



Rectification note to “Scientific models and metalinguistic negotiation”  
(*Theoria. An International Journal for Theory,  
History and Foundations of Science,*  
34(2), 277-295)

(Nota rectificativa de “Scientific models and metalinguistic negotiation”  
(*Theoria. An International Journal for Theory, History and Foundations of Science,*  
34(2), 277-295))

Mirco SAMBROTTA  
Slovak Academy of Sciences

\* **Correspondence to:** Mirco Sambrotta. Institute of Philosophy, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Klemensova 19 (811 09 Bratislava, Slovak Republic) – [mirco.sambrotta@gmail.com](mailto:mirco.sambrotta@gmail.com) – <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6962-4207>

**How to cite:** Sambrotta, Mirco (2022). «Rectification note to “Scientific models and metalinguistic negotiation” (*Theoria. An International Journal for Theory, History and Foundations of Science*, 34(2), 277-295)»; *Theoria. An International Journal for Theory, History and Foundations of Science*, 37(2), 257-261. (<https://doi.org/10.1387/theoria.23644>).

Received: 2021-03-22; Final version: 2021-03-22.

ISSN 0495-4548 - eISSN 2171-679X / © 2022 UPV/EHU



This work is licensed under a  
Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

This rectification note has the aim of clarifying the sources used in the article “Scientific models and metalinguistic negotiation” (Sambrotta, 2019 – henceforth SMMN). Although in general these sources are mentioned in the text, and are included in the reference list, the specific ways in which the article relies on these works were not always clear. Here, this lack of clarity is addressed, by indicating explicitly various passages in the original article where specific references to the relevant sources should be introduced. The author wishes to apologize for any confusions that may have been caused by these imprecisions in the original article’s references.

The presentation of the notion of scientific models in pp. 278-279 relies heavily on the “Models in Science” entry of the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Frigg and Hartmann, 2020).

Several sections of the article are based, more or less directly, on Delia Belleri’s paper “Verbalism and metalinguistic negotiation in ontological disputes” (Belleri, 2017). In particular, the discussion of Carnap in page 291 is indebted to Belleri’s work, especially to Belleri (2017, p. 2223), where the following fragment can be found:

The idea seems in no way to differ from Carnap’s approach, according to which ontological questions are matters of ‘practical decision concerning the structure of language’ (Carnap 1950, p. 23), where acceptance of a certain linguistic form is judged according to its expediency and fruitfulness given a certain intended aim. (Belleri 2017, p. 2223)

It should be properly noted that the following passage in SMMN (p. 291) is drawn from Belleri’s text:

The idea put forward here does not really differ from Carnap’s approach, according to which an ontological question is a matter of ‘Practical decision concerning the structure of language, not a theoretical question as their formulation seems to suggest’ (Carnap 1950, 23), where acceptance of a certain linguistic form is judged according to its expediency and fruitfulness given certain intended aims. (p. 291)

Although the topics addressed are different, the structure of Belleri’s (2017) argument is in several points parallel to that of SMN. Her precedence in formulating this type of argument should be acknowledged. For instance, in comparing the languages of Endurantism and Perdurantism, Belleri writes, “... I have argued that this makes the ontologist ‘free’ to choose one or the other for pragmatic purposes (...) Finally, I have explained in what sense the dispute would be ‘minimally substantive’ even though language-choice is largely a pragmatic matter” (Belleri, 2017, p. 2224). In SMMN, in relation to the dispute between realists and fictionalists, we can read: “I will maintain that ontologists have no substantive grounds to choose one view or the other, so they are in a sense ‘free’ to choose between the competing standpoints for practical purposes. In spite of this, I shall finally explain in what sense the dispute can still be regarded as ‘minimally substantive’” (SMMN, p. 279).

Moreover, in arguing for the ontological relevance of the respective debates, Belleri says: “The decision we make has an ontological impact, for it implies that the selected language will existentially quantify at the object-level over certain entities. If we take existential quantification as being connected to a statement of existence, which in turn implies a certain ontological commitment —perhaps just a ‘lightweight’ [note 17] one—, then it seems we can rescue the ontological relevance of such debate” (Belleri, 2017, p. 2221). In

turn, in SMMN (p. 288) we find: “Indeed, if we take existential statements as being connected to existential quantifications, the selected language will existentially quantify at the object-level over certain entities, which in turn implies certain ontological commitments.” Furthermore, the sentence “In a possible connection with Neo-Fregean approaches to ontology, a ‘lightweight’ notion of existence implies that the existence of the entities in question ‘requires nothing from the world’” (SMMN, p. 289) has been taken from Belleri (2017, p. 2221, n. 17).

