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## **The Fourth Option: Avoiding Sosa's Trilemma**

### *(0) Introduction*

Ernest Sosa's "Putnam's Pragmatic Realism," is meant not only as a reply to Putnam, but much more broadly as a summary of the available metaphysical options to the question: "what exists?" Sosa claims that "by extending Putnam's reasoning, we reach a set of options in contemporary ontology that presents us with a rather troubling tri-lemma" (1993, 624), namely, the choice among eliminativism, absolutism, and conceptual relativism. Sosa argues each option has "disastrous" consequences, and further that there are no other options currently available. In this essay, I don't dispute the difficulties Sosa attributes to each option since I believe he's correct. What I will argue is that Sosa is overly pessimistic with limited number of options he uses to characterize contemporary metaphysics. There is in fact at least one other tenable position that can meet the difficulties collectively confronting the original three positions.

Part of what I find surprising about Sosa's claim is that what I will call the 'Fourth Option' can be found in both analytic literature, as well as contemporary continental philosophy. I'm assuming the Fourth Option is not a single theory, but instead represents a family of theories as radically different as Ruth Millikan's historical/functional account of kinds and Martin Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology of ready-to-hand entities. I'll discuss each of these versions of the Fourth Option in this paper.

### *(1) Sosa's Troubling Triad*

Sosa asks us to consider the existence of a snowball. The existence of a snowball requires a time  $t$  at which it exists, the location  $l$  where it exists, and some quantity of snow (matter) in the shape (form) of a ball that is distinct from other snow. For the snowball to continue to exist for some interval  $I$  of time requires that there are corresponding sequences of snow  $Q_1, Q_2, \dots$ , for each division of  $I$  into subintervals  $I_1, I_2, \dots$ . Sosa claims to have given us the criteria for the existence and perdurance for snowballs.

An entity of any sort “exists if and only if its criteria of existence are satisfied at  $t$ , and perdures through  $I$  if and only if its criteria of perdurance are satisfied relative to  $I$ ” (1993, 619). Entities perdure through time by having successive links that satisfy the existence criteria relative to some interval. What Sosa has in mind by “criteria of existence” is that an object is constituted by the combination of matter and form (1993, 620). Criteria of existence are intrinsic properties of objects.

Now consider our ordinary concept of a snowball in relation to the concept of snowdiscalls, “defined as an entity constituted by a piece of snow as matter and as form any shape between being round and being disc-shaped” (1993, 620). Sosa’s criteria for being a snowdiscall are inclusive, meaning that every snowball is also a snowdiscall. Not every snowdiscall is a snowball however since not all snowdiscalls are round. Furthermore, snowballs are distinct entities from snowdiscalls since flattening a snowball destroys its requisite shape, but not its matter as a portion of snow. So, destroying a snowball does not destroy the portion of snow, and if the remaining shape still meets the criteria of existence for a snowdiscall, then snowdiscalls are certainly distinct from snowballs.

Once we agree to the previous criteria we are faced with the “explosion of reality” problem. Since there are infinitely many gradations or shapes between roundness and flatness, there are infinitely many entities with distinct criteria of existence. If we think  $G_1$  is slightly less than round and more flattened than a snowball, and  $G_2$  is even more flattened, and  $G_3$ ,  $G_4$ ,  $G_5$ , and so on, all represent the least possible variation from the previous stage’s roundness, we can destroy  $G_1$  through  $G_5$  by flattening the portion of snow to extent  $X$  but still leave  $G_6$ ,  $G_7$ , and so on. What Sosa believes this shows is that there are an infinite number of distinct entities (snowdiscalls) within a snowball. They are distinct entities since they all have differing points at which they cease to exist. In this example, all the entities require the same matter (snow) but their forms vary. Sosa concludes, “whenever a piece of snow constitutes a snowball, therefore, it constitutes infinitely many entities all sharing its place with it” (1993, 620). Sosa contends there are currently three disastrous solutions: conceptual relativism, absolutism, and eliminativism.

The conceptual relativist’s solution to the oddity of positing an infinite number of snowdiscalls is to make existence itself relative to some conceptual scheme. The move here is to deny that constituted supervenient entities of our ordinary world do not just objectively supervene on their requisite matters and forms “with absolute independence from the catego-

ries recognized by any person or group” (1993, 620). Our conceptual scheme does not afford the shape of snowdiscall sufficient status for objects that have this shape, with snow as their matter, to be separately existing entities. Conceptual relativism prevents the explosion of reality, but the price is costly.

