ON WHAT THERE IS

A curious thing about the ontological problem is its simplicity. It can be put in three Anglo-Saxon monosyllables: 'What is there?' It can be answered, moreover, in a word—'Everything'—and everyone will accept this answer as true. However, this is merely to say that there is what there is. There remains room for disagreement over cases; and so the issue has stayed alive down the centuries.

Suppose now that two philosophers, McX and I, differ over ontology. Suppose McX maintains there is something which I maintain there is not. McX can, quite consistently with his own point of view, describe our difference of opinion by saying that I refuse to recognize certain entities. I should protest, of course, that he is wrong in his formulation of our disagreement, for I maintain that there are no entities, of the kind which he alleges, for me to recognize; but my finding him wrong in his formulation of our disagreement is unimportant, for I am committed to considering him wrong in his ontology anyway.

When I try to formulate our difference of opinion, on the other hand, I seem to be in a predicament. I cannot admit that there are some things which McX countenances and I do not, for in admitting that there are such things I should be contradicting my own rejection of them.

It would appear, if this reasoning were sound, that in any ontological dispute the proponent of the negative side suffers the disadvantage of not being able to admit that his opponent disagrees with him.

This is the old Platonic riddle of nonbeing. Nonbeing must
in some sense be, otherwise what is it that there is not? This
tangled doctrine might be nicknamed Plato's beard; historically
it has proved tough, frequently dulling the edge of Occam's
razor.

It is some such line of thought that leads philosophers like
McX to impute being where they might otherwise be quite
content to recognize that there is nothing. Thus, take Pegasus.
If Pegasus were not, McX argues, we should not be talking
about anything when we use the word; therefore it would be
nonsense to say even that Pegasus is not. Thinking to show thus
that the denial of Pegasus cannot be coherently maintained, he
concludes that Pegasus is.

McX cannot, indeed, quite persuade himself that any region
of space-time, near or remote, contains a flying horse of flesh
and blood. Pressed for further details on Pegasus, then, he says
that Pegasus is an idea in men's minds. Here, however, a con-
fusion begins to be apparent. We may for the sake of argument
concede that there is an entity, and even a unique entity (though
this is rather implausible), which is the mental Pegasus-idea;
but this mental entity is not what people are talking about when
they deny Pegasus.

McX never confuses the Parthenon with the Parthenon-idea.
The Parthenon is physical; the Parthenon-idea is mental (accord-
ing anyway to McX's version of ideas, and I have no better to
offer). The Parthenon is visible; the Parthenon-idea is invisible.
We cannot easily imagine two things more unlike, and less
liable to confusion, than the Parthenon and the Parthenon-idea.
But when we shift from the Parthenon to Pegasus, the confusion
sets in—for no other reason than that McX would sooner be
deceived by the crudest and most flagrant counterfeit than grant
the nonbeing of Pegasus.

The notion that Pegasus must be, because it would otherwise
be nonsense to say even that Pegasus is not, has been seen to
lead McX into an elementary confusion. Subtler minds, taking
the same precept as their starting point, come out with theories
of Pegasus which are less patently misguided than McX's, and
correspondingly more difficult to eradicate. One of these subtler
minds is named, let us say, Wyman. Pegasus, Wyman maintains,
has his being as an unactualized possible. When we say of
Pegasus that there is no such thing, we are saying, more
precisely, that Pegasus does not have the special attribute of
actuality. Saying that Pegasus is not actual is on a par, logically,
with saying that the Parthenon is not red; in either case we are
saying something about an entity whose being is unquestioned.

Wyman, by the way, is one of those philosophers who have
united in ruining the good old word 'exist'. Despite his espousal
of unactualized possibles, he limits the word 'existence' to
actuality—thus preserving an illusion of ontological agreement
between himself and us who repudiate the rest of his bloated
universe. We have all been prone to say, in our common-sense
usage of 'exist', that Pegasus does not exist, meaning simply
that there is no such entity at all. If Pegasus existed he would
indeed be in space and time, but only because the word 'Pegasus'
has spatio-temporal connotations, and not because 'exists' has
spatio-temporal connotations. If spatio-temporal reference is
lacking when we affirm the existence of the cube root of 27,
this is simply because a cube root is not a spatio-temporal
kind of thing, and not because we are being ambiguous in our
use of 'exist'.

However, Wyman, in an ill-conceived effort to appear agreeable,
genially grants us the nonexistence of Pegasus and then, contrary to what we meant by nonexistence of Pegasus,
insists that Pegasus is. Existence is one thing, he says, and
subsistence is another. The only way I know of coping with this
obfuscation of issues is to give Wyman the word 'exist'. I'll
try not to use it again; I still have 'is'. So much for lexicography;
let's get back to Wyman's ontology.