The characterization of meta-linguistic negotiation in p. 284 follows closely the discussion of the notion by Sundell and Plunkett (2013) and by Burgess and Plunkett (2013). In this way, the sentences

Metalinguistic negotiations are not confined to gradable adjectives or other context-sensitive expressions, but they can even concern words that are seemingly quite fixed in their meaning. (SMMN, p. 283)

and

Note that unlike the cases of metalinguistic sharpening involving gradable adjectives, there is little reason to think that the relevant linguistic expressions here (‘athlete’ and ‘publication’) are semantically context-sensitive. (SMMN, p. 284)

Are reformulations of the following passages by Plunkett and Sundell:

But metalinguistic negotiation is not confined to gradable adjectives or other context-sensitive expressions. It can even concern words that are seemingly quite fixed in their meaning. (Plunkett and Sundell, p. 16)

Unlike the cases of metalinguistic sharpening involving gradable adjectives, there is little reason to think that the relevant linguistic expression here — ‘athlete’ — is semantically context-sensitive. (Plunkett and Sundell, p. 16).

Similarly, the following passage (p. 284) is derived directly from Burgess and Plunkett (2013, p. 1103):

Fictionalism can be helpfully understood as a position in conceptual ethics insofar as fictionalists advocate the distinctly normative view that we ought to use the relevant concept(s) within the scope of some sort of pretense. We can distinguish two sorts of questions in conceptual ethics:

- i. Should we use a given concept?
- ii. And if so, how should we use it exactly? (SMMN, p. 284)

The work of A. Thomasson is one of the main sources on which the article relies, as indicated in the text. There are several points, however, in which more specific references to Thomasson need to be introduced.

The fragment “heavyweight metaphysicians in the neo-Quinean tradition, who think of themselves as doing work of a piece with science, weighing up the merits of competing theories about the world just as a scientist does” (SMMN, p. 290 n. 28) is taken from Thomasson (2017, p. 26).

Footnote 19 (p. 289) includes fragments derived from Thomasson (2007, pp. 193, 199, 201), which was missing from the reference list. In particular, the following passage is taken directly from Thomasson (2007, p. 199):

that relieves us of the epistemological embarrassments that come with a ‘serious metaphysical’ approach that takes facts about what exists and what modal features objects possess to be discoverable by some special means that is not simply exhausted by of conceptual analysis or straightforward empirical enquiry. (SMMN, p. 289)

And the following passage reproduces with minimal alterations a fragment found in Thomasson (2007, p. 201):

the primary role of the ontologist addressing existence questions is not to undertake a certain kind of conceptual analysis, but rather to engage in deep discoveries about what really exists, or what things there really are. (SMMN, p. 289)

Footnote 20 (p. 289) follows closely the text in Thomasson (2008, pp. 70-71).

The discussion of deep disagreement in pp. 287-288 relies heavily on Lynch (2010), to which a reference is made in footnote 16. It should be indicated that the sentence “Considerations given above, after all, already suggest that the underlying issue is not a matter of what we know or do not know, but of what we should or shouldn’t do” (Sambrotta, 2019, p. 288) is taken from Lynch (2010, p. 274). Moreover, the following sentence is extracted from Lynch (2010, p. 269):

One relevant sense of ‘rational’ here is presumably epistemic rationality. Epistemic rationality trades in epistemic reasons. An epistemic reason is a reason for thinking that some [...]. (SMMN, p. 288)

In p. 292, the following sentence should be attributed to Carnap (1950, p. 208):

intended to be used will determine which factors are relevant for the decision: the efficiency, fruitfulness and simplicity of the use of the thing language may be among the decisive factors.

## REFERENCES

- Belleri, D. (2017). Verbalism and metalinguistic negotiation in ontological disputes. *Philosophical Studies*, 174(9), 2211-2226.
- Carnap, R. (1950). Empiricism, semantics, and ontology. *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, Vol. 4. Reprinted in: *Meaning and Necessity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1956.
- Frigg, R., and Hartmann, S. (2017). Models in Science. In E. Zalta (ed.). *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2017 Edition). URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/models-science/>>.
- Lynch, M. (2010). Epistemic Circularity and Epistemic Incommensurability. In Adrian Haddock, Alan Millar, and Duncan Pritchard (eds.). *Social epistemology*. Oxford: OUP, 262-277.
- Plunkett, D., & Burgess, A. (2013). Conceptual Ethics II. *Philosophy Compass*, 8(12), 1102-1110.
- Plunkett, D., & Sundell, T. (2013). Disagreement and the Semantics of Normative and Evaluative Terms. *Philosopher's Imprint*, 13(23).

- Sambrotta, M. (2019). Scientific models and metalinguistic negotiation. *Theoria. An International Journal for Theory, History and Foundations of Science*, 34(2), 277-295.
- Thomasson, A. (2007). *Ordinary objects*. Oxford University Press.
- Thomasson, A. (2008). Existence questions. *Philosophical Studies*, 141(1), 63-78.
- Thomasson, A. (2017). Metaphysical disputes and metalinguistic negotiation. *Analytic Philosophy*, 58(1), 1-28.

**MIRCO SAMBROTTA** is a researcher at Slovak Academy of Sciences.

**ADDRESS:** Institute of Philosophy, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Klemensova 19, 811 09 Bratislava, Slovak Republic. E-mail: mirco.sambrotta@gmail.com. ORCID: 0000-0001-6962-4207.