MATJAŽ POTRČ

Univerza v Ljubljani
matjazpotrc@gmail.com

METAPHYSICALLY LIGHTWEIGHT POSITS

abstract

We discuss metaphysically lightweight posits, providing some examples. The ontological assertion is that the right ontology does not include any lightweight posits. There are two semantical claims: statements about lightweight posits are often true in context, and truth is often indirect correspondence. Methodological claim is that this approach fits well with reflective common sense, considering the dialectics involving naïve common sense realism, common sense antinomies and the reflective or austere realism. This kind of approach is roughly compatible with Searle's view on the same matters in his story about the construction of social reality.

keywords

Metaphysically lightweight posits, truth as indirect correspondence, reflective common sense, austere realism.

MATJAŽ POTRČ *Univerza v Ljubljani*

1.
Examples of
Metaphysically
Lightweight
Posits

Prior to providing examples of metaphysically lightweight posits, it is advisable to discuss posits as a more general term, introductorily furnishing the feel for what may be called everyday bulky posits as their counterparts[1]. These, as we call them, bulky posits, are predominantly not really massive, but they may be seen to be such in respect to their supposed subatomic ingredients, and they are important for our dealings with the surroundings in which we find ourselves. As posits have to do with metaphysics and with ontology, we can start with simple cases of entities such as they are encountered on the everyday basis. A usual example of entities discussed in philosophy involves the cat and mat, probably because the words pointing to them are short and almost everybody has some experiences with these items or at least a certain idea of what they might be. The famous sentence is

(C) The cat is on the mat.

In order to check whether this sentence is true one is advised to see whether there are the cat and the mat in vicinity, and whether situation is such that the relation is appropriately described so that the cat comes to be positioned on the mat and not the other way round. If all this matches the description, then one may claim that the sentence is true. Notice that in this case we have to do with the construal of truth as direct correspondence, for one establishes truth upon verifying that the situation in the world is such as described by the sentence. If the mat is on the cat, the sentence will not be true. But first of all, there have to be the cat and the mat somewhere in vicinity. We will come back to the construal of truth as direct correspondence. Let us notice now that this construal presupposes the existence of entities such as the cat and the mat, and possibly also the existence of relations in a certain sense. Given that we have to do with existence, we are in the area of matters pertaining to metaphysics. Quine has the following criterion for existence: whatever exists needs to be a value of a bound variable. This means that E x Cx delivers conditions for the existence of the cat, given that E is the existential quantifier, x is a variable and C is the cat-predicate: i.e. there exists some x so that this x is a cat. The

just reported criterion of existence does not start with the introduction of entities, but with the quantified environment in which the entities are then posited. This is why Quine speaks about *posits*, in accordance with his empiricist and science oriented view of the world. Similarly as electrons or muons are posited in physics, in the environment of a physical theory, cats, mats and relations are posited in ontology, in the framework of the common sense view of the world, which may perhaps be called folk theory about what there is. So existence seems to be theory-relative according to Quine's approach, which, in its holistic manner, presupposes a possible interrelatedness and mutual effectivity of everyday and scientific world views. The logical center of the overall world view may well be questioned and transformed by the newly discovered data at its empirical periphery: we tend to stay with the law of non-contradiction, say, but we may well depart from it once as empirical experiential evidence pushes us into this direction. Common sense posits the existence of entities such as cats, mats and stones. Quine gives to these the name "middle sized dry goods", which means that they tend to be perceptually salient in our everyday surroundings, and that they are not like water or a similar mass terms corresponding stuff, i.e. that they have comparatively well assigned borders, coming in comparatively well distinguishable chunks. Given this characterization, we may call the everyday ontology suitable entities "metaphysically bulky posits". These are posits that we use in everyday dealings with the surrounding world and that therefore are important for folk ontology. We have seen that the construal of truth as direct correspondence deals with these everyday posits as based upon the everyday experience with entities in our environment. If there exists a cat, a mat, and if there is the relation of the first sitting on the second one, then our sentential assertion (C) to this effect is true. We find the cat and the mat in our surrounding world, we are well able to point at them, and delimit them from their surroundings.

