

Ideological Innocence

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Abstract

Quine taught us the difference between a theory's ontology and its ideology. Ontology is the things a theory's quantifiers must range over if it is true, Ideology is the primitive concepts that must be used to state the theory. This allows us to split the theoretical virtue of parsimony into two kinds: ontological parsimony and ideological parsimony. My goal is help illuminate the virtue of ideological parsimony by giving a criterion for ideological innocence - a rule for when additional ideology does not count against parsimony. I propose the expressive power innocence criterion: if the ideology of theory one is expressively equivalent to that of theory two, then neither is ideologically simpler than the other. In its favor I offer the argument from accuracy, showing that any account of a theoretical virtue that is supposed to make theories that have it more likely to be true than theories that do not must respect it. Next I consider its ramifications, eliminating rival views and passing judgment on some arguments from parsimony that can be found in the literature. Finally, I consider two objections. First: I address an objection arising from the possibility of languages with a 'primitive' operator that allows us to list a theory's primitives in the object-language. Second: I address an objection raised by Nelson Goodman against attempts to reckon simplicity by expressive power. Both objections fail.

1 Introduction

Quine taught us that theoretical commitments come in two varieties: ontology and ideology.¹ A theory's ontology is the entities that must exist if the theory is true: things like chairs, gods, electrons, incars, and Eiffel-tower-noses. A theory's ideology is the primitive notions or concepts employed in its most perspicuous statement: things like quantifiers, operators, predicates, and connectives. Good theories

¹Quine [1951], [1983].

minimize their commitments. Better theories minimize their commitments more. This minimization of commitments is typically codified in the theoretical virtue of parsimony, which may be split into two components: ontological parsimony and ideological parsimony. My interest here is in ideological parsimony. There is, unfortunately, no widely accepted theory of what ideological parsimony amounts to. I have no such theory on offer. But I do wish to defend a condition for when additional ideology does not offend against parsimony; a criterion of ideological innocence, so to speak. I will argue that when adding ideology does not increase expressive power, it does not count against a theory's (ideological) parsimony. Of course, any final judgment about how parsimonious a theory's total commitments are requires not just a reckoning of its ideology, but also one of its ontology and of how to trade the two off against each other. What I saw is decidedly *ceteris paribus*; we must first get a grasp on what ideological commitment is and how to measure it before tackling the rather thorny question of how to trade it off against ontological commitment.

In defense of my proposal I offer what I call the argument from accuracy. The argument takes a specific conception of how epistemic theoretical virtues do their job and combines it with a theory of epistemic reasons to show that any adequate analysis of ideological parsimony must include my expressive power innocence criterion. After giving the argument from accuracy, I explore the consequences of my proposal for the literature, passing judgment on several prominent arguments, before we consider several objections.

Before we begin, an important note. Because of how terminology has evolved in several debates, I will be dealing with several distinct notions with the term 'equivalent' or some variant in the name. These should not be confused. 'Logical equivalence' is a relation between theories, which holds when each may be derived from the other. 'Theoretical equivalence' is a relationship between expressions of theories, when two expressions express the same theory. 'Expressive equivalence' is a relation between languages, when each may be used to express all and only the concepts that the other may be. 'equally virtuous' and 'equally parsimonious' are relations between theories, that hold when they are equal in their theoretical virtue or parsimony respectively. While this paper will explore interesting relationships between these notions, in particular between parsimoniousness and the expressive equivalence of the canonical language of a theory (for more elaboration, see below), it will not argue that any of these notions are to be identified.

2 The Expressive Power Innocence Criterion

Expressive power is a property of languages. For our purposes, we can think of a language as a set of symbols plus some formation rules. Roughly, a language's expressive power is the range of things it can be used to communicate. Two languages are expressively equivalent when they can communicate the

same things. A bit more precisely: two languages are expressively equivalent when there exists a meaning-preserving map from sentences of the first to sentences of the second such that the sentences paired up are true in all and only the same models, which for our purposes we can think of as mathematical structures that together with a semantics give the meaning and truth conditions of the sentences of a language.² We can think of a theory as a set of sentences in some language.

We can compare the expressive power of ideologies by comparing the expressive power of languages whose syntax includes only symbols representing their primitives and the things that can be defined out of them. This step is critical, otherwise it would be a category mistake to talk of the expressive power of a theory's ideology, since expressive power is a property of languages. Given some ideology I_n , we call the language containing symbols only for its primitives and what can be defined using them L_{I_n} its perspicuous language. We can then say that one ideology is expressively equivalent to another just in case their perspicuous languages are expressively equivalent. We can extend this notion of a perspicuous language directly to a specific theory's ideology as follows: A language L_{T_i} is perspicuous for a theory T_i just in case it contains symbols only for the ideology that appears in T_i (give or take convenience items like scope indicators). I am not going to go into detail on the technical aspects of expressive equivalence; the interested reader is referred to Kocurek [2017] and Pelletier & Urquhart [2003] for a formal discussion. We can now state the expressive power innocence criterion that I will be defending:

EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION: some ideology I_k and some other ideology I_j are equally parsimonious if their perspicuous languages L_{I_j} and L_{I_k} are expressively equivalent.³

The expressive power innocence criterion gives us a sufficient condition for when arguments from ideological parsimony fail. They fail when the perspicuous language of T_i is expressively equivalent to the perspicuous language of T_j .⁴

²In this sense, the notion of expressiveness in play here is propositional and intensional. I do not mean to claim that all good notions of expressiveness are like this, only that this is the one I will be using.