The first difficulty is explaining the existence of the scheme itself, as well as the framers and users of the scheme; do they exist relative to that or some other conceptual scheme? This leads to a vicious circle. The circle is sidestepped by distinguishing between existence *relative* to a scheme from existence *in virtue of* a scheme. But this leads to a further difficulty. If there are entities that exist not in virtue of our present conceptual scheme but are merely unrecognized in our scheme, what are the criteria for their existence? If the answer is the in-itself criteria of existence, that is, an answer solely in terms of intrinsic matter and form, we are confronted with the explosion of reality. We also need an explanation of why our scheme doesn't recognize entities that already exist. The most significant problem, according to Sosa, is that there is no satisfactory account of how entities we have yet to discover from the past, present, or in the future exist prior to our recognition of them in our conceptual scheme.

We could reject conceptual relativism and simply admit the existence of an infinite number of snowdiscalls all existing in intimate proximity to each existing snowball. To admit there are an infinite number of entities all satisfying absolutely independent criteria of existence is to accept absolutism. This option is strongly counter-intuitive and any proponent of such a view is burdened to explain why we so narrowly focus on the limited number of objects we typically attend to. There is an infinite number of objects in the very same place as the objects we currently recognize; why do we recognize such a small percentage of them and why this set of objects as opposed to some other? The burden here for the absolutist is to explain away our intuition that there aren't an infinite number of entities in the very same place by explaining why we only acknowledge some of them.

The third and last option is eliminativism. This position denies full ontological status to most of our everyday world. The terms of our ordinary speech such as: 'chair,' 'snowball,' 'tree,' and so on are viewed as convenient abbreviations - not as “seriously representing reality and its contents” (1993, 622). There are two main problems with this position pointed out by Sosa. First, it is strongly counter-intuitive that the objects that we are most intimately familiar with and that nearly everyone believes exist don't really exist. Second, assuming our ordinary terms are merely

abbreviations, we are left wanting a coherent account of what these terms are abbreviations for, and to whom they are convenient for what ends.

*(2) Dependent beings and belief independence*

In this section I want to provide brief accounts of metaphysical theories that I contend are representative of the Fourth Option. I'll begin by presenting Ruth Millikan's discussion of "real kinds" and substance concept acquisition. Following an explication of Millikan, we will leave analytic philosophy and examine Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology to show that it too falls under the heading of a Fourth Option. In section three, I'll explain why these approaches meet the shortcomings of Sosa's options and why they should be considered a distinct type of option.

Millikan's account of how human beings acquire empirical concepts – what she calls 'substance concepts' - provides a realist ontology that posits various real kinds that are more than just occurrent swarms of micro-particles.<sup>1</sup> These real kinds are in many cases dependent on human practices, but are decidedly not constituted by our beliefs. Millikan argues that substances are those things that allow non-accidental inductive inferences. These substances or real kinds are subjects over which predicates are projectable. Real kinds are not merely clusters of properties, but instead require a real ground that explains that presence of similar sets of properties across members of the same kind. Natural kinds, the stuffs typically referred to in the assertions of physics and chemistry, involve 'ahistorical' or 'eternal' kinds. The members of an eternal kind belong to that kind **not** in virtue of their historical relation to other members of the same kind; there is some other form of causal interaction that makes each member belong to a kind. The historical relation is primarily a causal one in which previous instances of members of a kind have a causal role in the existence of new members of the same kind. Two pieces of gold for example do not belong to the same kind in virtue of their historical relations to other pieces of gold; there are other causal mechanisms that explain why all pieces of gold exhibit similar properties.

Millikan does not limit her ontology to eternal kinds however; she argues that historical kinds are equally real. The similarity between members of an historical kind such as biological species is not accidental; the similarity between members of a species arises out of their historical rela-

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<sup>1</sup> See chapters 2 and 3 of Millikan's Clear and Confused Ideas for a thorough development of her ontology.

tionship to other members of the species (2000, 20). Millikan's account of historical kinds can be extended, most interestingly from the perspective of this paper, to explain the non-accidental similarities of cultural artifacts.

There are three sorts of causal historical relations that explain why members of an historical kind share similar properties:

- (1) Some form of copying or reproduction has occurred.
- (2) Various members have been produced by, or in response to, the very same ongoing historical environment.
- (3) Some "function" is served by members of a kind such that this function raises the probability that the kind's cause will be reproduced (2000, 20).

