

## Book Reviews

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### Buchbesprechungen

Amie L. Thomasson: *Ontology made Easy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, xiii + 345 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-992838-5

Amie Thomasson's *Ontology made Easy* (2015) aims to present an 'easy' approach to existence questions or for short: *the Easy Approach*. The relevant existence questions are further qualified as "ontological" – presumably in distinction to other kinds of existence questions. (The author announces a separate book on the Easy Approach to *modal* questions; 11, fn. 7.) The Easy Approach is significantly informed by Rudolf Carnap's anti-metaphysical stance in several respects, but includes a different position with regard to some underlying linguistic options. More specifically, ordinary language is unanimously accepted as the principal framework in which questions ought to be resolved. The book presents itself as opposing an ontological tradition which began with Quine or possibly with a misunderstanding (4–5, fn. 2; 13, fn. 8) of Quine. It is an important contribution to the ongoing metametaphysical debate as it relates several approaches to one another. The style allows the reader to grasp the main ideas easily but a thorough reading will encounter many problems in underlying assumptions.

There are 10 chapters with another two unnumbered chapters (introduction and conclusion). Chapters 1 to 5 together make up part I ("Developing Easy Ontology") of the book, which is mostly devoted to a positive and constructive presentation of the Easy Approach. Part II ("Defending Easy Ontology") comprises chapters 6 to 10 and critically delineates different strands of reasoning against Easy Ontology. In addition, the book includes acknowledgements, a bibliography and a 5-page index, the last of which unfortunately lacks some more programmatic terms like 'pseudo-question' and some central systematic terms like 'easy argument'. I will now proceed to give an outline of the chapters each with a varying amount of critical or favorable remarks. After that, there will be an overall assessment.

The *introduction* chapter of *Ontology made Easy* sketches the historical background of the debate between Easy (Thomasson) and Hard Ontologists (Sider, van Inwagen). This debate is central to the book since Easy Ontology is largely characterized by its opposition to Hard Ontology. In the introduction relevant philosophical trends are mentioned up to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century stressing the distinction of conceptual and empirical methods and their respective roles in philosophy and other sciences. The Vienna circle is presented as the preliminary apogee of traditional philosophy (in this respect) as this school promoted a clear division of labor between philosophy (conceptual) and other sciences (empirical). The Carnap-Quine debate is then portrayed as a turning point beyond which metaphysical research was viewed as an enterprise to be conducted by other than conceptual methods. For those Hard Ontologists who are Thomasson's favorite opponents these methods are not empirical either but consist in a third option. Thomasson does not go into detail about said turning point but focuses on characterizing the state of the art in so-called Quinean or Neo-Quinean metaphysics. On Thomasson's view, the development since Quine led to

an ontological “morass” (12, 14), meaning a plethora of rivalling ontological theories and no sufficient means to decide between any two such theories. Easy approaches (not only Thomasson’s Easy Approach) are then presented as ways to avoid this situation.

In the *first chapter* Thomasson strives to devolve anti-deflationist reflexes, i. e. reflexes against those positions that portray metaphysical debates about existence as insubstantial or ‘trivial’. These reflexes stem from a stereotypical view on deflationism. To this end Carnap is presented as a deflationist who in distinction to some other deflationists is not anti-realist with respect to at least some ontologically debated entities. Hence, not all deflationists are anti-realists. Thomasson also points out that contrary to what she takes to be a widespread opinion, deflationism does not determine anything about how many different meanings there are to the talk of existence or to existential quantifiers. Thomasson points to some contributions to the metaphysical debate (Putnam, Hirsch) which led to these stereotypical misunderstandings of ‘the’ deflationist view. The author’s admonitions against anti-deflationist reflexes are plausible but the portrayal of deflationism’s claim of triviality of ontological questions is misleading. Only in later chapters it is admitted that this claim does not imply that the issues are “entirely ‘easy’” (113, 329–330). Some readers may be led to suspect that the label ‘easy’ in ‘Easy Ontology’ is employed solely for PR reasons – especially so when they try to fully appreciate Thomasson’s systematic elaborations in the next chapters.