³Nota Bene: This definition does make ideological parsimony relative to a class of models and choice of semantics, but I think this is a harmless relativism. It is relative in the sense that anything that is relative to meaning is relative. In most cases we care about, there will be a clear 'right' class of models to use in making the comparison: namely, those we used when determining validities and analyticities for the languages. For example, for first order theories, the 'right' class of models will be models of predicate logic where the predicates of the theories stand in any common-ground analytic relations.

⁴As noted in fn. 3, expressive equivalence is always relative to the class of models used to give meaning to the language(s). So in order to use the criterion effectively, we will need to compare expressive power relative to the appropriate class of models and semantics. Spelling out which class of models and semantics is 'appropriate' will depend so much on the theories in question and the context of the debate that I doubt much can be said about it at this level of abstraction. But minimally, it should be a class of models and semantics where any common-ground validities and analyticities are respected. For example: if both theorists agree that 'bachelor' is equivalent to 'unmarried man,' then models including married bachelors are not appropriate.

3 The Argument from Accuracy

Now we can turn to the central argument of the paper: the argument from accuracy. The argument proceeds from a specific conception of the way in which epistemic virtues do their work and a specific theory of epistemic value to the conclusion that any adequate analysis of ideological parsimony must concur with the EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION in all of its verdicts. I will not be able to offer full-blooded defenses of the theories of theoretical virtue and epistemic value that I will rely on, but these defenses can be found elsewhere. Instead, I will give a brief explanation of each before showing how they can be combined to produce an argument for the EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION.

3.1 Virtue-Probabilism

Arguments from theoretical virtue attempt to show that one theory is better than its rival(s), even though all theories are consistent with the data. We can divide theoretical virtues between *epistemic* and *pragmatic* virtues. Epistemic virtues provide epistemic reasons in favor of the theories that possess them. Following Ernest Sosa, I define an epistemic reason as a reason to affirm in the effort to be right, reliably enough.⁵ Pragmatic virtues provide reasons to use a theory, truth be damned. I have nothing against pragmatic virtues, but I am only interested in ideological parsimony as an epistemic virtue. Thus, I will argue that any analysis of ideological parsimony that violates the EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION is inconsistent with regarding ideological parsimony as an epistemic virtue. For those skeptical or agnostic about whether ideological parsimony makes theories more likely to be true, think of my argument as partially showing what ideological parsimony would have to be in order for it to do the work of an epistemic virtue.

Epistemic likelihood is given by probability functions. There are a number of arguments for this conclusion, which I won't rehearse in detail here. They include Cox's Theorem,⁶ which lays down some intuitive axioms that govern the term 'plausibility' and uses them to derive the laws of probability; Dutch Book arguments, which are traditionally used to show that anyone whose degrees of belief don't conform to the axioms of probability can be baited into a series of bets that guarantee a loss, but have been adapted for purely epistemic purposes⁷; and Accuracy-Dominance arguments, which show that anyone whose degrees of belief are not a probability function is dominated with respect to distance from truth by a probability

⁵Sosa [2015].

⁶Cox [1946]

⁷Maher [1997], Christensen [1996]

function.⁸ But an important feature of probability functions is that they assign equal values to logically equivalent theories. Thus, if two theories are logically equivalent, one cannot be more likely than the other.⁹ This gives us our first premise in the argument from accuracy.

FIRST PREMISE: Logically equivalent theories are equally likely to be true.

3.2 The Value of Truth

Epistemic virtues are the ones that make a theory more likely to be true. They are characteristic of theories we affirm in the effort to be right, reliably enough. This makes truth the only value that epistemic virtues are sensitive to and gives us our next premise.

SECOND PREMISE: Theories that are equally likely to be true are equally epistemically virtuous.

Starting with Goldman, there is a tradition in epistemic value theory called *veritism* that takes truth to be the sole epistemic virtue. I don't quite need full blown veritism here; it is sufficient for my purposes that theories that are equally likely to be true are equally virtuous. But arguments for veritism are arguments for my premise.¹⁰ It is important to note that for me, and for these arguments, it is the accuracy of the mental state that is its measure of value, not its role in facilitating the future learning or getting closer to the truth of other propositions, at least for synchronic assessment. Veritism is not equivalent to the claim that a theory/mental state has epistemic value only if it's true. There are sensible ways of measuring the relative accuracy of a theory/mental state even when it is not perfectly accurate. The veritist claim is that epistemic virtue covaries with relative accuracy.

Although I will not be giving a full defense of this premise, it is necessary to say a bit more about epistemic value. In his *Writing the Book of the World*, Ted Sider has proposed that the use of joint-carving ideology is itself epistemically valuable.¹¹ He makes this point by comparing 'regular' color predicates with 'grueified' ones. The color of the world's supply of emeralds and sapphires may be truly described using the familiar 'green' and 'blue,' or Nelson Goodman's 'bleen' and 'grue.'¹² But, he contends, the blue/green

⁸Joyce [1998], [2009], Easwaran and Fitelson [2015], Pettigrew [2016], Leitgeb and Pettigrew [2010a], [2010b].

⁹This places my view of the inferential role of theoretical virtues in the same company as Bayesian approaches. I only need probabilism, not full blown Bayesianism, to make the argument work, but arguments for Bayesianism will be arguments for the premise I need. See McGrew [2003] and Climenhaga [2017] for a Bayesian case; Douven [2016] for opposition.

¹⁰See Goldman [1999]; see also Konek and Levinstein [Forthcoming] for the development of a veritist epistemic decision theory.

¹¹Sider [2011].

