

REPLY TO FALK'S REVIEW OF
*THE ONTOLOGY OF THE ANALYTIC
TRADITION AND ITS ORIGINS*

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This is a reply to Arthur Falk's review of my book, *The Ontology of the Analytic Tradition and Its Origins: Realism and Identity in Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein and Quine*.¹

I said, "I expect my argument ... will encounter tremendous resistance from, and will sow confusion among, orthodox Anglo-American analysts" (my p. xvi). In so far as Falk typifies the reaction I expected, perhaps the present reply may help readers understand the book better.

Falk is unhappy that my book is not history of philosophy, despite what he calls my "partial plea of *nolo contendere*" (p. 161). I am not sure what he means by "partial". What I say is:

[T]he present book is not a historical study in that there is almost no discussion of causal influences of earlier philosophers on the analysts. If you please, the book is a *proto*-historical study. It is not history of philosophy, but something that must be done prior to that.... If I had done a historical study ..., the book would have been far longer than it is, and would have taken many more years to write.... (My p. xii)

My book goes well beyond ... historical studies ... to give a philosophical evaluation of what the analytic movement really amounts to. (My p. xiii)

Falk is also unhappy that the title speaks of origins, leading him to expect a history book (p. 161). He does not mention that I explain in the preface that

¹ *Russell*, n.s. 18 (1998): 161–74. Falk is unhappy about the subtitle because the book is mainly on Frege and Russell and very little on Wittgenstein and Quine. He does not mention that I explain why in the preface (my p. xii).

“origin” is triply ambiguous, including a purely comparative sense (my p. xii), or that I do explain what, on my view, the origins are (my pp. xii, xiii, xix, 17, 28–31, 40, 124–5, 135–43, 184–5, 216–18, 270–2). The title speaks of the ontology *and* its origins, so nobody should have expected the book to be entirely about origins. The subtitle does not even suggest a history book.

Falk says that even as proto-history, my book should not point away from history (pp. 169–70). He says that like the scholastics, I impose an alien scholastic framework of interpretation on the analysts, a framework I know they rejected (pp. 161, 168, 169).² He notes, citing me, that the 1903 Russell expressly rejects the distinction between real distinction and distinction in reason (p. 168). Falk does not mention that the 1903 Russell also insists that an army, its regiments, and its soldiers are all different objects, admitting both classes as many and classes as one (my p. 244)—a distinction in reason if there ever was one. Nor does Falk mention that the 1903 Russell’s principal thesis might be interpreted as being that arithmetic is distinct only in reason from logic and class theory.³

Falk notices that “[i]n Chapter 7 the arguments that none of the four philosophers is a modified realist are listed, then the more numerous arguments are listed for the thesis that each is, and the arguments against are undermined, leading to the conclusion that [the four analysts were modified realists]” (p. 169). He calls this “smoke and mirrors” and “blindness” (p. 169). But what is wrong with defining a thesis, and then seeing if anything logically implies it or is analogous to it in a philosopher’s work? That is discovery, not imposition. That is all I do. It is bread and butter scholarship. Surely we all have argued that a thesis is implicit in a philosopher who officially denies it or who might appear committed to rejecting it due to holding other, apparently contrary, theses. Here my suggestion was that the great analysts might be deeper and more subtle than Falk thinks (my pp. xxi, 38).

Falk speaks of my “imperfect grasp of the discipline of intellectual history” (p. 169). But are not comparative studies fair game? Do we not need to find

² As if Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle were scholastic philosophers. This is also quite a slam against the medievals.

³ I suspect the 1903 Russell does not understand distinction in reason the same way I do. Very possibly he thinks that items distinct in reason exist only in reason. I define distinction in reason much more generally so as to include all less than fully real distinctions (my p. 26). I find such distinctions abound in the jungle realism of the 1903 Russell.

Technically, since I define four sorts of real identity, I have four sorts of real distinction, four sorts of less than fully real identity, and four sorts of less than fully real distinction.

Falk says I know Frege rejects the distinction between real distinction and distinction in reason because I report that for Frege there is only one form of identity (p. 168). Falk misses my statement that this single form of identity concerns only the logical structure of identity statements, while real identities and identities in reason are objectual (my pp. 62–3).

whether similarities exist before we can raise questions of historical influence concerning the adoption of similar views? Is a scholar who looks for similarities among thinkers blindly imposing his own views on them according to a pre-set framework?