Having rejected initial aversive reactions against deflationism, Thomasson presents the cornerstone of her Easy Approach in the *second chapter*, i. e. E, the core rule of use for ‘exists’: “Ks exist iff the application conditions actually associated with ‘K’ are fulfilled.” (86) Here, ‘K’ might be any sortal predicate expression (from ‘ordinary’ language), like ‘number’, ‘proposition’, ‘table’, ‘organism’, ‘mental state’, etc. (83). Thomasson emphasizes that the application conditions have to be associated with the respective term in the *actual* world. She does so in order to avoid any association problems between terms/concepts and application conditions that might surface in other ‘possible worlds’. Thomasson discusses the form application conditions might take (e. g. existence may not be part of the application conditions; 96) and defends two constraints and one admission (91; 1. Speakers must “master” the conditions. 2. They are “conditions under which the term would be correctly applied”. 3. “They need not be descriptive”). The chapter closes with examples for the application of E to ontological issues – according to Thomasson they fare much better than inflationary criteria for ‘exists’.

This result should be plausible to most readers despite the dubious modal talk with regards to E: In order to talk about the existence of entities in our world as it actually is, is it really necessary to invoke possible worlds and to modally qualify existence criteria? A lot of people may agree that modalities are an important issue in many metaphysical debates but why this is important here, where Thomasson only talks about what exists in the (actual) world, remains unclear. This inclusion of issues of modality into the metaontological topic of her book makes her core rule E open to all kinds of criticism of modalities. In addition, by E she technically prevents existential claims from being taken as equivalent to quantificational claims, at least if she understands quantification in modal contexts in the usual way.<sup>1</sup> If Thomasson was to refrain from “rigidifying” (86) the core rule we would

<sup>1</sup> Usually the quantificational statement ‘ $\exists xKx$ ’ is interpreted as true or false in each world depending on how ‘K’ is interpreted at each world, respectively. Even with *one* interpretation function this may vary between the worlds.

arrive at an alternate version: Ks exist iff the application conditions associated with ‘K’ are fulfilled. Here, one can see what the important and interesting core of Thomasson’s Easy Approach really amounts to: the association of expressions with application conditions. Unfortunately Thomasson’s talk about rules and application conditions remains unclear in several respects throughout the book. In effect, different readers might develop different views on how to individuate application conditions and on why it may or may not be admissible to talk about *the* application conditions (plural!) in E. In addition, in the remainder of the book the relation between E and the “easy arguments” will not be spelt out in a clear manner despite the great importance the easy arguments will play in later chapters.

In the *third chapter* Thomasson elaborates on some example questions of existence and distinguishes her approach from two other deflationary approaches. The neo-Fregean approach is associated with Bob Hale and Crispin Wright, the pleonastic approach is associated with Stephen Schiffer. She concludes that her approach makes the least assumptions by merely supposing that certain expressions have application conditions of a certain kind (141). Her view leads to a “simple realism” (145–158) based on ‘easy arguments’ formulated in ordinary language. An example for an easy argument runs like this (142, cf. 232–233):

Uncontroversial claim: There are particles arranged tablewise.

Conceptual truth: If there are particles arranged tablewise, then there is a table.

Derived/ontological claim: There is a table.

These arguments have existential conclusions which Thomasson takes to be ontological in nature. The easy arguments are to be distinguished from other arguments for example those proposed by “explanatory realists” (156) who accept the existence of a thing because its existence is supposed to explain something. Another purported result of Thomasson’s view is the deflationism with regard to existential debates in the metaphysics department.