¹²Reminder: something is grue iff it is observed before 1/1/2028 and it is green, or it is not observed before 1/1/2028 and

description is clearly better. This betterness is explained by blue and green being more fundamental concepts (or more structural, as he puts it) than grue and bleen. He later argues that it is epistemically better to know more fundamental (or structural) truths, a kind of epistemic goodness that cannot be explained in veritistic terms.¹³

With Sider, I agree that some concepts carve more natural joints than others. And, as one interested in truth, I agree that it is good to know which concepts those are. In that sense, if we think there are facts about which concepts carve at nature's joints, knowing those facts is desirable from a veritist perspective. But it is not a special value. I do not think that the superiority of the blue/green description is explicable in terms of epistemic value over and above the value of truth. Rather, I think the added value is a pragmatic matter. We think in terms of blue and green. It is therefore less of a cognitive strain for us to use the blue/green description. If a community naturally thought in terms of grue/bleen, they would be right to say that the grue/bleen description is better. It may be that we are right and they are wrong (or that they are right and we are wrong) about which concepts are more natural, but I maintain that even if we were to learn that grue and bleen carved closer to the joints in nature than blue and green do, we would be right to maintain our verdict that the blue/green description is superior for us.

3.3 Bringing It All Together

The argument from accuracy will show that any adequate analysis of ideological parsimony as an epistemic virtue must respect the EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION. The argument itself is fairly straightforward.

We start with a theorem of the probability calculus. If $\phi \leftrightarrow \psi$ is valid (that is, if ϕ and ψ are logically equivalent), then $\Pr(\phi) = \Pr(\psi)$. Thus, if ϕ is more likely to be true than ψ is, then $\phi \leftrightarrow \psi$ is false in some model(s). Consequently, if T_1 is more epistemically virtuous than T_2 , then T_1 and T_2 are not logically equivalent. Epistemic virtues do not divide logical equivalents.¹⁴

Any attempt to explicate ideological parsimony that does not respect the EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION will divide logical equivalents. Suppose the perspicuous languages of two collections of ideology, I_1 and I_2 , are expressively equivalent, but some proposed criterion of ideological parsimony

it is blue; something is bleen iff it is observed before 1/1/2028 and it is blue, or it is not observed before 1/1/2028 and it is green.

¹³Sider [2011] section 4.2.

¹⁴A wrinkle: we may be uncertain whether two ideologies are expressively equivalent. If so, then we may still be rational in assigning different probabilities to logically equivalent theories; Bayesian superbabies may be logically omniscient, but we aren't. This is an instance of the problem of logical learning. The best framework for modeling logical learning is Garrabrant et al.'s [Ms] "Logical Induction," in which the probabilities of logical equivalents converge in the limit. This is enough for the argument. As we learn more logic, we approximate the Bayesian ideal.

deems I_1 more parsimonious than I_2 . Now take a theory T_1 whose ideology just is I_1 . By assumption, there exists a function $Tr()$ from the perspicuous languages for I_1 to that of I_2 . But this means that there exists a theory, $Tr(T_1)$, whose ideology just is I_2 and is logically equivalent to T_1 . So the proposed criterion divides logical equivalents, and consequently cannot be the analysis of an epistemic virtue. Although the EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION does not aspire to analyze ideological parsimony, it does create a necessary condition for any analysis of ideological parsimony that could be the analysis of an epistemic virtue.¹⁵

The argument from accuracy is the primary reason to accept the EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION. We shall now turn to consequences of accepting it and objections that might be launched against it.

4 Rivals

There are several proposed criteria for ideological parsimony in the literature. For now, I am going to evaluate them as attempts to analyze an epistemic virtue. So analyzed, all of them fall prey to the argument from accuracy. As we have seen, if a proposed explication of a theoretical virtue divides logically equivalent theories, then it is not the explication of an epistemic virtue. The best way to test this is to compare minimal pairs: theories that are as similar as possible while differing with respect to the proposed virtue. I will use this minimal pair test to show that some intuitive explications of ideological parsimony that conflict with the expressive power innocence criterion fail; whatever goodness they capture, it is not epistemic.

We can use this test to eliminate rival explications of ideological parsimony that are somewhat intuitive and conflict with the expressive power innocence criterion. In particular, we can eliminate the COUNTING CRITERION, the KINDS COUNTING CRITERION, and the MERE DELETION criterion.¹⁶ We will do this by providing logically equivalent theories that satisfy each, showing that ideological parsimony so-explicated is not an epistemic virtue. But first, we state the criteria. In doing so, it is important to recall that I am considering (and arguing against) these as guides to truth, criteria that makes theories that have them more probable than otherwise. There might be other interpretations (as non-epistemic virtues) of these same parsimony principles that are beyond the scope of my arguments:

¹⁵My thanks to [omitted] for pointing out this feature of EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION to me.

¹⁶Although it tends to be the initial heuristic used, I've yet to encounter anyone actually accepts the counting criterion; arguments against it may be found in Cowling [2013], Sider [2013], and Goodman [1951]; Sider [2013] employs the mere deletion criterion for fundamental theories, while Cowling [2013] proposes the kind counting criterion].

THE COUNTING CRITERION: Some ideology I_j is more parsimonious than some other ideology I_k if I_j has fewer bits of ideology than I_k .

THE MERE DELETION CRITERION: If I_j is obtained from I_k by deleting some bit of ideology, then I_j is more parsimonious than I_k .

THE KINDS COUNTING CRITERION: Some ideology I_j is more parsimonious than some other ideology I_k if I_j includes fewer kinds of ideology than I_k .

