Stephan Blatti and Sandra Lapointe, eds. *Ontology after Carnap*. Oxford University Press 2016. 256 pp. $74.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780199661985).

Ontology after Carnap, edited by Stephan Blatti and Sandra Lapointe, is a collection of eleven new essays by leading scholars on, as the title suggests, Carnap and ontology. They bear the mark of contemporary professional scholarship and thus they will become a major reference point for both metaphysicians and analytic philosophers in general.

One should be cautious, however, both with 'Carnap' and 'ontology' as they are treated in the volume. Ontology usually accounts for what there is. In it, 'questions about what exists and about the properties and relations of various existents are posed and answered.' (1). By ontology, on the other hand, one often means those investigations whose subject is *ontology* itself—this is usually called *metaontology*, or more broadly *metametaphysics*. In most cases, the chapters of the reviewed volume are related to this field and do not argue for the (non-)existence of a certain type of entities (as one would expect from a so-called first-order ontological investigation).

Though metaontological questions and debates provide the core questions of contemporary metaphysicians, the main motivation behind the volume is the renewed interest in Carnap's philosophy and particularly the exploration of 'what insights a Carnapian approach might offer to contemporary work in metaontology' (6). Carnap defended a certain form of deflationism which states that metaphysical questions are not substantive and cognitive ones which purport to describe reality as it is. His *Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology* [ESO] paper from 1950 is treated as the *magnum opus* of his position.

The Carnapian approach looks like this: facing the ontological question 'Are there F-s?' one shall say that taking it *internally* to a linguistic framework, it is answerable either by logical-mathematical means (the answer is then analytic, but not trivial!) or by empirical and experiential means (the answer is then synthetic). There is no need for any non-analytic and non-empirical metaphysical insights or special philosophical tools. But taking the question *externally* to any framework, if you still go after whether *there are* F-s, then you ask a pseudo-question without any cognitive and factual content. However, if you ask the external question as whether one should accept a given framework or not, that is, whether to use the framework of F-s (like numbers, things, events, etc.), you ask a legitimate and meaningful question of a pragmatic kind. You accept the linguistic framework of abstract entities (like sets and propositions) not because there *really* are abstract objects in a mind and language independent way, but because their introduction is expedient.

All of the chapters of *Ontology after Carnap* examine this scheme in its Carnapian and in its current neo-Carnapian version—either in a positive or negative manner. While Thomas Hofweber, Robert Kraut, Stephen Biggs and Jessica Wilson, Amie Thomasson, Richard Creath, and partly Gregory Lavers and Eli Hirsch argue for a Carnapian point of view, Simon Evnine, Matti Eklund, and Kathrin Koslicki raise some important issues against the deflationist approach pursued by and on the basis of Carnap. (Alan Sidelle's article is an interpretative one). The volume contains not just generally opposed articles, but documents some interesting inner tensions as well.

Hofweber claims, for example, that though Carnap's 'big idea' about the different readings of the ontological questions is 'exactly correct' (13), it does not have to lead us to the rejection of a

genuine metaphysics. A similar point is presented by Stephen Biggs and Jessica Wilson, who argues in their chapter that 'the most promising (and most Carnapian!) post-Kripke version of Carnap's semantics—*abductive two-dimensionalism*—presupposes an epistemology which undermines Carnap's metaphysical anti-realism' (81, emphasis in the original). In addition, as a culmination of her investigation pursued in recent years, Amie Thomasson discusses the easy approach to ontology—a deflationist account of metaphysics on Carnapian lines.

Others debate these accounts and maintains an anti-realist or anti-metaphysical Carnap picture (Kraut, Creath, Lavers), or disputes the neo-Carnapian accounts like Thomasson's (Evnine, Eklund). It can be seen that metaontology is indeed a lively field of philosophical discussion and contemporary scholars do their best to prove their points. The most Carnapian point of view might be to say that everyone shall choose according to her/his best interest and goals. *In metaphysics, there are no morals* (to paraphrase Carnap's famous principle of tolerance).

There are serious issues and problems, however, with the general outlook of the volume. After the editors and many of the contributors declared that they are not interested in and hence not doing *historical exegesis* it would be unfair to complain about the unhistorical character of the chapters. But the often inaccurate picture of Carnap dealt with in the volume, stemming from the *historically unsatisfactory* approach to Carnap, is another thing.

