Titles and Abstracts for HOM Conference

1. Presenter Kevin C. Klement (UMass Amherst)
   
   Title “Russell on Ontological Fundamentality and Existence”
   
   Abstract Russell is often taken as a forerunner of the Quinean position that “to be is to be the value of a bound variable”, whereupon the ontological commitment of a theory is given by what it quantifies over. Among other reasons, Russell was among the first to suggest that all existence statements should be analyzed by means of existential quantification. That there was more to Russell’s metaphysics than what existential quantifications come out as true is obvious in the earlier period where Russell still made a distinction between existence and being/subsistence. But even the later Russell, including that of the Logical Atomism lectures period, would not have understood ontological questions to be first and foremost questions of quantification. He would take fundamentality to be important too, which explains in part his assertions to the effect the the values of individual variables have a reality not attributable to values of higher-order variables, even ineliminable higher-order variables.

   Commentator Kate Ritchie (City College of New York)

2. Presenter Peter Fritz (University of Oslo)
   
   Title “Predication and Existence”
   
   Abstract Contingentists, those who think that it is contingent what individuals there are, face the following question: is it possible for relations to relate individuals there could be, but there aren’t? Higher-order contingentists, roughly those who think that it is contingent what propositions, properties and relations there are, face the analogous question for propositions, properties and relations. I argue first that higher-order contingentists should answer both questions positively: relations relate not only what there is, but also what there could be. I then show that higher-order contingentists have ways of talking about relations, properties and propositions which there could not possibly be, namely by constructing them out of relations, properties and propositions there could be. Such entities open up a further question: is it possible for relations to relate lower-level relations, properties or propositions there could not possibly be? I argue that higher-order contingentists should also answer this questions positively: relations relate not only what there is and what there could be, but also what there couldn’t be.

   Commentator Catharine Diehl (Humboldt University)

3. Presenters Michael Caie, Harvey Lederman (UPitt)
   
   Title “Classical Opacity”
Abstract

In Frege’s well-known example, Hesperus was known by the Greeks to rise in the evening, and Phosphorus was not known by the Greeks to rise in the evening, even though Hesperus is Phosphorus. A predicate F such that for some a and b, a = b, Fa and not Fb is said to be opaque. Opaque predicates appear to threaten the classical logic of identity. The responses to this puzzle in the literature either deny that there are cases of opacity in this sense, or deny that one can use classical quantificational logic when opacity is in play. In this paper we motivate and explore the view that there are cases of opacity and that classical quantificational logic is valid even when quantifying in to opaque contexts. We develop the logic of identity given these assumptions in the setting of higher-order logic. We identify a key choice-point for such views, and then develop alternative theories of identity depending on how one makes this choice. In closing, we discuss arguments for each of the two theories.

Commentator Agustin Rayo (MIT)

4. Presenter Rohan Sud (Bates College)

Title “Ontological Deflationism, Vague Existence, and Metaphysical Vagueness”

Abstract Ontological deflationists are under pressure to think that existence is vague, but that the vagueness is (in some sense) linguistic rather than metaphysical. This paper asks whether vague existence requires adopting metaphysical vagueness. Drawing on research on contingent existence and higher-order modal logic, I offer regimented formulations of claims of vague existence and metaphysical vagueness. With these theses in hand, I seek to answer the guiding question. Interestingly, the results are far from straightforward and reveal significant metaphysical commitments of proponents of vague existence.

Commentator Tom Donaldson (Stanford)

5. Presenter Bryan Pickel (University of Edinburgh)

Title “Life at a Lower Order”

Abstract This paper examines arguments for primitivist approaches to Higher Order Logic such as Williamson (2003). These arguments purport to show that we ought to theorize in higher-order languages even if constructions in these languages have no natural language rendering. These resources are purportedly indispensable for framing the notion of logical consequence and for capturing important generalizations. I examine and defend Quinean responses to these arguments.

Commentator Jeremy Goodman (USC)

6. Presenter Harold Hodes (Cornell)

Title “Three Kinds of Ramified-Type Assignment Systems”

Abstract A type assignment for a symbol A has the form ‘A : t’ for a type (-symbol) t. A type-context is a single-valued set of type-assignments for some variables. A type-assignment system is a 2-place relation between type-contexts and some type-assignments for (what I’ll call) the terms of the system. A type is ramified iff it has a unique natural number – its order – associated with it, meeting certain conditions. I will present several sets of ramified types, and four kinds of ramified-type systems using these types. It turns out that two of these sets
and kinds are isomorphic; so properly speaking we'll have three sets of types and three kinds of ramified-type assignment systems on the table. One kind (first introduced by Kurt Schutte) is “cumulative” (with respect to order). One kind extends the construal of Principia Mathematica offered by Kambarradine, Laan and Nederpelt. One kind (the one with two isomorphic presentations) is (to my knowledge) new; in one presentation it employs two kinds of order; in another version it dispenses with the idea that the order of a propositional function is greater than the order of all of its arguments. I will compare RTA systems of these kinds with respect to certain desiderata, and make some historical remarks about Russell’s writings. If time permits, I will say something about the model theories for such systems.

Commentator Cian Dorr (NYU)

7. Presenter Jeff Russell (USC)

Title “Vague Existence”

Abstract Can it be vague what there is, unrestrictedly speaking? Ted Sider argues that it cannot (2003; 2009; building on an idea from Lewis 1986). I will explore several lines of response to this argument, in the context of higher-order logic with a “definitely” operator. The Lewis-Sider argument is particularly interesting because it turns out that each of its premises is a theorem in this context, if we make some simplifying assumptions. Each of these assumptions is often harmless and theoretically useful. But we have good reasons to think that these assumptions are idealizations at best. What we learn is that, when it comes to vague quantification, these idealizations are not harmless.

Commentator Paul Hovda (Reed College)