These are the criteria. Now for the theories. We begin with a pair that takes down both COUNTING CRITERION and the MERE DELETION CRITERION. The first is a mereological theory with parthood taken as primitive. The second is a mereological theory with both parthood and overlap taken as primitive. Since they both have a finite ideology, the first theory satisfies both the COUNTING CRITERION and the MERE DELETION CRITERION relative to the second. But since both are axiomatizations of classical mereology, they are logically equivalent when the standard interdefinition of parthood and overlap is added (or: in the class of models where the interdefinition of parthood and overlap is a theorem). This shows that both criteria cut too finely to be epistemic virtues. Note that both unrestricted fusion axioms are actually axiom schemata, which we are using to avoid adding plural quantification to the ideology.

MEREOLOGICAL THEORY ONE:¹⁷

- | | |
|---|---------------------|
| i. All predicate logic tautologies | TAUT |
| ii. AXIOM: $\forall x Pxx$ | PART REFLEXIVITY |
| iii. AXIOM: $\forall x \forall y ((Pxy \wedge Pyx) \rightarrow x = y)$ | ANTISYMMETRY |
| iv. AXIOM: $\forall x \forall y \forall z ((Pxy \wedge Pyz) \rightarrow Pxz)$ | TRANSITIVITY |
| v. AXIOM: $\forall x \forall y (\neg Pxy \rightarrow \exists z \forall w (Pwz \leftrightarrow (Pwx \wedge \neg \exists t (Ptz \wedge Ptw))))$ | REMAINDER |
| vi. AXIOM: $\exists x \varphi \rightarrow \exists z (\forall y (\varphi \rightarrow Pyz) \wedge \forall w \forall y ((\varphi \rightarrow Pyw) \rightarrow Pzw))$ | UNRESTRICTED FUSION |

MEREOLOGICAL THEORY TWO:

¹⁷Courtesy of Varzi and Cotnoir [ms.]

i	All predicate logic tautologies	TAUT
ii	AXIOM: $\forall xOxx$	OVERLAP REFLEXIVITY
iii	AXIOM: $\forall xPxx$	PART REFLEXIVITY
iv	AXIOM: $\forall x\forall y((Pxy \wedge Pyx) \rightarrow x = y)$	ANTISYMMETRY
v	AXIOM: $\forall x\forall y\forall z((Pxy \wedge Pyz) \rightarrow Pxz)$	TRANSITIVITY
vi	AXIOM: $\forall x\forall y(\neg Pxy \rightarrow \exists z\forall w(Pwz \leftrightarrow (Pwx \wedge \neg \exists t(Ptw \wedge Pty))))$	REMAINDER
vii	AXIOM: $\exists x\varphi \rightarrow \exists z(\forall y(\varphi \rightarrow Pyz) \wedge \forall w\forall y((\varphi \rightarrow Pyw) \rightarrow Pzw))$	UNRESTRICTED FUSION

As we can see, THEORY ONE is an axiomatization of classical mereology using the ideology of quantificational logic with identity and a primitive parthood predicate, while THEORY TWO is an axiomatization of classical mereology using the ideology of quantificational logic with identity plus both primitive parthood and primitive overlap predicates. But since they are both axiomatizations of classical mereology, they are logically equivalent in models where P and O take their intended interpretations (that is: models where $\forall x\forall y(Pxy \leftrightarrow \forall z(Ozx \rightarrow Ozy))$ is true; adding this equivalence to PART REFLEXIVITY allows us to derive OVERLAP REFLEXIVITY). But the ideology of THEORY ONE is more parsimonious than the ideology of THEORY TWO by both the COUNTING CRITERION and the MERE DELETION criterion. Both have a finite ideology, and that of THEORY ONE may be obtained from THEORY TWO by deleting the 'Overlap' relation. But since classical mereology doesn't get any more likely when reaxiomatized with different primitives, neither COUNTING CRITERION nor MERE DELETION CRITERION are the right way to explicate ideological parsimony.

The fall of the mere deletion criteria is striking. When we think of ontological parsimony, it seems like some analogue of the mere deletion criterion (perhaps applied to ontological kinds or fundamental ontology) is extremely plausible, so if we thought that ideological parsimony operated similarly to ontological parsimony, we would have expected something along these lines to be right. Even if it wasn't the whole story, it seemed like a good place to start. But the argument from accuracy says otherwise. This tells us that we should not expect too much from analogy between ontological and ideological parsimony.

It will require a different example to show how the KIND COUNTING CRITERION fails. Here we must be a bit less precise, because we do not have a rigorous definition of an ideological kind on hand. In what follows, however, I will rely on only two claims: (i) adding a modal operator to a truth-functional propositional language adds a new kind of ideology, and (ii) 'truth-function' is a kind of ideology. Since the primary

defender of the KIND COUNTING CRITERION endorses (i)¹⁸, that leaves (ii) as the only risky commitment I must make. But (ii) strikes me as fairly low risk. Insofar as I have any intuitive grasp on the notion of an ideological kind (and thus am willing to countenance them sans definition), truth-functions form one. With (i) and (ii) in hand, we can use Godel’s interpretation of intuitionistic propositional logic in the modal propositional system S4 and its converse proved by Tarski and McKinsey to generate counterexamples to the KIND COUNTING CRITERION.¹⁹

The language of intuitionistic propositional logic contains proposition letters and truth-functional connectives.²⁰ The language of (basic) modal logic adds a modal operator to its base of propositional variables and truth-functional connectives. Thus, it contains more kinds of ideology than intuitionistic propositional logic. But we can find ever so many S4-theories that are logically equivalent to one in the language of intuitionistic propositional logic. The KIND COUNTING CRITERION divides many logical equivalents.

5 Extant Parsimony Arguments

Next we will look at some consequences of adopting EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION for several metaphysical debates. We will examine the following cases: Ted Sider’s mereological nihilism vs. its traditional rivals, modal theories with primitive actuality vs. modal theories without it, David Lewis’s attempt to reduce modality to quantification over worlds, and an argument against the “moving spotlight” theory of time.