Millikan claims chairs and even 1969 Plymouth Valiants satisfy all three types of causal relations previously mentioned and thus belong to rough historical kinds respectively. Even entities such as schoolteachers, doctors, and parents form historical kinds since the similarity shared by members of these kinds is the result of training (a form of copying or reproduction), or a result of custom, or even social pressures to conform (each of the latter is also a form of copying). Schoolteachers, doctors, and parents all have certain properties in common, such as various behaviors, because these behaviors are the result of some form of copying.

Millikan offers us a theory explaining the ontological status of species, chairs, teachers, and social groups that is causally based in historical relations. The beliefs of members of a culture do not determine the ontology of their living reality. In fact, by Millikan's account, the existence of such kinds is a necessary prerequisite for our having such concepts as chair, teacher, and so on. Millikan argues against the traditional view of what determines a concept's extension – a view she calls "conceptionism."

Conceptionism is the view that the extension of a concept or term is determined by some aspect of the speaker's conception of its extension, that is, by some method that the thinker has of identifying it. I am fully in charge of the extensions of my concepts. (2000, 42)

One of the main differences between Millikan's view and what she sees as the traditional account is in making the locus of an extension's determination in the ability to identify, rather than in the act of classifying.

Classification is first of all an act of the individual – what the individual has in mind determines the reference of a class term. Secondly, clas-

sification presupposes that the individual already can identify what it is he wants to classify. Millikan states the organism's capacities to re-identify "are not the purposes of individuals, but the biological functions – the unconscious purposes – of their inborn concept-tuning mechanism that connects substance concepts with certain extensions" (2000, 49). In order for organisms to have concepts they must have the ability to identify real kinds – kinds not determined by the psychological act of classification, since such acts require the prior ability to re-identify kinds.

Another version of what I've referred to as a Fourth Option is Martin Heidegger's account of equipmental beings. Where Millikan offers us a biologically based and modeled theory of proper functions and historical causal relations, Heidegger provides a phenomenological analysis of beings. Heidegger draws the distinction between nature and worldliness; the former category corresponds to the entities posited by physics and chemistry, while the latter category contains things that comprise much of our daily involvements in the world. Like Millikan, Heidegger rejects the traditional role of the subject in the determination of particular beings. Millikan replaces the view of a conceptualizing subject setting the parameters of a term's extension by making the re-identification of substances a biological function. Heidegger likewise diverges from the tradition via his treatment of *Dasein*, or being-in-the-world. The important question is: how does Heidegger explain the particular being of objects such as chairs, hammers, pens, and other instances of cultural artifacts?

Prior to the polarity of subject and object, Heidegger argues that our relationship to the world is characterized by a special kind of intimacy; this intimacy is *being-in-the-world*. We are not first detached subjects imposing meaning and significance on a purely objective world. Instead, we achieve the subjective perspective already in the midst of coping in a public space with other people and things. The subjective perspective is the point of self-awareness characterized by inner dialogue; it was taken to be foundational by Descartes. The various beings of our everyday world are pre-determined prior to our ability to detach ourselves and ask theoretical questions about their existence. In fact, in order to ask theoretical questions about objects in our daily lives assumes we have already recognized these objects as autonomous things – autonomous in the sense that we relate to objects as kinds of things independently of our beliefs about them. We have a pre-theoretical understanding of objects such as chairs, sidewalks, toys, house, and so on through our active use and skillful manipulation of these entities. Moreover, we don't first discover ourselves through some

Cartesian meditation, but by continually realizing our abilities to interact with our environment. Hence, being-in-the-world or Dasein is not to be understood as the unification of two distinct elements – subject and object – but as a phenomenologically unified process of coping that gives rise to the possibility of such a duality.