Once as we appropriate this direct perceptual and ontological match as leading our inquiry, we notice that we have difficulties with the following examples:

(U) "University Vita-Salute San Raffaele is in Milan."
(N) "NATO lead a campaign to help rebels in Libya."
(I) "Italy is predominantly a Mediterranean climate agriculture country."

The expressions "university", "NATO" and "Italy" are not so directly presented to our experience as this is the case with cats, mats and stones. Where is their essence? – one may ask. But first of all, where exactly are they located?

A Rylean klutz is somebody who encounters troubles in dealing with these presumed entities, because he leans on the model of the just discussed bulky metaphysical posits, such as cats and mats. Klutz decided to visit the Milano University Construction of Social Reality symposium, and he tries to find it. He says: "I see people here, lecturing and interacting, I see chairs and tables, rooms and buildings – but where the heck is the symposium? Where is the University? I do not see any University here!" In respect to (N) the Rylean klutz says: "I understand that people were shooting, and that airplanes got involved into airstrikes campaign. I can imagine and present to myself airplanes dropping bombs somewhere in the sandy landscape. But where the heck is NATO? Where is Libya? I do not see any NATO!" In respect to (I) the Rylean klutz says: "I feel fine here, eating pasta or pizza and drinking red wine, communicating with people in Italian language. But where the heck is Italy? I just read Searle's *Speech Acts* example featuring the American soldier in WWII trying to convey to his German captors the idea that he is a German himself, by reciting the only sentence in that language that he remembers, '*Kennst du das Land wo die Zitronen blühen?*' But where the heck is Mediterranean climate? I do not see any climate here!"

Notice that Rylean klutz tries to find bulky metaphysical entities that are similar to cats and mats as he searches for University, NATO and Italy. But he fails to find any such compact stuff as he did in the former, cat and mat figuring cases. In the spatio-temporal sense things are scattered in several directions. All these matters may be called posits. But they are not bulky posits. Rather they are what we may call *metaphysically lightweight posits.* One may quantify over these, without that they would be perceptually and experientially salient. They are there, but they have no bulky ontological presence. They are lightweight posits because they are not bulky in the same manner as the middle sized dry goods. Nevertheless, one can see that the metaphysically lightweight posits have several sometimes quite important impacts upon one's behavior.

Notice also that common sense, i.e. the usual cognizers, have no difficulty with the understanding of sentences such as (U), (N), (I). Just the Rylean klutz seems to be in trouble here. We have already presumed that such is the case because he is leaning exclusively on the model of bulky posits.

2. Ontological Claim: The Right Ontology Includes no Lightweight Posits

We do not say that Universities exist, in a similar manner as cats exist. In fact, we say that the right ontology does not include any such metaphysically lightweight posits. Then we even extend this claim in the direction that similarly to the metaphysically lightweight posits there in fact do not exist metaphysically bulky posits, i.e. middle sized dry goods either.

MATJAŽ POTRČ *Univerza v Ljubljani*

Rylean klutz certainly is in search of metaphysically lightweight posits in the same manner and attitude in which he would look for the everyday bulky posits. His idea is that if there is a cat, he would be able to directly spot it and present it to himself if that cat is around. In the same manner, he then expects University to be there in such a shape that it could be directly perceptually noticed. What is meant by this? What is the Rylean klutz really missing as he deals with the metaphysically lightweight posits? In order to see what is at stake here we may help ourselves with Searle's treatment of matters such as University, NATO and Italy. For him, they are socially construed entities, which means, as we may say, that they have a constitutive deontic ingredient built into them. Deontics is related to matters such as duties, obligations, permissibility and moral commitment, and it is not just related to the external world targeting ontological commitment, in its direct manners. In other terms, if we are in a world where the deontic ingredients matter or where they even are constitutive, then we are not just in the essentially ontologically existent world. In this case we are in the kind of surrounding where normativity is important and where it may be constitutive for some matters. These matters, exactly, are the metaphysically lightweight posits. University is constitutively normatively and deontically shaped.