Before we start, it will be worth highlighting a companion of the EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION that we will rely on throughout this section. As stated, the EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION only has something to say when we are dealing with ideologies whose perspicuous languages are expressively equivalent. But when we are in a situation where the perspicuous language of one theory is expressively equivalent to a fragment of the perspicuous language of another (in other words, when it is strictly expressively weaker), we can state a companion of the EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION that does apply:

¹⁸Cowling [2013].

¹⁹See Godel [1933] and McKinsey and Tarski [1948] for the proofs. For those surprised by this translatability, it will be helpful to recall a few facts. First: the basic idea behind intuitionist logic is provability. The intuitionist only accepts theorems that she has a constructive proof of. Thus, in her mouth, $\neg P$ means ‘there is no constructive proof of P.’ This is why she rejects excluded middle: there is a third option between P being true and there being no constructive proof that P: namely, that P is both true and lacking a constructive proof. Second: there is a provability interpretation of the modal logic formalism, where $\Box P$ means ‘it is provable that P’ and $\Diamond P$ means ‘it is consistent that P.’ Concatenating the provability-interpreted box with classical negation yields a meaning of ‘it is not provable that P’ for the expression $\neg\Box P$, which is not that far from the meaning of intuitionistic negation. This is the central insight of both the Godel and the Tarski-McKinsey constructions.

²⁰It requires an infinity of truth-values to characterize intuitionistic logic truth-functionally. See Kleene [1937].

FRAGMENTARY EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION: some ideology I_k is not more parsimonious than some ideology I_j if its perspicuous language L_{I_k} is expressively equivalent to a fragment of that ideology's perspicuous language L_{I_j} .

The Argument from Accuracy also supports FRAGMENTARY EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION. Given a theory T in L_{I_k} , we can find a logically equivalent theory in the fragment of L_{I_j} that L_{I_k} is expressively equivalent to (and so also in L_{I_j} itself) that is logically equivalent to T . So, by the same reasoning as that in §3.3, any explication of ideological parsimony that violates FRAGMENTARY EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION will divide logical equivalents.

5.1 Nihilism Old and New

Very generally, mereological nihilists deny that anything is a part of anything other than itself. Traditionally, this means replacing UNRESTRICTED FUSION with an axiom that denies the existence of proper parts. But traditional nihilists do not dispute axioms like TRANSITIVITY and REFLEXIVITY. Parts may well have these properties, if there were any. Thus, a traditional nihilist mereology has a very similar axiomatization to a traditional universalist mereology, with changes only to the axioms that say which composites exist. We give one below:

- i All predicate logic tautologies TAUT
- ii AXIOM: $\forall x Pxx$ REFLEXIVITY
- iii AXIOM: $\forall x \forall y \forall z ((Pxy \wedge Pyz) \rightarrow Pxz)$ TRANSITIVITY
- iv AXIOM: $\forall x \forall y (Pxy \rightarrow x = y)$ NIHILISM

Ted Sider's mereological nihilism departs from this tradition.²¹ Sider argues for the wholesale elimination of mereological ideology. Thus, he does not simply claim that nothing has a proper part; he claims that 'proper part' has no place in a fundamental theory of the world. While this has a similar effect on his ontology - it lacks composites - as traditional nihilism would, it changes his mereological theory and therefore his ideology considerably. The traditional nihilist theory above has the same ideology as the universalist's; where it differs is in ontology, in the things it claims exist. Sider's mereological theory, by

²¹Sider [2013].

contrast, omits all of the distinctively mereological ideology and consequently the axioms formulated in it.

We give it below:

- i All predicate logic tautologies TAUT

This is intuitively an advance in ideological parsimony. Sider's ideology, lacking the ability to say anything about parts, seems simpler than that of a theory which has lots to say about what parts would be like, were there to be any.

Since Sider's ideology is only the bare logical vocabulary of predicate logic, it is expressively weaker than that of the traditional nihilist, lacking any equivalent way to express the 'parthood' predicate. So by the lights of FRAGMENTARY EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION, the traditional nihilist's theory is not more parsimonious than Sider's. A parsimony argument for Sider's nihilism survives the test. Our criteria have nothing to say about when one ideology is more parsimonious than another. They cannot make a parsimony argument, they can only refute one. But the fact that they do not refute a parsimony argument is a point in its favor.

5.2 Modal Theories and Actuality

We can find a second test case in modal metaphysics. One of the longest-running disputes among modal metaphysicians has been over the status of actuality. Reductionists like David Lewis²² and Robert Adams²³ explain actuality in terms of something else (indexicality, truth) while primitivists such as Phillip Bricker²⁴ take actuality as a simple, unanalyzed property of worlds. There is, *prima facie*, an argument from ideological parsimony in favor of the reductionists. The EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION and its fragmentary cousin do not stand in its way.

For simplicity, let us imagine two modal metaphysicians who disagree only about the status of actuality. They agree on which modal logic is correct, and they agree about what's possible/necessary. Thus, we can may describe their theories as below:

MODAL THEORY ONE

- i All S5 tautologies TAUT
- ii Possibility postulates POSS

²²Lewis [1986]

²³Adams [1974]

²⁴Bricker [2006].

MODAL THEORY TWO

i All S5 tautologies	TAUT
ii Possibility postulates	POSS
iii Hybrid Axioms	HYBRID
iv Actuality Postulates	ACT

The first theory includes axioms for modal logic and axioms for which things are possible (necessities may be derived from these two). I will assume these can all be described in the language of propositional modal logic (nothing much turns on whether the language is propositional or first order, so we can count this as a simplifying assumption). The second theory includes the same modal logic and theory of possibility, but it adds in axioms for the logical behavior of an actuality operator and a substantive theory of what's actual. The language of this theory is thus a simple hybrid language: that of propositional modal logic enriched by an actuality operator.