The third chapter provides enough material to illustrate the Easy Approach sketched in the preceding chapter. It makes obvious that this approach takes the availability of application conditions as a substantial premise. This clarity about the premises of the Easy Approach is welcome. Unfortunately, Thomasson additionally claims uniqueness of the “sense” of terms like ‘property’, ‘number’, and ‘proposition’, talking of “the only sense these terms have” (153). Of course, a multitude of senses or application conditions for terms would be problematic for the Easy Approach since it is not guaranteed that there will be one clearly recognizable ontological sense of the relevant terms. The author gives no reason for the uniqueness presumption. – As to the claim of deflating existential debates, this might be true in a sense. But the reader should realize that Thomasson’s book and the Easy Approach may lead to an inflation of debates in the metaphysics department albeit debates of a different, rather metametaphysical tone. Apart from the flourishing of new programmatic and methodological debates the formal and informal treatment of easy arguments may prove worthy of discussion as well. One must start considering various ways of formally representing supposedly easy arguments, like the one above.

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But according to E the existence of Ks in any world solely relies on how ‘K’ is interpreted in a certain constant world, i. e. our actual world. Hence, the equivalence between ‘ $\exists xKx$ ’ and a statement expressing the existence of Ks according to E does not hold – contrary to the provision presented by Thomasson in parentheses on p. 86.

*Chapter four* presents a variety of deflationist positions diverging from the Easy Approach. Being skeptical towards ontological debates is the attitude all deflationisms have in common with Thomasson's Easy Approach. She first dives into the quantifier variance approach according to which ontological debaters presume different quantifier meanings and hence seem to disagree while indeed talking past one another. Other deflationary views are treated briefly and include those according to which ontological (existence) questions are not decidable, are not a matter of truth or simply have no answers. At the end of the chapter Thomasson tries to explain the fact, that despite the deflationary options a lot of metaphysicians still entertain "hard" ontology.

While Thomasson's attitude towards the other deflationisms is friendly, hard ontology is explained from an overt critical point of view: "[M]etaphysicians engaged in debates about whether the relevant objects *really* exist cannot be simply *using* the predicates and quantifier in their usual sense, or else the question could be answered easily along the lines of a Carnapian internal question. But this still leaves open many options about how to understand what they are up to" (173). So the 'burden of explication' rests on the hard ontologists (in accordance with Carnap's principle of tolerance).<sup>2</sup>

Thomasson dedicates the *fifth chapter* to what she takes to be the "most important rival" of her Easy Approach (177; which presumably means: the most important ally, once won over, against the real enemy of Hard Ontology). This rival is "Hermeneutical"<sup>3</sup> fictionalism as represented by Stephen Yablo. She defends her own position against fictionalist criticisms and criticizes fictionalism in return. The core of her criticism regards the concept of "commitment": What is it that a speaker is committed to if she *claims* that numbers exist? What is it that a speaker is committed to if she *acts as if* numbers existed? Thomasson plausibly criticizes the fictionalist claim that a simple realist is in the midst of a game of make-believe with respect to numbers (or other entities). The simple realist's attitude bears too much dissimilarity to games of make-believe. At the end of the chapter Thomasson turns the fictionalist critique against hard ontology. She even tries to pitch her own point of view to fictionalists by going back to the motives for fictionalism. It is (plausibly) argued that a lot of the motives are actually redeemed in the Easy Approach.

With *chapter six* the defensive Part II of the book begins. The first objection asserts that there is no guarantee that according to reality the consequences of the Easy Approach are correct, most importantly that simple realism is correct. In full coherence with the primacy of natural language displayed in Part I Thomasson fends off this objection by pointing out that there is no further valid question once the natural language argument

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<sup>2</sup> Three remarks: (i) Thomasson seems to suppose that Carnap takes the internal question about the existence of numbers to be only correctly answerable in the affirmative (163). I do not think that this is an easily defensible reading of Carnap. According to the principle of tolerance it should be perfectly fine to go with a language which does not talk about numbers according to which the respective internal existence question has to be answered in the negative. – (ii) Since Thomasson takes the ontological talk of existence to be the same as talk of existence in the "usual sense", it seems like she must view it as a matter of internal questions and answers. But then, what is the framework relative to which these issues are internal? If ordinary language is supposed to be that framework it is not quite clear whether it fulfills the standards Carnap would like to apply to (acceptable) frameworks for internal questions. – (iii) It is uncertain on page 163 whether Thomasson still reports Carnap's views or already made a transition from Carnap to her own point of view.