Rylean klutz is right in a way: there does not exist any University, NATO or Italy. This means that these matters do not exist in the ultimate ontological sense. We believe that there is the world out there, but no Universities, in the just described sense. The dealing with klutz shows that the mentioned entities are not straightforwardly ontologically/metaphysically given in direct perceptual experience, and this means that they must have some deontological founding involved into them. We and Searle share the view that metaphysically lightweight posits are deontically basically constituted. But whereas Searle considers their existence to be the one conforming to the construction of truth as direct correspondence, we think that they are to be captured under the construction of truth as indirect correspondence. More about this in a moment. But in overall, it seems to us that our position is close to Searle's in his construction of social reality thesis. As just hinted at, we conclude that metaphysically lightweight posits do not exist in the ultimate ontological reality. We then go on to argue that this is just an entrance into the fact of ultimately ontological non-existence of bulky metaphysical posits, cats, mats and stones. We have some arguments with the help of which we demonstrate their non-existence, such as that these bulky metaphysical posits are vague, and that vagueness just cannot be there in a mind- and language-independent world. Another consideration is

the question about the composition of the bulky metaphysical posits, which also leads us to conclude that they do not ultimately ontologically exist in the world.

3.
Semantical
Claims

We provide a couple of semantical claims, namely that statements about lightweight posits are often true (in context), and that truth is often construed as indirect correspondence.

(a) *Statements about lightweight posits are often true (in context).*

Although we believe that metaphysically lightweight posits do not exist in the ultimate ontology, the assertions about them nevertheless often turn out to be true. Is there Università Vita-Salute San Raffaele? Of course it is! But: is there really University Vita-Salute San Raffaele out there? No way, it isn't. As we say that there are Universities, we are talking under the lightweight normative pressure of everyday semantic standards. But as we pose the question whether a University really exists in the ultimate ontology, we appropriate semantic standards that are fitting for discussion in the strict ontology room environment. We can say that the statement (U) is true because the *world* is such that it makes it true, i.e. the world together with the appropriate semantic standards. Metaphysically lightweight posits involving statements are constitutively true because of the deontic foundation that they involve. We just say that there is yet another approach to truth possibly involving semantic slack, non-tightness, which is the approach according to moral statements according to the views of moral expressivism. What about the truth as indirect correspondence and deontic matters? There is *no* correspondence for moral terms: since genuinely opposed judgments are possible in this area there is *slack* and accordingly there is no tightness. Tightness is where semantic normativity and the world conspire for the sentence to be true, whereas there is no such tight correspondence for moral terms.

(b) *Truth is often indirect correspondence.*

As we said, the statements involving metaphysically lightweight posits are often true. And their truth, according to our understanding is that of indirect correspondence. As we just said: the world is such, in a direct manner, that the statement (U) is true. But as far as the University is concerned, this is the construal of truth as indirect correspondence. The statement is directly about the world but just indirectly about

the University. We think that the construal of truth as indirect correspondence fits well to the metaphysically lightweight posits, and also that it is ontologically responsible. By saying that truth is often indirect correspondence we do not restrict our statement to metaphysically lightweight posits only, because for us the bulky posits provided by common sense deserve indirect correspondence treatment in respect to truth as well. In this sense metaphysically lightweight posits can be eye opening about the truth that is fitting to the realm of the middle sized dry goods.

4. Methodological Claim: This Approach Fits Well with the Reflective Common Sense

In the book on *Austere Realism* (2008), the dialectics of the reflective common sense is the guiding theme. There are basically three stages involved, which we summarize here in very scarce words.

Stage I: Naïve common sense realism.
Naive common sense realism, our folk psychology, posits a bunch of bulky metaphysical posits, such as cats, mats and stones. It buys realism because it claims that these entities do indeed exist in the ultimate ontology.

Stage II: Common sense antinomies.
Once as common sense eventually gets into reflective mood about the existence of bulky metaphysical posits, it encounters a bunch of antinomies. It is important to notice that this is still the very approach of common sense itself indeed, at the time as it gets reflexive about its own presuppositions. At the occasion of the Milano gathering the dean professor Di Francesco uttered the following sentence: "I now declare the existence of the 2011 San Raffaele Summer school on Making the Social World." But you cannot add to ontology just by making an announcement! This is what common sense, as it gets into a reflective mood about its own presuppositions, realizes. Other considerations of common sense in this direction involve the just mentioned realization that bulky metaphysical posits are often vague and that their compositional criteria are questionable – vagueness proving itself to be impossible in the language and thought independently existing world, and a clear answer to the special composition question is not really forthcoming.