It seems fairly clear that the ideology of MODAL THEORY TWO is more complicated than that of MODAL THEORY ONE. Aside from additional postulates, the actuality operator requires new axioms to describe its logical behavior. And the FRAGMENTARY EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION agrees. It is a well-known result that simple hybrid logic is expressively superior to simple modal logic, which is a fragment of it, in both the propositional and first-order cases.²⁵ Thus, the addition of an actuality operator to the ideology of MODAL THEORY ONE is not judged innocent by our criteria.

5.3 Modal Reduction and Quantification

In both the metaphysics of modality and the metaphysics of time, we find debates between those who prefer primitive operators such as 'possibly' and 'was' and those who prefer to reduce those operators to quantification over worlds/times. A typical telling of the situation goes something like this: reductionists purchase an improvement in ideological parsimony in the coin of ontology; primitivists have a leaner ontology but at the price of a bloated ideology.

The FRAGMENTARY EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION calls this telling into question. Basic modal and tense logics are provably expressively weaker than two-sorted predicate logics with quantification over worlds/times.²⁶ In fact, they are expressively equivalent to fragments of them. Furthermore, proposals

²⁵see Kocurek [2016] for the first order case, Areces and ten Cate [2007] for propositional.

²⁶See Blackburn and von Bentham [2006], Hodkinson and Reynolds [2006].

to increase the expressive power of modal/tense logics to capture some of the things that can be done with quantification over worlds/times do not generally achieve full expressive equivalence, and I know of no proposal that would achieve expressive superiority. Consequently, the FRAGMENTARY EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION says that there is no successful argument from ideological parsimony for reductionism about time/modality over primitivism. Since anything the primitivist can say in her language has a translation in the language of the reductionist, anything expressible in her ideology is also expressible in the ideology of the reductionist. While our criterion falls silent on whether the primitivist's ideology is more parsimonious, the equivalence between the primitivist's language and a fragment of the reductionist's is enough to show that it is not less parsimonious.

This places the primitivist in good position as regards parsimony over the reductionist. By most accounts of ontological parsimony, her view is more parsimonious. By any adequate account of ideological parsimony, her view is at least not less ideologically parsimonious. If theoretical economy is the main motivation for reductionism, this leaves the reductionist in an awkward position. It does not, of course, constitute anything like a conclusive argument for primitivism. But it leaves the reductionist with more work to do than is generally thought. It is also a surprising and interesting result of accepting the FRAGMENTARY EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION and a good case of it helping us make progress in first order metaphysical disputes.

5.4 The Moving Spotlight

Another argument from ideological parsimony may be found in the philosophy of time, targeting “moving spotlight” theories of time.²⁷ This argument does not fail, but its non-failure is interesting. It will turn out that some of the moving spotlighter's alleged excess machinery is innocent, but some of it is not.

Moving spotlight theories address two debates in the philosophy of time (among other things). The first is over ontology. Presentists think that only the present time and present things (give or take a few abstracta) exist. Their opponents, eternalists, think that all times - past, present, future - and all of the things - past, present, future - exist and are on an ontological par. As a result, presentists and eternalists account for truths about the past and future in very different ways. In order to see how, we'll start with a fairly ordinary, present-tense truth: the sun is shining. This is true just in case there is a sun, and that sun shines at the time of utterance (which for some eternalists may be the value of a covert variable in the expression's logical form, while for presentists it will be picked out by the tense indexical NOW which is

²⁷Various versions of this theory may be found in Broad [1923], Cameron [2015], and Skow [2015].

implicitly part of the English verb ‘is’). On that, everyone agrees. For eternalists, truths about the past and future are very much like this truth. For an eternalist, ‘the sun was shining’ will be true just in case, at a time earlier than ours, there exists a sun and that sun is shining. She can do this because she believes that all times - past, present, future - and all things - past, present, future - exist, just as much as we and our shining sun do now. A presentist has to say something different, since she does not think that past times and past things, or future times and future things, exist. So she introduces tense operators. A tense operator attaches itself to a tenseless sentence and commands us to evaluate its truth not at the present but in the past or the future. Thus, a sentence like ‘the sun was shining’ becomes PAST (sun shine), true just in case the sun was shining in the past. This allows the presentist to state facts about the past (or future) without an existing past or future. In order to rid herself of that ontology, she has adopted the ideology of tense operators.

The second debate is over change. A-theorists believe that change of some sort is a deep feature of the world, and this is ultimately to be accounted for by change from past to present to future, making the distinction between past, present, and future an important feature of the world. Their opponents, B-theorists, think that change is shallow. Change for a B-theorist is merely difference along a time-like dimension. For example, according to a B-theorist, all it is for me to change from sitting to standing is for a past version (I use ‘version’ here to remain neutral between stage theories and worm theories) of me to be sitting while a present one is standing. According to an A-theorist, however, there is only one version of me, which once sat and now stands.

The moving spotlihter combines an eternalist ontology with an A-theorist’s approach to change, but only for a few very special properties. Like the eternalist, the moving spotlihter places all times on a par: past, present, and future. And like the B-theorist, she accounts for most change by difference along a time-like dimension. I change from sitting to standing by having a sitting version succeeded by a standing version. But she adds something: a few special properties that change in the A-theorists’ sense. The tense properties. This is what gives the view its name. The moving spotlihter believes in an objective present, a primitive property of ‘being present’ that is true of one time and then another. This property “lights up” each time in succession, making it the case that what is past, present and future changes not simply by being arranged in an ‘earlier than’ relation, but by being before, at, or after a time that is objectively present. Thus, the moving spotlihter supplements the B-theorists’ quantification over times with tense operators that track the movement of the spotliht (change in the facts about the objective present).

