anything that satisfies ‘ $x = \text{wisdom}$ ’. And there is nothing *wrong* with the “outside” use of ‘Wisdom exists’. It is not *non-standard*. It is not *non-literal*. The ordinary speakers who use the sentence to affirm the existence of wise people are not speaking *loosely*. (“Ordinary language is all right.”) But who would say that it followed from this story that Norma means one thing by the verb ‘to exist’ when she uses it in an “inside” debate about whether the universal *wisdom* exists and another when she uses it in an “outside” debate about whether wise people exist?

²² A second example: the relation between the outside and the inside proposition can be compared to the relation between the propositions expressed by ‘Those points form a circle’ and ‘For some point x and some distinct point y , those points are all and only the points that are at the same distance from x as y is’.

²³ Similarly, I might gesture in the direction of a tree-filled park on a sunny day and say, “The proposition expressed ‘outside’ by ‘Shadows exist’ is made true by such states of affairs as *that*.”