Falk does not mention that I say, “A ... fallacy is to assume that I am applying the categories, theses, approaches, methods, or tools of either tradition to the other at all. I am simply comparing them ...” (my p. xvii).

If I am blindly imposing modified realism right and left as Falk claims, then why do I assimilate Protagoras and Carnap to radical relativity (my pp. 25, 246–65)? Why do I assimilate Parmenides, Occam, Arnauld, the later Brentano, and the later Wittgenstein to radical realism (my pp. 25, 30, 31, 233, 259)? Falk does not mention these other assimilations.

Falk is wrong to think I define modified realism in terms of real distinction and distinction in reason (p. 168). He is also wrong to think real things are always building-blocks and rational things are always “composite individuals” “built on that” (p. 168). Each of these wrong views precludes a monist from being a modified realist. I define modified realism more deeply in terms of real identity and less than fully real identity (my p. 25), so that Spinoza, who admits only one real thing, can be a modified realist (my pp. xiii, 27; see p. 14 on why identity is prior to difference). I hold that real beings can occur as parts of a conceptual being, but also that conceptual beings can occur as parts of a real being (my p. 28).

Falk says I define the analytic tradition vaguely, but “soon clarif[y] this definition with the thesis that paraphrase ... into canonical notations is basic to ontology and metaphysics” (p. 161). Not at all. What I say is,

I agree with those who divide [the analytic tradition] into three broad phases: the ideal or formal language approach (Frege, Russell, the early Wittgenstein, Quine), the ordinary language approach (the later Wittgenstein), and the present phase of consolidation and diffusion....

... I count Frege and Russell as analysts because they make paraphrase into their respective canonical notations basic to ontology and metaphysics.... (My p. 5)

That is, I count Frege and Russell as analysts because I can place them in the first of three broad phases of the analytic tradition. By misreading me as making canonical notations basic to the entire analytic tradition, Falk saddles me with the idiotic view that the entire ordinary language movement falls outside that tradition. Falk chides me for holding such a view, completely missing that I make that movement the second broad phase of the tradition.

Falk complains that in my book, “ontology is stage centre, and little is said about the paraphrasing into canonical notations”, which he supposes to be basic to the analytic tradition on my view (pp. 161–2). Falk completely misses

my critique of the supposed importance of canonical notation. This is not to mention the title of my book; I did not write *The Canonical Notation of the Analytic Tradition and Its Origins*.⁴

To rescue me from my blindness, Falk spends over two pages describing his own view of the analytic tradition, using a triple distinction and a double distinction to yield a matrix of six options. I will discuss only his ontologizers, who “leave the syntactic structures of the sentences they analyze the same as they find them and posit entities, either ‘senses’ or mere possibilia, for those structures to denote” (p. 162). “Frege was [an ontologizer], because his analyses posited concepts and thoughts that existed independently of anyone thinking them” (p. 162). This bald *non sequitur* opposes Frege to Russell, who was “sceptical of the apparent syntax” (p. 162). Falk seems to think that for Frege a sentence’s syntactic structure denotes senses or mere possibilia. Actually, sentences express senses and denote truth-values, their copulative structures denote nothing because Frege deems the copula syncategorematic, and their relational expressions express senses and denote relations; Frege rejects mere possibilia. Falk also seems to think that a Fregean concept is a sense or a mere possibile. Actually, concepts are extensional and senses are intensional; again, Frege rejects mere possibilia. Worst of all, Falk seems to think that Frege leaves the apparent syntax of “Falk exists” the same as he finds it, with existence being a property of Falk’s. In fact Frege is famous for making existence a second-level concept predicated of first-level concepts. Even the sense expressed by “exists” is second-level. All the other great analysts I discuss adopt Frege’s analysis of levels. As I repeatedly state in my book, even the later Wittgenstein does so in *Remarks on the Foundations of Mathematics* (at sec. v, #35). Thus none of them is an ontologizer concerning quantification. Falk also forgets Frege’s whole project of logicism, on which the apparent syntax of arithmetical sentences is replaced with a complex logical syntax.