Sider has questioned whether the small amount of “genuine” or A-theory-ish change that the moving

spotlighter manages to secure is worth the cost of the extra ideology - the addition of tense operators and the presentness property.²⁸ But the tense operators, it turns out, are free. Quantified tense logic is expressively equivalent to a fragment of two-sorted quantificational logic, and there is no known way to extend it to the entire language.²⁹ Consequently, the FRAGMENTARY EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION gets them off the hook. However, the same cannot be said for the ‘is present’ predicate. Just as the Siderian nihilist can remove the mereological predicates and achieve an expressive decrease against the regular mereologist, the eternalist can dispense with the ‘is present’ predicate and achieve an expressive decrease against the moving spotlighter.

6 Objections

Finally, we will consider two objections. The first comes from a special class of languages: those with an ‘is primitive’ operator.³⁰ The ability to include axioms in a theory that say what the theory takes as primitive poses a threat to the claims of equivalence that drive the argument from accuracy. I respond by arguing that a theory is not equivalent to a cousin theory with the same axioms but an additional one that says what the theory’s primitives are. The second comes from Nelson Goodman, who considered an expressive power analysis of parsimony but rejected it as undermining the goal of seeking a parsimonious set of primitives out of which to build a theory’s ideology. I respond by showing that Goodman and I have incompatible conceptions of the role of parsimony as a theoretical virtue. Goodman’s is pragmatic while mine is not.

6.1 Higher-Order Languages With a ‘Primitive’ Operator

So far, we have been working with cases where the perspicuous languages are fairly well understood, with a wide body of model-theoretic results to draw on. Now we will consider theories formulated in languages that are less well-studied, but seem fairly natural for our purposes: languages where we are allowed to list our primitives in the object-language. In these languages, we introduce an explicit ‘is primitive’ operator \mathfrak{p} , which allows us to give a list of symbols which stand for the ideological primitives in a theory. A theory in a language like this can then have a ‘primitives axiom,’ that is: an axiom which lists the theory’s primitives. Any language can be extended with a ‘primitive’ operator, and so any theory can

²⁸Sider 2011

²⁹Hodkinson and Reynolds [2006]

³⁰Something similar to the operator could be accomplished with an ‘is primitive’ predicate. What I say about the languages with the operator applies *mutatis mutandis* to those with the predicate.

be supplemented with a primitives axiom. If we are required to list our primitives in a new axiom, this poses a threat to the argument I've given for the EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION. Languages that merely allow us to list our primitives aren't a problem. But if forced to include a primitives axiom, mereological theories 1 and 2 are no longer logically equivalent,³¹ and thus the argument from accuracy will no longer apply. Indeed, any two theories that differ in their primitives will no longer be logically equivalent. This puts rivals to the expressive power approach back in play.

My response takes the form of a challenge: "Sez Who?" Why must our theories specify their primitives in the object-language? It will unquestionably be true about our theories that they employ such-and-so primitives. But there are lots of things that will be true about our theories that we do not need to say in the object-language, or add special axioms that break natural equivalences to account for. To take a somewhat absurd example: every theory is stated in a certain number of characters. So there will be some truth about each theory which says how many characters are in its statement. But it would be a bit absurd to insist that our theorizing take place in a language with apparatus designed to talk about the character-count of theories, so that each theory is supplemented with a 'character-count axiom,' thereby breaking logical equivalences. What makes a 'primitives axiom' different from a 'character-count' axiom, such that we ought to include one in our theories?

I can think of two potentially promising responses to the "Sez Who" challenge. First: the Closure Response. The closure response answers the challenge with: logic. It's fairly standard to think of theories as closed under logical consequence. If, therefore, it turned out that every theory in a language that includes a \mathfrak{p} -operator, as a matter of logical closure, includes a primitives axiom, then it looks like the only thing stopping us from specifying our primitives in our theories is our refusal to include a \mathfrak{p} -operator in our language. This refusal on the part of the EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION defender then comes to look awfully convenient, and somewhat arbitrary.

Second: the Equivalence Response. The equivalence response answers the challenge with: because a theory is always equivalent to its expansion with a primitives axiom. Inquiry into the conditions under which two theories are equivalent is ongoing. But there is a fair case to be made that it is something less stringent than logical equivalence. If so, then this leaves open the possibility that, under a plausible and well-defined notion of theoretical equivalence, a theory and its expansion with a primitives axiom are

³¹Perhaps. As [omitted] has noted in personal correspondence, a genuine primitives operator only produces sentences that are true in all models or in none, and so can be rendered expressively inert by mapping sentences involving it to either the True or the False as appropriate. I'm going to spot the advocate of a primitives axiom a way out of this objection, although I don't know what that way would be, and offer a less formal response. But if my response fails, let the record show that I endorse [omitted]'s response as a backstop.

equivalent. ‘Because they are equivalent’ seems like a good reason to replace a theory with its primitives-axiom-supplemented twin.

I respond to these with a dilemma. We can partition the space of possible logical relationships between a theory and its primitives-axiom-enhanced cousin as follow: (i) the two theories could be logically equivalent, (ii) the enhanced theory could be logically stronger, (iii) the unenhanced theory could be logically stronger, or (iv) they could be logically incomparable. We can rule out (iii) and (iv) pretty easily. In order to compare the two at all, we must use the language of the enhanced theory and its attendant consequence relation. If we were to use the language of the unenhanced theory, the enhanced theory would be gibberish. Since the enhanced theory is a superset of the unenhanced theory, it will entail the unenhanced theory according to any sane consequence relation. That leaves two options: the enhanced theory is logically stronger, or the two theories are logically equivalent.