<sup>3</sup> "Hermeneutical fictionalists interpret the relevant discourse as merely speaking fictionally or figuratively" (179).

is acknowledged. Within her project this retreat to natural language is the correct line of defense (218). This echoes the Vienna Circle's original stance that there is nothing gained by allegedly strengthening existence claims by means of talking about 'real' or 'actual' existence. Having said that, one needs to note that Thomasson is far from refraining from surplus talk about 'the reality'. She is rather vague about the relation between natural language and reality (217) and her examples (226–227) lack a summary or at least a statement of the systematic theses about the workings of natural language that Thomasson takes to be established in this chapter (or even in this book). Some progress is made on the systematization of the theory of application conditions as it is supplemented by coapplication conditions for terms *F* which come down to identity criteria as to what 'same *F*s' are (223). But a full systematic exposition of this obviously important theoretical foundation is missing. Hence, the reader can only take the author's word for it when trying to assess the aptitude of the application condition theory with regard to the Easy Approach.

*Chapter seven* tries to reinforce the concept of analyticity. Its importance to the Easy Approach can be seen in an example for a Thomassonian easy argument: The apple is red. Thus the apple has the property of being red. Thus there is a property. (232–233) Both inferences are supposed to be analytic. Thomasson presents Timothy Williamson as a critic of the underlying concept of analyticity (i. e. analytical truth or analytical correctness). According to Williamson "[a] sentence *s* is analytic just in case, necessarily, whoever understands *s* assents to it" (236, Thomasson quoting Williamson). Thomasson rejects this concept of analyticity and presents her own. On her view a sentence *s* is analytic just in case "mastery of the relevant linguistic/conceptual rules governing the expressions used [in *s*] entitles one to make the relevant inference [to *s*] using those expressions" (238).

On the upside, Thomasson's (parenthetical) accusation of psychologism in Williamson (239) is sound and compelling. But her own views on analyticity are supported by yet another homeopathic dose of philosophy of language. Here again, what she writes is not enough to support the Easy Approach and, in this case, rather confusing as can be seen in Thomasson's caveats at the end of the chapter: On the one hand natural language terms are supposed to have one sense only, on the other hand rules of use are subject to change (252). In addition rules of use for natural language terms are now at least sometimes influenced by the (stipulated) rules in formal languages and Thomasson even relativizes analyticity to sets of rules (249). That kind of relativization on its own would be most laudable, but it should strike the reader as odd considering Thomasson's strong ordinary language presumptions.

At first sight there seems to be no safeguard in Easy Ontology against all the easy arguments running into contradictions (be it cumulatively or separately, for example by accepting the existence of something like the Russell set; 255–256). Thomasson addresses this issue in *chapter eight* by a two-pronged method. First, she proposes three conditions for new concepts (and thereby for acceptable easy arguments employing these concepts) in order to avoid contradictions (263–264). Second, she tries to ignite confidence in ordinary language and our hermeneutical access to it: "We're very unlikely to turn up inconsistencies, failures of harmony, and the like in the rules of use for ordinary terms if we do our interpretive work well." (271) In a way, we should just 'play the game' like we play a game of baseball despite some subtle inconsistencies in the rule book (269). It is not clear how Thomasson arrives at her optimism especially when the reconstruction of

prima facie unpretentious arguments is a growing endeavor in analytical philosophy.<sup>4</sup> The chapter lacks any reference to the abundant cases of ‘interpretive mishaps’ in the history of philosophy. No examples are mentioned where ordinary language terms give rise to a multitude of readings.<sup>5</sup>

