

Preface

The heart of philosophy is metaphysics, and at the heart of the heart lie two questions about existence. What is it for any contingent thing to exist? Why does any contingent thing exist? Call these the *nature* question and the *ground* question, respectively. The first concerns the nature of the existence of the contingent existent; the second concerns the ground of the contingent existent. Both questions are ancient, and yet perennial in their appeal; both have presided over the burial of so many of their would-be undertakers that it is a good induction that they will continue to do so.

For some time now, the preferred style in addressing such questions has been deflationary when it has not been eliminativist. Ask Willard Quine what existence is, and you will hear that “Existence is what existential quantification expresses.”¹ Ask Bertrand Russell what it is for an individual to exist, and he will tell you that an individual can no more exist than it can be numerous: there just is no such thing as the existence of individuals.² And of course Russell’s eliminativist answer implies that one cannot even ask, on pain of succumbing to the fallacy of complex question, why any contingent individual exists: if no individual exists, there can be no question *why* any individual exists. Not to mention Russell’s modal corollary: ‘contingent’ and ‘necessary’ can only be said *de dicto* (of propositions) and not *de re* (of things). At the source of the Russellian-Quinean stream stands the imposing figure of Frege, perhaps the greatest of logicians, and certainly the greatest since Aristotle. But logic is not metaphysics, and we shall see that existence cannot come into focus through the lenses of logic alone. It is, as Santayana once said, “odious to the logician.”³ This is part of its charm, as the resolute reader will no doubt come to appreciate.

The *critical* task of this book is to put paid to deflationary and eliminativist accounts, thereby restoring existence to its rightful place as one of the deep topics in philosophy, if not the deepest. The *constructive* task is to defend the thesis that the nature and ground questions admit of a unified answer, and that this answer takes the form of what I call a paradigm theory of existence. The central idea of the paradigm theory is that existence itself is nothing abstract (hence not a property or a concept or a quantifier or anything merely logical or linguistic or representational) but is instead a paradigmatically existent concrete individual. The idea is not merely that existence itself exists -- which would be true if one said that existence is a property and one held a realist theory of properties -- but that existence exists in a plenary concrete sense that it cannot be the business of a preface to explain. But the idea may be limned as follows. Existence itself exists of absolute metaphysical necessity and the contingent existent exists in virtue of its dependence on self-existent existence. I submit that this robust theory of existence can be as rigorously defended as any deflationary theory.

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Above all, I am indebted to my wife Mary whose loving support made it possible for me to leave the ranks of those who live *from* philosophy, but rarely *for* it, and to strike out on an independent path. I should also mention fellow maverick Quentin Smith with whom I have enjoyed many a conversation and on whom I have inflicted many a half-baked draft. The largesse of the National Endowment for the Humanities of the USA contributed its part to my postdoctoral education. Among teachers and NEH seminar directors, I recall with pleasure Roderick Chisholm, Hector-Neri Castañeda, and J. N. Findlay, all of whom, sadly enough, have ascended into the philosophical pantheon. I have tried to combine Chisholm's sobriety, Castañeda's systematic vision and Findlay's speculative depth -- with what success, or lack thereof, the reader is left to decide.

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William F. Vallicella
Gold Canyon, Arizona, USA
billvallicella@compuserve.com

NOTES

¹ W. V. Quine, "Existence and Quantification" in *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), p. 97.

² Bertrand Russell, "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism" in *Logic and Knowledge*, ed. R. C. Marsh (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1956), pp. 232 ff.

³ George Santayana, *Scepticism and Animal Faith* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1955), p. 48.

⁴ Barry Miller, *The Fullness of Being* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002). See also his *From Existence to God* (London: Routledge, 1992).