Falk’s chief complaint is that I am blind to the “deflation of ontology” achieved by the analysts (p. 169). To his mind, this automatically scouts any imputation of modified realism to them. He quotes the 1994 Quine as wondering why “people, including me in the old days, ... why they take questions of the identity of objects so seriously” (p. 171). Well, my book is about people in the old days of analysis, including Quine. Falk does not mention

⁴ I argue that canonical notation is not the most basic aspect even of the ideal or formal language phase of the analytic tradition. I criticize the value of canonical notation as opposed to deeper and purer “no entity without identity” analysis in Quine (and by extension in Frege and Russell) and hold that Quine (as well as Frege and Russell) recognize as much in practice (my pp. xv, 11–12, 14–15).

that my main imputation of modified realism to Quine is to the 1960–81 Quine, who admits a robust realism of physical objects (boots) as well as less real abstract classes (classes of boots). Falk also does not mention that I show that when Quine later abandons that dualism, he still has plenty of overlapping and non-overlapping objects such that some are really distinct from each other and others are distinct from each other only in reason (boots, various classes of boots) (my pp. 267–8; see p. 271 on “mix-and-match interplay”). When it comes to theses implying modified realism, Falk puts his blind eye to the telescope every time.

Falk knows that I anticipate a principal objection to my book. He says that it is not his criticism, since the principal objection I anticipate is that people will say that for the analysts, ontology is supervenient on language, and his criticism is the different one that I am blind to the “deflation” of ontology by the linguistic analysts (p. 170). The question to ask is not whether his vague criticism is exactly the same as the more precise objection I anticipate, but whether his criticism is similar enough that my reply would apply to it as well:

Now, this principal objection is just the principal myth my book aims to explode.... (My p. xvii)

In fact, the chief problem with the principal objection is that it ignores my principal argument. No flaw has been detected in my principal argument.... In particular, my argument is analogical.... Even those who reject substances in any traditional sense count as modified realists if, according to my seven criteria, they admit sufficient substance analogues or can be interpreted as admitting sufficient analogues to real distinctions and distinctions in reason. Even if it were the case that the ontology of every analyst [has deflationary aspects], this would only make such analogies to traditional ontology deeper and more exciting. Indeed, ... analogy is the deepest form of philosophical understanding. (My pp. xvii–xviii)

Thus the chief resemblance of Falk’s deflation criticism to the principal objection I anticipate is that both ignore the principal argument of my book, which is to compare the analysts to earlier Western philosophers by looking for analogies to traditional theses. Unfortunately, the principal argument of my book, though announced as such twice, was too hard for Falk’s scholarly radar to detect (my pp. xiv, 235; see p. 38).⁵

What does Falk think I am arguing against, if not the misconception that

⁵ Other reviews less than a quarter as long as Falk’s correctly report my argument as analogical. See Wayne Patterson’s review, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 75 (1997): 543–4, and Bob Barnard’s review, *The Bertrand Russell Society Quarterly*, no. 100 (Nov. 1998): 44.

everything the great analysts say in some sense deflates, undermines, or invalidates traditional ontology?

Since Falk misses the principal argument of my book, he also misses my distinction within that argument between a main position and a fall-back position. Should the many direct positive analogies in Chapter 7 fail, the fall-back position is that there is enough presupposition or reformulation of metaphysics in the analysts to deem them covert metaphysicians or virtual metaphysicians (my pp. xiv, 20; see pp. xx, 19–20).

Obviously, the major seeming disanalogies are the seeming relativistic (“deflationary”) aspects of the analysts. But modified realism accommodates or subsumes them. On objectual identities’ “shifting” when sortal concepts or terms “shift” for all four analysts, see my Chapter 7. Such “shifting” is exactly the same as that for Aristotelian substance metaphysicians, who admit it across all their categories, and is scarcely a disanalogy. See my Chapter 6. I also accommodate Frege’s and Russell’s sentential context principles (my pp. 86–101, 299 n.8), Wittgenstein’s language-game contextualism (my p. 259, 15th point), and Quine’s theses of translational indeterminacy, referential inscrutability, and non-immunity from revision (underdetermination of theory) (my pp. 26, 259–64).

Falk does not mention that my modified realism can accommodate philosophers whose metaphysics are almost entirely deflationary. “Modified realism ... is a theory accommodating huge amounts of relativity on a realist base” (my p. 270). It “may be called modified relativity with equal justice” (my p. 25).