But also the first prong of Thomasson’s tactic against the threat of contradiction is problematic. Though the three conditions on acceptable easy arguments are stated in *rather* clear terms when taken to refer to a formal language, their application to ordinary language arguments and the concepts therein is everything else but straightforward. For example, it is completely unclear what should be taken as a *statable fact* in ordinary language or what the *extant terms* of ordinary language are, yet these concepts play a major role in the three conditions. Consequently, the assessment of easy arguments is not easy at all.<sup>6</sup> Does the Easy Approach deserve its name if the supposedly easy arguments first have to be divided into good and bad easy arguments with this division being operationalized in a rather complex hermeneutical way? It is a misleading tactic to say that we just have to do our interpretive job well. To put it more provocatively: Does Thomasson want to imply, that Frege was just bad at interpreting ordinary language expressions? In fact, this job is not ‘easy’ at all. This again questions the adequacy of the Easy Approach’s name.

In *chapter nine* Thomasson discusses the possibility of different meanings to the talk of existence (especially of the existential quantifier). If there is more than one meaning, her easy arguments might have conclusions which employ existential expressions alien to ontology. Thomasson presents Thomas Hofweber as an advocate of this position. He distinguishes existence in an internal (non-referential/ordinary) and an external (referential/‘Ontologese’) sense (276).<sup>7</sup> In response Thomasson draws attention to the perks of a single meaning to the talk of existence. More importantly she criticizes Hofweber’s approach as not sufficiently motivated and as methodologically questionable. On her view, an alternative ontological understanding of existence would first need to be furnished with a new meaning and this should be done in a controllable framework. “But can we understand the external reading of the quantifier in a way that both makes sense and contrasts it with the trivial [internal] understanding of the above quantified claims?” (292) Thomasson’s criticism

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<sup>4</sup> See for example Reinmuth, F./Siegwart G./Tapp C. (eds.) 2014. *Theory and Practice of Logical Reconstruction: Anselm as a Model Case*. *Logical Analysis and History of Philosophy* Vol. 17. Münster: Mentis. Works such as this question the unlimited aptitude of ordinary language for systematic philosophy – something Thomasson takes for granted.

<sup>5</sup> Here I may provide an example: The ordinary terms ‘set’, ‘concept’, and ‘number’ which figure prominently in philosophy are thoroughly treated and carefully interpreted by Cantor and Frege (and others). Still both of them did not manage to avoid inconsistencies and Frege was especially confident with regards to his interpretation. Only later alternative interpretations seem to have solved some of the problems in *various* rivalling ways.

<sup>6</sup> The application problems are tangible in the ‘wishdate’ argument; wishdates being entities that come into existence just when one wishes for a date. The argument runs thus: “If x wishes for a date, then x gets a wishdate (and so there is a wishdate).” (259) Thomasson tries to point out that this argument is unacceptable because the main conditional is unacceptable. And this, she states, is because there cannot be existence conditions for wishdates that conflict with the usual existence conditions for persons. But contrary to Thomasson’s suggestions there is no indication in the argument that wishdates are persons. Thus, the application of the acceptability conditions do not run as smoothly as Thomasson hoped.

<sup>7</sup> This internal/external distinction is vaguely related to Carnap’s famous erotetic terminology.

is correct, of course, and it is important that she insists on the semantical gaps in the ‘Ontologese language’. But in addition she does not fail to notice the merits of having alternative languages at one’s disposal. Unfortunately from this comes a tension in her book which might be pinpointed by two quotes: “The deflationist is the friend, not the foe, of acknowledging functional pluralism about language.” (285) – “[T]here is a single use of the quantifier in claims such as ‘there are numbers’ and ‘there is a mouse [...]’.” (290) In the end it remains unclear to what extent Thomasson wants to be a linguistic pluralist and to what extent primacy belongs to ordinary language with a singular meaning for any term. Nonetheless her semantical critique of ‘Ontologese’ stands.