This phenomenological unity is not merely a developmental stage that is eventually surpassed for more advanced modes of understanding and interpretation. A good example of this phenomenon would be learning how to ride a bicycle or play a musical instrument. One may initially read books and articles in an attempt to understand a particular activity and the objects involved in the performance of that activity, but the highest or most accomplished form of understanding of the activity and the object is mastery of use. Trumpets and bicycles are most properly understood as objects of their respective kinds when they are effectively used. Regarding the being of these types of “worlded” objects, Heidegger states:

This being is not the object of a theoretical “world”- cognition; it is what is used, produced, and so on. As a being thus encountered it comes pre-thematically into view for a “knowing” ... Thus, this phenomenological interpretation is not a cognition of existent qualities of beings; but, rather, a determination of the structure of their being... Phenomenologically pre-thematic beings, what is used and produced, becomes accessible when we put ourselves in the place of taking care of things in the world. (BT, 63)

A bit of explication is necessary at this point regarding the previous passage. The beings of the everyday world are not the products or objects of a subject imposing a theoretical structure or conceptual scheme (a theoretical “world” cognition). The being of these objects is understood in its use or function; through socialization into specific uses for tools, furniture, and the like, we not only discover the kinds of objects for what they are, we participate in an ongoing determination of the structure of their being; that is, our activities are a necessary part of the particular type of equipmentality each piece of equipment has. Moreover, what we are able to “care” about is determined by our biological needs and abilities, as well as various social roles that we are thrown into.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> “Thrownness” plays an important role in Heidegger’s claim that worldly objects are not subjective projections. All individual Dasein are thrown into a context; that is, by the time we are self-aware we have been using or coping with chairs, spoons, mama, etc. Hence, as subjects we can discover things about the world because the everyday

Heidegger argues that the being of everyday objects is not subjectively determined. One of Heidegger's main arguments is that for everyday beings to be "subjectively interpreted" would require two things: (1) an autonomous subject standing apart from a purely objective world and (2) an "objectively present world-stuff" (BT, 67) that subjects could then interpret. Heidegger denies that either condition obtains. No subject has a non-historical and non-contextual perspective on the world; the world is presupposed in the achievement of subjectivity. Descartes could never have thought he was if he hadn't been a language user in a public world with other language users.

Heidegger does not deny that what he calls "nature" exists in-itself independent of human activity and understanding. However, our access to this mode of being is secondary. "To expose what is merely objectively present, cognition must first penetrate beyond things at hand being taken care of" (BT, 67). Because we are always engaged in using and producing objects to serve our activities, a failure of such objects is inevitable. Equipment tends to break down or wear out. These failures force us to recognize that there are features of nature that affect the efficacy of our tools or even the health of our bodies. Thus, Heidegger posits two modes of being: the in-itself existence of nature and the objects characterized by "handiness." Although the latter do not exist in the same way as natural entities, they are not simply subjective projections as we have seen.

### *(3) Why Millikan and Heidegger Offer a Fourth Option*

To see why Millikan offers a distinct option, we need to ask if snowballs are a real kind on Millikan's account and, if so, what type of kind are they – eternal or historical? Real kinds are kinds that support non-accidental inductive inferences and it seems we can make non-accidental inductive claims about snowballs. Now we need to decide what grounds these inferences; that is, what explains why snowballs share certain properties in common? The answer to this question will show that snowballs are historical kinds that have human activities as part of their causal histories.

Snowballs do not occur naturally without human intervention from any non-accidentally recurring causal factors. Hail, for example, may at times look like a snowball but is structured differently than a snowball. Moreover, even assuming hail shared an identical structure with snowballs,

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world has been pre-theoretically disclosed. Thrownness is one way in which Heidegger sees the determination of beings as a fundamentally temporal/historical process.



hail has an entirely different causal origin. Each instance of hail, such as an individual piece, is caused by various atmospheric conditions that join water molecules together in a certain pattern. Thus, each piece of hail has no causal relation to other pieces of hail. Snowballs have a different causal origin that involves a common pattern of copying in response to similar ongoing environmental pressures. Children are taught how to make snowballs by parents and older children so that they can be thrown with ease and, with a bit of practice, accuracy. Given the common shape and ability of the human hand and arm, along with the function of being an object for throwing, there is a causal pattern of copying that explains the similarity among snowballs.

One may want to ask about poorly made snowballs, ones that are slightly flattened. After all not everyone makes a perfect sphere every time; shouldn't these cases count as snowdiscalls? The most plausible answer on Millikan's account is that there are no snowdiscalls, only less than perfectly made snowballs. However, if the shape of a snowdiscall came to serve some function, much like snowballs do in snowball fights, and these disc-shaped pieces of snow are copied or reproduced because of this function, they could perhaps evolve into a distinct kind.