Falk lists two sources of the analysts’ deflation of ontology: “scepticism”, under which head he includes non-epistemological Quinean indeterminacy of translation; and understanding objectivity as mere invariance through transformation (pp. 170–1). The latter he attributes to Russell and Carnap. Actually the analytic origin of both sources is Frege’s private language argument of 1884 based on the dualism of projective geometry; compare the 1918 Frege and the later Wittgenstein on systematic red–green colour inversion private language arguments. Quine, Russell, and Carnap all studied Frege. Falk does not mention that I argue that such arguments promote realism (my pp. 255–9).

As to source #1, indeterminacy of translation, Falk does not mention that I argue that this has its rightful place within Quine’s modified realism (my pp. 259–64). Nor does Falk mention Quine’s famous robust realism of physical objects (my pp. 265–6).

As to source #2, Falk cites the 1919 Russell as deflating ontology with his theory of structure (pp. 171–2). Falk does not mention that from 1927 on, Russell uses his theory of structure to support a probable physical realism (see

my pp. 189–94, 247). Falk claims I miss the deflationary theory of structure. I do not miss it (my p. 194). But he misses the realist later phase of that theory. He also misses the 1919 Russell’s famous insistence on preserving a “robust sense of reality” (see my Chap. 4, entitled “Russell’s Robust Sense of Reality”).

Falk generalizes Russell’s deflationary theory of structure to all cases of identity, “since the identity conditions themselves are structures” (p. 174). Not at all. For Russell, a true identity statement whose subject-terms are logically proper names does not describe a structure. It does not describe a fact at all. It asserts an empty tautology (my pp. 125–6; see pp. 178, 290 n.3). Russell is clear that anything with a structure is complex, and he is also clear that there may be simple entities (my pp. 152–3, 161). Such entities would have identities, but not structures. And such entities would be real, even in the early deflationary phase of Russell’s theory of structure.

In an attempt to correct me, Falk says all the analysts do admit “aboutness”, by which I assume he means reference or at least denotation (p. 172). Falk does not seem to realize that, if anything, this supports my thesis that all the analysts are realists. Falk quotes me as saying “Thus the later Russell’s structures are structures of nothing”, and concerning Quine, “Without a domain [of quantification], physics would be no longer about anything” (p. 172). Falk says here I am “just not insightful at all” (p. 172). Falk does not seem to realize that if anything, on his own interpretation of these quotations of me, I would be supporting the deflationary thesis he accuses me of ignoring. In fact Falk takes these quotations out of context. I say those things as criticisms, and not at all as descriptions, of Russell’s and Quine’s views. I state them as embarrassing implications—embarrassing precisely because the later Russell and Quine are physical realists.

Falk includes a little dissertation of his own on how quantum mechanics is messy and ontologists should let physicists tell them what the entities are. If Falk had wanted to relate this to my book, he might have mentioned that Russell’s theory of quantum mechanics is a major part of Russell’s realist interpretation of what physicists tell us (see my Chap. 5, sec. 5, entitled “Quantum Mechanics”).

Falk says that my arguments for my name interpretation of Frege’s theory of informative identity statements are unconvincing (p. 169). Falk gives no argument for his claim, and no argument for the object interpretation he prefers. Falk does not mention that I give an extensive critique of the interpretation Falk prefers. Falk goes so far as to mention the conclusion of one of my arguments, but does not describe the argument itself. (The conclusion is that on my view, Frege’s theory is workable, while on Falk’s view, it is not.) The argument is important, but not crucial to my view. Falk is saying “Bang

bang, you're dead", but with no bullets in his gun.