The ninth chapter holds several obstacles for the reader’s understanding that relate to the tension articulated in the above paragraph. There are, for example, claims of language independence of the Easy Approach (283–284) which are not easy to understand – it seems obvious that the Approach’s results (simple realism) hinge on what terms are acceptable in the current state of our ordinary language. Another obstacle concerns the sideline about the role of reference with respect to existential questions. Thomasson could have put all burden of clarification on Hofweber who relates the concept of reference to the internal/external distinction. It seems like she indeed tries to shuffle off this kind of burden when she accuses Hofweber of “lumping issues of sameness of truth-conditions and reference/semantic function together” (279). But after chapter nine the reader will not be satisfied with Thomasson’s account of reference, while she seems convinced that a treatment of ontological existence has to incorporate a treatment of reference. This might be less obvious to the reader than she hoped – except maybe to the readers from the hard ontology faction who will not necessarily bring a benevolent reading to Thomasson’s position anyway.

The topics of chapter nine partially recur in *chapter ten* where the idea of an Ontologese language is discussed more extensively. The employment of such a language strives to be more suitable than the ordinary language to the task of “carving (nature/the world) at its joints” (297–299; Plato’s metaphor). Ted Sider poses as the main defendant of Ontologese. Thomasson’s countercriticism of Ontologese problematizes the relation between any language and the world. In her view Ontologese is more affected by these problems because its proponents make stronger claims about this relation than proponents of other languages. The claim that the Easy Approach is just as bad since Easy Ontologists take the world as unstructured, is countered by Thomasson with a rather non-cognitivist perspective towards the structure of reality/nature/the world (299–304). Thomasson emphasizes this point, echoing the Vienna Circle (she names Carnap; 306–307).

Thomasson’s attitude towards Ontologese could be more uncompromising, but in this chapter more consistently than in the preceding one Thomasson shifts the burden of clarification to the proponents of Ontologese while positioning herself in a way that lets her successfully defend the Easy Approach. The critique of the correspondistic goals of Ontologese is plausible mostly due to some illuminating remarks on the linguistic foundations of Ontologese and the Easy Approach. In fact, Thomasson dives deeper into the philosophy of language than before and the reader gets some valuable insights. Still, this is no introduction into the linguistic basis of the Easy Approach which, admittedly, would be better placed at the beginning of the book. Some views on the relation of language and world are hard to swallow for the sympathetic reader since they seem to be inherited from the methodological problems with Ontologese. This, of course, was supposed to be no problem to Thomasson but to her opponents.

The first part of the *conclusion* (C.1; 320–324) of *Ontology Made Easy* is a final plea for the Easy Approach summarizing all its assets in empirical, conceptual and pragmatic respects. For the second part (C.2; 325–330) Thomasson depicts her project as a “reorientation” (330) of metaphysics. In her view, her Easy Approach to ontological questions of existence may serve as a blueprint for future metaphysics including metaphysics that is not predominantly concerned with existence.

Plea and reorientation are convincing, indeed. Especially the pragmatic assets of an Easy Ontology are hard to deny at the end of the book. At this point Thomasson even finds clearer words to succinctly criticize proponents of more demanding ontologies and their methodologically questionable adventures: “Unless you are committed to prolonging such debates – what’s not to like [about the Easy Approach]? [...] Hard ontologists, of course, have a pragmatic reason of their own to reject my approach: to be able to retain the interest in the debates to which they have devoted themselves.” (324) Gladly and rightfully Thomasson asks to “lay to rest the embarrassment of proliferating debates” (322). Another positive feature of the last pages of the book can be seen in her optimism with regard to the meaning of a number of ontological terms: “[W]e may have work to do to determine how best to fill in the details of our concept of ‘same person’ or ‘same work of art’, consistent with some (ethical, aesthetic, or pragmatic) purpose.” (327–328) These lines should be valued because they represent a possible departure point from Thomasson’s anti-pluralistic tendencies towards a semantical instrumentalism which gives more room to establish varying conceptual frameworks in ontology (and elsewhere) without being inflationary.