Sosa's example of a snowball containing an infinite number of snowdiscalls exemplifies what Millikan calls "conceptionism." Sosa has given us a definition of snowdiscalls – a means of classifying – but Sosa hasn't given us a reason to believe there are such entities that belong to this class. There is no causal ground that would explain why nearly all snowdiscalls have certain features in common other than the fact that we have stipulated that there is a class of object with a certain set of properties. On Millikan's view, just because we can classify a group of imagined objects does not make the objects in that class a real kind.

Snowdiscalls are not historical kinds and nor are they eternal kinds on Millikan's account. Eternal kinds exist because members of a particular eternal kind share some inner structure resulting from some "natural necessity in a certain selection of surface properties, or results in given selection under given conditions" (2000, 18). Water is an eternal kind because the atomic structure of all water molecules is the same as a result of the natural necessity involving one oxygen and two hydrogen atoms. Stars, planets, asteroids, also are eternal kinds not because of an identical inner structure but because they "are formed by the same natural forces in the same sort of circumstances out of materials similar in relevant ways"

(2000, 19). Hail is an eternal kind, snowballs are an historical kind, and snowdiscalls satisfy neither set of conditions.

Heidegger also offers a distinct response to the explosion of reality problem. Let us begin by trying to understand how Heidegger might articulate the being of a snowball. Snowballs are characterized by their “handiness” or their equipmentality in a broad sense. Equipmental kinds are characterized by their functions – what Heidegger calls their “in-order-to.” What we’ve come to know about snow as a natural kind is derived from snow’s significance or meaning in terms of how we can appropriate it to meet some practical ends. Snowballs are analogous to other types of equipment:

In the environment certain entities become accessible which are always ready-to-hand, but which, in themselves, do not need to be produced. hammer, tongs, and needle, refer in themselves to steel, iron, metal, mineral, wood, in that they consist of these. In equipment that is used, ‘Nature’ is discovered along with it by that use... (BT, 66).

Snowballs are a kind of equipment that fit into a holistic network that refers to various natural kinds; part of a snowball’s existence involves reference to the material from which it is made. But, equipment as equipment is more than mere matter. This “more” relates to the equipment’s function or usefulness.

In *Poetry, Language, and Thought* Heidegger states: “The equipmental quality of the equipment consists indeed in its usefulness. But this usefulness itself rests in the abundance of an essential being of the equipment. We call it reliability.” (PLT, 34) To be a type of equipment such as a snowball requires that the object reliably perform some function. It is the equipment’s reliability that leads to its continued use and production. Any particular function must be understood relationally: hammering makes sense only if there are nails and wood; nails and wood are related by the task of building shelters; shelters are related to the harsh weather they shelter their inhabitants from.

The function of snowballs is to be thrown with reliable accuracy. The being-thrown as the in-order-to of the snowball makes sense only in relation to various social practices such as snowball fights. To be a snowball, or any piece of equipment, is to reliably fulfill some function within a network of practices. Snowdiscalls do not fulfill any function, reliably or otherwise, there is no holistic network of practices of which snowdiscalls are a part. Hence, unless we have reason to think snowdiscalls play a causal role

in the strictly independent physical world apart from human affairs, we have no reason to suppose they exist in the way that snowballs do.

Sosa's trilemma, when viewed from a Heideggerian perspective, results from a failure to distinguish distinct ways of existence; in this case, Sosa fails to consider the ontological difference between ready-to-hand and present-at-hand entities. The trilemma assumes that a ready-to-hand entity, such as a snowball, can be defined ontologically in terms of its present-at-hand constituents.

It is clear from the brief discussion of Millikan and Heidegger that they are not eliminativists. Both philosophers' ontologies have a central role for most of the everyday objects that occupy our world. Our concepts and terms have meaningful content because the world contains certain mind-independent entities, whether our approach is biological or phenomenological. Our ordinary talk is not "so much convenient abbreviation," as Sosa describes the eliminativist position; moreover, our ordinary talk couldn't exist as it does to a large extent if it were some type of abbreviation for a more fundamental ontology.

It should also be evident that neither Millikan nor Heidegger is a conceptual relativist. True, cultural kinds do depend on human practices, so the being of these kinds is relative but not *conceptually* relative. What determines the particular being of these entities is not the imposition of a conceptual scheme or theory. Sosa describes conceptually relative existence as an application of criteria of existence and perdurance. The problem is in explaining the existence of things currently unrecognized in our scheme. Both Millikan and Heidegger can admit that entities that have "ahistorical" or a purely "natural" existence are waiting to be discovered; their existence has nothing to do with our concepts and theories. Cultural kinds don't typically have to be discovered since we are intimately familiar with them, but this familiarity isn't because our beliefs are constitutive of their being. Many cultural kinds could exist even if we did not have beliefs about them.