If both theories are logically equivalent, then the objection fails. Logical equivalence is transitive. So if T_1 and T_2 are equivalent, and the enhanced versions of T_1 and T_2 are logically equivalent to T_1 and T_2 respectively, then the enhanced versions of T_1 and T_2 will be logically equivalent to each other. Thus, if the objection is to work at all, the enhanced theory must be logically stronger than the unenhanced version. This undermines the closure response. A theory must be logically equivalent to its deductive closure, because by definition it mutually entails its own deductive closure.

That leaves only the equivalence response. There are approaches to theoretical equivalence that allow for theories that are not logically equivalent to be theoretically equivalent nonetheless. We find several proposed formal criteria of theoretical equivalence in the literature.³² This opens the door for a theory and its primitives-axiom-supplemented twin to be deemed theoretically equivalent despite not being logically equivalent.

Ideally, we would be able to test for this mathematically. But two things prevent us from doing that. First: there is no standard formal criterion for theoretical equivalence. That question remains open. Second: we do not have a good semantics for the \mathfrak{p} -operator. Fortunately, we can introduce some non-formal considerations that push us toward rejecting the claim of equivalence.

Which primitive concepts are the correct ones is a fact about the world. A theory can be true while taking things as primitive that should not be so taken.³³ If this is true, then it looks like a primitives axiom is a genuine addition to a theory. It says more about the world than the theory itself does. And if that is true, it tells against regarding the theories as equivalent. One says more than the other. Absent a

³²See Barrett and Halverson [2016] for a good summary.

³³Sider [2011] presents a compelling case for these theses.

powerful reason - such as the verdict of a well-regarded formal criterion of theoretical equivalence - to think otherwise, this should be enough to reject the equivalence response. Circumstances in which equivalent theories are not logically equivalent are very specific. We should not just suppose ourselves to be in them.

Of course, nothing I have said here *disallows* a language from having an ‘is primitive’ operator and theories from having a primitives axiom. But if those theories neither follow from nor are equivalent to their primitives-axiom-lacking cousins, the argument from accuracy still stands. Suppose we are interested in what’s fundamental and want theories that list their primitives. Presumably equivalences among those will be much more rarer. But when they do occur, the EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION will still apply.

6.2 A Goodmanian Objection

Nelson Goodman considered a similar approach to simplicity in *The Structure of Appearance*.³⁴ He proposed and rejected something more ambitious than the EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION: he considered an analysis of simplicity in terms of expressive power, where one theory is simpler than another if the language of its ideology is expressively weaker. However, he rejected this analysis by observing that it provided no motivation for replacing defined terms with primitives. Since, he argued, the main goal of finding a simpler theory was to find primitives that could be used to define all desired predicates, the analysis of simplicity in terms of expressive power undercut the original motivation to seek simpler theories.

Although the pragmatist Goodman wouldn’t be interested in our project of explicating a distinctively epistemic virtue, it’s worth seeing he provides the basis for an objection to our criteria. We can see how the objection works most clearly with an example. Consider the following two sets of primitives for a modal language.

MODAL PRIMITIVES ONE: $\Box, \diamond, \rightarrow, \wedge, \vee, \neg$, and a countable infinity of propositional variables.

MODAL PRIMITIVES TWO: \Box, \rightarrow, \neg and a countable infinity of propositional variables.

All of the primitives in MODAL PRIMITIVES ONE can be defined out of primitives in MODAL PRIMITIVES TWO. Thus, if an expressive power analysis of ideological parsimony is right, the two sets of primitives are equally parsimonious. Likewise, if the EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION is right, the extra

³⁴Goodman [1951].

primitives are ideologically innocent. And what goes for these goes for anything else definable from the primitives in MODAL PRIMITIVES TWO. We could add a primitive for all 16 bivalent truth functions and still not increase expressive power. And so, Goodman says, we might as well never define anything. Replacing a defined notion with a primitive one will never increase our expressive power.

If Goodman is right that the task of finding the simplest ideology for our theory is tantamount to finding the best base of primitives from which to define everything else, then this objection is fatal. But for reasons articulated in §3, he cannot be correct. Merely replacing primitives with defined notions that have the same truth conditions cannot make a theory more likely to be true, and so cannot be a way to increase ideological parsimony in the sense we are interested in—as an epistemic improvement. Of course, there are many contexts when reducing out number of primitives is useful. Two examples: first, when doing metatheory, it is often helpful to state our theory using the fewest kinds of lexical item (especially when things need to be proven by induction); second, sometimes we search for ways to define some terms in terms of others in order to find out which theories/languages are equivalent in the first place. But that usefulness is merely pragmatic. It's not the virtue we're looking for.

7 Conclusion

I have argued for a partial analysis of ideological parsimony, the EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION. The criterion says that if the primitive ideology of one theory is expressively equivalent to that of another, then neither ideology is more parsimonious to the other. This has the consequence that additional ideology that does not increase expressive power is innocent. It can be added without taking a hit to virtuousness. I have argued for this criterion in two ways. First: I have shown that popular criteria for ideological parsimony that conflict with it divide logically equivalent theories, and therefore doing better by their lights need not make a theory more likely to be true. Second: I have given some intuitive cases where one theory does have a simpler ideology than another, and in all of those cases the simpler theory was expressively weaker. Next, I considered two objections, both of which failed. I conclude that EXPRESSIVE POWER INNOCENCE CRITERION is true, and we are one step closer to an analysis of ideological parsimony.

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