The conclusion gives an angled overall picture of the book. Readers may not buy into every argument and every line of thought presented by Thomasson. Still the main impetus is only slightly affected. The reason for that rests in the antagonistic exposition of the Easy Approach; it is mainly conceived as an alternative opposed to existing approaches to ontological questions: “I aim to explicate how the view works and how it compares to some more familiar options, and to provide a unified defense of it against the variety of arguments that have been, and could be, wielded against it – all with a view to presenting it as an attractive alternative to the neo-Quinean mainstream.” (4) Consequentially there are always two optional ways to proceed in such a setting: (i) Thomasson may criticize the more demanding approaches to ontology or (ii) she may construct and defend her own approach. *Ontology Made Easy* has two parts but both of them are aligned to option (ii) – part I constructing, part II defending – but, of course, option (i) easily sneaks in because of the governing antagonism of the book.

Though it may not negatively affect the reader who looks for substantiation of his view on demanding ontologies as a “morass” of mutually irresolvable and unfounded ‘conceptual opinions’, with regard to construction and defense of the Easy Approach there are some gaps in Thomasson’s book. One is that the theory of application and coapplication conditions is not fully presented so that its application remains problematic (e. g. ‘smarts’ 198–199). Those readers who run into results diverging from Thomasson’s view with regard to certain terms like ‘number’ may be stuck with her assurance that they indeed did not understand the term (and its application conditions) in the first place. For example the following quote might make some readers feel like they missed some announcement about how to talk about numbers: “[A]nyone who thought that it took the presence of an ‘object’ in this sortal sense for there to be a number failed to grasp the number concept to begin



with.” (196–197)<sup>8</sup> This may seem evident to Thomasson, but why should anybody with an opposite feeling about the ordinary talk about numbers agree?

As mentioned in connection with several chapters of the book there is a large gap concerning the linguistic-philosophical foundations of both, the Easy Approach and some of the criticism towards other approaches. The application conditions represent just one (cluster of) concept(s) and *compared to other concepts (!)* it is rather clearly sketched. In contrast, the relation between reference and existence remains deeply enigmatic. Another example are the conditions for new concepts (and easy arguments) in chapter eight. – This deficit of the book could be compensated for by a global reference to a thorough introduction to these issues, though a couple of chapters devoted solely to the linguistic-philosophical infrastructure might have served that purpose as well. As it stands the book cannot be considered self-contained. This also goes to show that with all these fundamental but extra-ontological issues left open the Easy Approach might not be as easy as one expects – though still easier than the demanding approaches.

Despite the shortcomings and as pointed out above, the book is an achievement. The number of foes it legitimately criticizes is just too high to not deserve a benevolent reading that extends to the presentation of the Easy Approach, a discussion of its constructive and destructive merits with regard to all referred approaches to ontology, and ultimately recognition of some central aspects of the Easy Approach. Of course, this assessments makes it more of a work in progress than the author may have intended, but this is not bad at all because it may help the issue to be discussed longer into the future.

Study of the book is especially recommended for those who seek to reflect on their meta-ontological presumptions before, after, or while working in ontology. Not being opposed to all uses of ordinary language should be seen as a precondition if the reader wants to keep her temper. Awareness of philosophical methods and especially the knowledge of concepts from the philosophy of language should be regarded as obligatory so as to assess Thomasson’s arguments without solely relying on her convictions. If this condition is met, the book may even serve as an introductory text, albeit a biased one, which presents various contemporary approaches to ontology by reference to representative adherents to these approaches. In teaching, the book or its chapters may serve the purpose of a basis for discussion in advanced courses. A supplementation with other texts for parallel discussion is recommended.

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Sandra Lapointe (ed.): *Themes from Ontology, Mind, and Logic: Present and Past – Essays in Honour of Peter Simons*. Grazer Philosophische Studien 91. Leiden/Boston: Brill Rodopi, 2015, viii + 442 pages, ISBN 978-90-04-30224-2

The publication under review is a festschrift honouring Peter Simons and his contributions to philosophy, on the occasion of his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday. Through his 40 years long career, Peter Simons has made considerable contributions to the field of philosophy. Through hundreds of papers, and a few books, he has enriched our understanding of a multitude

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<sup>8</sup> Another issue with regard to which the ontologically interested reader will be at a loss are incomplete application conditions (204).