#### *(4) Conclusion and Further Considerations*

The main goal of this paper has been to show there is in fact a fourth option not explored by Sosa. Particular theories that exemplify a Fourth Option will not be without their own problems; however, Sosa claims his three options all have disastrous consequences, so at least the two examples of a Fourth Option explored here can't be much worse off. More im-

portantly, I've tried to show that Millikan and Heidegger have ways of avoiding the disastrous consequences Sosa sees looming over his options.

One potential objection is that although entities like snowdiscalls do not exist in infinite number, snowballs, pens, and similarly legitimate kinds do. The claim here is that within legitimate entities there is infinite number of the very same entity in the same place constituted by an ever so slightly different molecular arrangement. So, for every snowball there is contained within it an infinite number of snowballs with different criteria for existence and perdurance.

It then appears that Millikan and Heidegger are forced to adopt either an eliminativist or absolutist stance with regard to this possibility. Since snowballs are a legitimate entity the eliminativist position is not available. Although Millikan and Heidegger could admit that *some* terms or phrases in our language are in fact abbreviations for groupings or classifications of real kinds; this by itself does not make their theories eliminativist since Sosa contends such a position denies full ontological status to *most* of the everyday world. Their responses to the push toward absolutism will be similar; we should also remember that both Millikan and Heidegger could at worst be classified as moderate absolutist since not just any combination of form and matter counts as real. I'll briefly sketch the response.

The challenge that there is an infinite number of snowballs, pens, or other legitimate kind within any single legitimate kind is a metaphysical mistake that fails to recognize the ontological nature of such entities. For Heidegger, individuation of "worlded" objects (as opposed to purely natural kinds) is not based solely on arrangements of micro-particles. In fact, recognizing that a "single" pen may contain many because of micro-particle arrangements, presupposes that the pen has been individuated pre-theoretically by how it fits into a network of activities. Then the mistake is to disregard the pre-theoretical criteria of individuation and speak primarily in terms of micro-particles. If I'm holding a "single" pen in my hand I can't very well lend it to anyone else – especially not an infinite number of people. In Sosa terms, the criteria for existence and perdurance are determined by practical comportment.

Millikan likewise would challenge the assumption of the absolutist description. The organism's concept acquisition abilities – the abilities to re-identify real kinds – do not depend on determining a single set of micro-particles. Very few organisms, if any, perceive the micro-particle structure of medium sized objects. So, the role real kinds play in concept acquisition is determined at the macro-level; the vagueness of the boundaries of such

objects is irrelevant. In terms of the ontology of the objects themselves, cultural/historical kinds are individuated functionally through production and use, not through possible ways of classifying or describing micro-particle structures. Much like the Heideggerian response, the absolutist challenge presupposes we, as human organisms, have already identified pens or snowballs. Such objects have been individuated at a certain level by our biology and activities. Once we have certain concepts we can then construct hypothetical situations using those concepts, but these constructions don't necessarily tell us anything about the being of particular entities.

Admittedly more could be said here. However, I've only attempted to sketch one type of response available to a certain line of objections. When we take seriously the philosophy of Millikan and Heidegger, we see that Sosa has missed a promising option in contemporary ontology. As a fourth option, Heidegger and Millikan share a recognition of non-mentalistic dependent being; "non-mentalistic" because the being of many entities is not determined by the psychological act of classifying or imposing linguistic/conceptual schemes; "dependent" because the existence of these entities is not satisfied by the in-itself criterion of matter and form. More broadly, Millikan and Heidegger both offer unique ways of overcoming the Cartesian view of subjectivity, which may explain some of the similarities in their metaphysical orientations.

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**ABSTRACT**

Ernest Sosa has argued that there are only three options available to contemporary metaphysicians – eliminativism, absolutism, and conceptual relativism. He further claims that all three options have disastrous consequences. I argue that Sosa fails to recognize a fourth option in contemporary metaphysics, a theoretical option that is exemplified in both the analytic and continental traditions. More specifically, I argue that Ruth Millikan's account of historical kinds, and Martin Heidegger's account of ready-to-hand entities cannot be subsumed under the initial three options, and both potentially avoid the negative consequences.