Regarding the context of its origins, the editors claim that the ESO was produced as a response to Quine's challenge in his famous 'On What There Is' (2). In that article, Quine argued that by accepting abstract entities, Carnap was driven to (unacceptable) Platonism. In ESO, however, though Carnap mentions the problem of abstract entities in mathematics and Quine's article, he also declares that they resolved the debate regarding ontology, and since Quine accepted abstract entities right after his article (in 1948), Carnap would have known about it given their continuous and detailed correspondence.

Carnap's article was much more guidance for his empiricist friends (as the first passage of ESO says), especially for Ernest Nagel, but it would have been useful also for Otto Neurath, though he died in 1945. It was Neurath, however, who attacked Carnap most vehemently for pursuing semantics, dealing with denotation, reference, truth, meaning and satisfaction. Carnap referred to Neurath indirectly already in *Introduction to Semantics* (1942) and Nagel reviewed that book quite negatively. Carnap's aims were thus to show that one could be a semanticist and an empiricist *at the same time*. The occurrence of ontological questions regarding abstract entities (most notably propositions) is *not threatening* of a viable and coherent *empiricist* philosophy of science.

It is important to note the original historical circumstances of the article, because as Creath (198) notes, 'it would be more accurate to say that Carnap wants to *transform* the discussion of philosophical ontology rather than to dismiss it' (emphasis in the original) That is, he wanted to show to his empiricist friends that the ontological questions and entities they fear have a legitimate context and field of application—thus he also gives a pragmatist turn to his earlier 'attitude-towards-life' conception from 1932.

It is also instructive to consult not just the original text but other writings of Carnap as well (most of the papers refer only to ESO), because despite appearances (as in the article of Hirsch and

Biggs/Wilson), Carnap was not concerned with verificationism in 1950. He left that conception behind already in the mid-1930s, thus considering and attacking verificationism seems to be just a red herring. Therefore it is also irrelevant to talk about Carnap's antirealism since, as he declares in ESO, he is not an irrealist in the usual sense since antirealism is just another pseudo-position like realism (Biggs/Wilson treat Carnap as an antirealist in the volume).

One reason for invoking verificationism and epistemology in the context of ESO is Carnap's maintenance of the idea that *some evidence is required* to settle the dispute between nominalist and realist regarding the existence of numbers; and since there is no evidence acceptable for both parties, their debate is a pseudo one. The nature and idea of the required evidence are treated in greater length by Creath and Biggs/Wilson, but it should be mention that the notion of "evidence" could be understood in many ways: as inductive-statistical data, as theoretical virtues, as falsifying evidence, as intersubjectively gathered experiential results or even shared intuitions. Verification is not a necessary corollary of evidence.

At one point, Robert Kraut (39) says 'historical accuracy aside' and that could be the motto of the volume as well. There are exceptions of course: Lavers, Creath, and Sidelle do a great job to invoke Carnap, replacing the volume's 'Carnap,' but it is Amie Thomasson who does the most: she provided not just a historically sensitive and reflexive picture of Carnap, but also describes some interesting ways how Carnap was dropped from the philosophical canon and how the negligence transformed a viable position into a dogmatically rejected conception.

Regarding the editorial work, two things should be noted. Firstly, the internal reference form of the chapters is not united. Though it seems to be just a formal matter, it documents a deeper pattern: many internal references (from one chapter to another) are wrong: it seems that the given page numbers are in some cases from earlier page-proofs and in some cases they refer to the presumably internally circulated manuscripts, thus it is much harder to track down those arguments and passages that the other author in the volume criticizes.

In the end, *Ontology after Carnap* is an important document in metaontology and metametaphysics. One will find there many insightful and detailed arguments against and for deflationism and will get a sense of what is at stake now in the fields of ontology. It will provoke many debates among philosophers but those scholars who are interested in historically sensitive pictures of philosophers and positions should take it with a grain of salt. *Ontology after Carnap* would be better entitled as 'Contemporary Debates about Metaontological Deflationism'—not so seductive sounding but more accurate.

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