Stage III: Reflective (austere) realism.
Common sense itself, as it gets into reflective mood, is lead to conclude that there cannot exist these bulky metaphysical posits in the ultimate ontology. So, common sense, through its own reflective dialectics, arrives

at the position of austere realism: namely that there cannot exist all these metaphysical posits that it originally took to exist out there, as it still was in the non-reflective everyday mode. The entrance into this direction may be nicely opened by the metaphysically lightweight posits, the importance and basic deontic constitution of which is agreed upon both by ourselves, Searle and by the Rylean klutz. We propose their interpretation according to the construal of truth as indirect correspondence, Searle, if we get him right, as direct correspondence. Whereas the klutz, as his name says, stays in an unhealthy amazed state. Austere realism is a realism first, so it believes that there exist a mind- and language-independent world. It is austere then in the sense that this dynamical world is most probably just one, i.e. that there do not really exist any parts in it. So reflective common sense embraces a monistic story, and so it arrives itself at the monistic view of the world that is in disagreement with its non-reflective beliefs. We believe though that realism needs to be austere, even if it does not go all the way down to monism, the most important thing for it being that it does not buy any vague entities.

5. Searle's Construction of Social Reality and Some Discussion

We believe that our approach to the metaphysically lightweight posits is compatible with Searle's construction of social reality. As already remarked Searle may be more inclined than we are to see the appropriate construal of truth as direct correspondence and not as indirect correspondence. But we believe that he should agree with our claims according to which the right ontology does not include any metaphysically lightweight posits, and that nevertheless, statements about these often happen to be true. Searle's project is that of tracing deontic powers in the construction of social reality and this broadly agrees with our way to go. According to Searle, normative and deontic powers are the products of status function declarations which are collectively accepted. We believe that entities such as Universities do not ultimately ontologically exist, and that despite this statements involving these may well be true, in function of the existence of the world, and of the contextual normative powers guiding assertions of the relevant sentences. The world is such that there is a University, and the University's coming into being gets effectuated through contextually guided normative and deontic powers.

One question concerns things being really real such that they are acceptable in the ultimate ontology, and their difference to the phenomenological criteria, targeting rather whatever occurs in our experiences. And what succeeds with the concept of existence? Our argument here involves vagueness, which in our transvaluationist view

is governed by mutually unsatisfiable and yet benign semantic standards. As already noticed, our view is that ontological vagueness is impossible, and so most common sense objects do not inhabit the ultimate ontology – which happens to be austere. What about the fact that both trees and Universities seem to exist? We may help ourselves with the example that there are different uses of the word "flat". Despite their variety these uses involve the same concept, appearing under the fine grained semantic variation – a phenomenon that we call *différance* in meaning: preserving of identity under fine-grained semantical changes. We borrow the expression *différance* from Jacques Derrida, using it to indicate the phenomenon of sameness which perdures along with changes, just as a person stays the same person, despite the differences that she endures through the flow of time. Likewise it goes for concepts such as "existence", which is governed by contextually changeable semantical standards, so that this may give rise to a *différance*-based affirmatory conflict, involving the ultimate ontological and ontic understanding of existence. Metaphysically lightweight posits turn out to be features of our world, despite the lack of their ultimate existence.

REFERENCES

Horgan, T. and Potrč, M. (2000), "Blobjectivism and Indirect Correspondence", *Facta Philosophica*, 2, 2000, pp. 249-70;

Horgan, T. and Potrč, M. (2006), "Abundant Truth in Austere World", in P. Greenough and M.

Lynch, *Truth and Realism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2006, pp. 137-61;

Horgan, T. and Potrč, M. (2008), *Austere Realism*, MIT Press, Boston, 2008;

Potrč, M. (2002), "Transvaluationism, Common Sense and Indirect Correspondence", *Acta Analytica*, 29, 2002, pp. 97-114;

Searle, J.R. (2010), *Making the Social World. The structure of human civilization*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2010.