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SEMANTICS AND THE ONTOLOGY OF NUMBER

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Semantics and the Ontology of Number

Elements in the Philosophy of Mathematics

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Abstract: What are the meanings of number expressions, and what can they tell us about questions of central importance to the philosophy of mathematics, specifically 'Do numbers exist?' This Element attempts to shed light on this question by outlining a recent debate between substantialists and adjectivalists regarding the semantic function of number words in numerical statements. After highlighting their motivations and challenges, I develop a comprehensive polymorphic semantics for number expressions. I argue that accounting for their numerous meanings and how they are related leads to a strengthened argument for realism, one which renders familiar forms of nominalism highly implausible.

Keywords: semantics of number expressions, realism and nominalism, substantialism and adjectivalism, counting and measuring, the easy argument for numbers

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Contents

1 Introduction	1
2 Substantivalism and Adjectivalism	6
3 Polymorphism and the Ontology of Number	42
Bibliography	81