Falk rightly sees that I base the case that Frege is a radical relativist (against which case I argue) on three theses: for Frege, (1) objects "shift" as concepts "shift"; (2) identity is predicated not of objects, but of names expressing senses (it is the relation of denoting the same denotation); and (3) existence is predicated not of objects, but of concepts (pp. 168–9). Thesis (1) is by far the most important. It is the basic problem of radical relativity with which my book is concerned. I present the problem in Chapter 1 and resolve it in Chapter 7, after laying a foundation in Chapter 6, entitled "The Ancient Realist Basis of Conceptual Relativity". Thesis (2) is the least important, since it heightens the tension only in Frege's case, and only on my name interpretation of his theory of informative identity statements. Thesis (3) heightens the tension for all four great analysts, since they all make existence second-level. It is thus more important than thesis (2), but not much more, since I think I can dismiss it easily (my pp. 74–6). Perhaps because I must devote so much space to the difficult case for my name interpretation, out of all proportion to its importance to the basic problem of radical relativity, Falk wrongly assumes that thesis (2) is the most important one. In any event, Falk thinks the claim that Frege is a radical relativist "only begins to look plausible" on my name interpretation, and that is why "much of the defence [*sic*] of Frege is taken up with pinning" thesis (2) to him. I think Falk should stop looking at how much space I take on a thesis and start paying attention to what I say is the basic problem the book is concerned with. But I really have no idea why he thinks thesis (2) is the most important one about Frege. Thesis (2), like thesis (3), is logically consistent with modified realism and even with radical realism, while thesis (1) by definition precludes even the weakest of real identities.

Falk claims I missed a "key premiss" of Dummett's argument that Frege later abandons his context principle (p. 166). The premiss is that words and sentences are asymmetric; we "must respect an asymmetry between the way words function in sentences, and the way sentences function in more complex sentences" (p. 166). Specifically, sentences are units in implication relations, while words are units in speech acts (p. 166). In fact not only do I discuss that question-begging alleged asymmetry, but I reject it as illusory:

... Hacker disagrees with Dummett on the reason why Frege first held the context principle in 1884. Dummett sees the reason as the sentence's primacy in speech (in acts of communication). Hacker sees it as the sentence's primacy in deductive inference, including inferences of new sentences with old words in new arrangements. But these reasons are not wholly distinct. Deductive inferences are themselves part of speech, and can always be written as hypothetical ("if-then") sentences. (My p. 285)

When Dummett recants and confesses that the later Frege has a context principle after all, Dummett lists what Falk describes as the "key premiss" for Dummett's former view merely as argument (D) among arguments (A)–(E), and rebuts it saying, "In practice, [argument (D)] is not significant...."⁶

Presumably concerning my interpretation of Wittgenstein's private language argument as a dance of two veils, the core being Fregean, the inner veil being epistemic-verificationist, and the gossamer outer veil being Kripkean-justificationist (my p. 256), Falk accuses me of the baldest question-begging about the nature of knowledge (p. 172). Falk does not mention that I argue it is Kripke who begs the question against Descartes (my pp. 256–7).

Falk says I "slide" from interpreting to defending Russell (p. 173). Well, I also make six comments on Russell's 1911 theory of universals (my pp. 162–5), I criticize Davidson and Quine on events (my p. 204–6), I criticize the Hintikkas on language as a universal medium (my pp. 81–6), I offer my own qualified objects theory of informative identity statements (my pp. xxvi, 47, 61, 73), I criticize traditional theory of analogy (my p. 235), and I state my own ontology as a framework of concepts and issues for the book (Chap. 1). What is wrong with that? Even if my book were a history book, there are plenty of history books which helpfully criticize or defend views.

My book has a general thesis and a specific thesis. The general thesis is that all four analysts are "no entity without identity" ontologists in my broad sense, and the specific thesis is that they are modified realists (my p. xiii). The general thesis is fundamental. The specific thesis, understood as saying that all entities have either real or less than real identities, entails the general thesis. Belonging to the species entails belonging to the genus. I discuss the specific thesis in Chapters 1, 6, and 7; Chapter 2 combats the rival specific thesis that Frege is a radical relativist. There is a big skip from Chapter 1 to Chapter 7 in the discussion of the philosophical problem of radical relativity. But right after I tell readers of the skip, I warn that if you make the skip, you miss everything of interest on Frege and Russell as "no entity without identity" ontologists (my p. 38), that is, everything of interest on the general thesis directly as such. In fact all seven chapters progressively develop the general thesis of the book.

To sum up, my book failed to awaken Falk from his slumbering dogmatism.⁷

⁶ Michael Dummett, "The Context Principle: Centre of Frege's Philosophy", in Ingolf Max and Werner Stelzner, eds., *Logik und Mathematik: Frege-Kolloquium Jena 1993* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), pp. 3–19.

⁷ Please see http://www.members.tripod.com/~Jan_Dejnozka/index.html for my own retrospect on the book and corrections.