The impulse to distinguish terminologically between existence as
applied to objects actualized somewhere in space-time and existence (or
subsistence or being) as applied to other entities arises in part, perhaps,
from an idea that the observation of nature is relevant only to questions
of existence of the first kind. But this idea is readily refuted by counter-
instances such as 'the ratio of the number of centaurs to the number of
unicorns'. If there were such a ratio, it would be an abstract entity, viz.
a number. Yet it is only by studying nature that we conclude that the
number of centaurs and the number of unicorns are both 0 and hence
that there is no such ratio.
Wyman's overpopulated universe is in many ways unlovely. It offends the aesthetic sense of us who have a taste for desert landscapes, but this is not the worst of it. Wyman's slum of possible is a breeding ground for disorderly elements. Take, for instance, the possible fat man in that doorway; and, again, the possible bald man in that doorway. Are they the same possible man, or two possible men? How do we decide? How many possible men are there in that doorway? Are there more possible thin ones than fat ones? How many of them are alike? Or would their being alike make them one? Are no two possible things alike? Is this the same as saying that it is impossible for two things to be alike? Or, finally, is the concept of identity simply inapplicable to unactualized possibilities? But what sense can be found in talking of entities which cannot meaningfully be said to be identical with themselves and distinct from one another? These elements are well-nigh incorrigible. By a Fregean therapy of individual concepts,* some effort might be made at rehabilitation; but I feel we'd do better simply to clear Wyman's slum and be done with it.

Possibility, along with the other modalities of necessity and impossibility and contingency, raises problems upon which I do not mean to imply that we should turn our backs. But we can at least limit modalities to whole statements. We may impose the adverb 'possibly' upon a statement as a whole, and we may well worry about the semantical analysis of such usage; but little real advance in such analysis is to be hoped for in expanding our universe to include so-called possible entities. I suspect that the main motive for this expansion is simply the old notion that Pegasus, for example, must be because otherwise it would be nonsense to say even that he is not.

Still, all the rank luxuriance of Wyman's universe of possibilities would seem to come to naught when we make a slight change in the example and speak not of Pegasus but of the round square cupola on Berkeley College. If, unless Pegasus were, it would be nonsense to say that he is not, then by the same token, unless the round square cupola on Berkeley College were, it

---

*See below, p. 182.
descriptive names such as 'the author of Waverley', 'the present King of France', 'the round square cupola on Berkeley College'. Russell analyzes such phrases systematically as fragments of the whole sentences in which they occur. The sentence 'The author of Waverley was a poet', for example, is explained as a whole as meaning 'Someone (better: something) wrote Waverley and was a poet, and nothing else wrote Waverley'. (The point of this added clause is to affirm the uniqueness which is implicit in the word 'the', in 'the author of Waverley'.) The sentence 'The round square cupola on Berkeley College is pink' is explained as 'Something is round and square and is a cupola on Berkeley College and is pink, and nothing else is round and square and a cupola on Berkeley College'.

The virtue of this analysis is that the seeming name, a descriptive phrase, is paraphrased in context as a so-called incomplete symbol. No unified expression is offered as an analysis of the descriptive phrase, but the statement as a whole which was the context of that phrase still gets its full quota of meaning — whether true or false.

The unanalyzed statement 'The author of Waverley was a poet' contains a part, 'the author of Waverley', which is wrongly supposed by McX and Wyman to demand objective reference in order to be meaningful at all. But in Russell's translation, 'Something wrote Waverley and was a poet and nothing else wrote Waverley', the burden of objective reference which had been put upon the descriptive phrase is now taken over by words of the kind that logicians call bound variables, variables of quantification, namely, words like 'something', 'nothing', 'everything'. These words, far from purporting to be names specifically of the author of Waverley, do not purport to be names at all; they refer to entities generally, with a kind of studied ambiguity peculiar to themselves. These quantificalional words or bound variables are, of course a basic part of language, and their meaningfulness, at least in context, is not to be challenged. But their meaningfulness in no way presupposes there being either the author of Waverley or the round square cupola on Berkeley College or any other specifically preassigned objects.

Where descriptions are concerned, there is no longer any difficulty in affirming or denying being. 'There is the author of Waverley' is explained by Russell as meaning 'Someone (or, more strictly, something) wrote Waverley and nothing else wrote Waverley'. 'The author of Waverley is not' is explained, correspondingly, as the alternation 'Either each thing failed to write Waverley or two or more things wrote Waverley'. This alternation is false, but meaningful; and it contains no expression purporting to name the author of Waverley. The statement 'The round square cupola on Berkeley College is not' is analyzed in similar fashion. So the old notion that statements of nonbeing defeat themselves goes by the board. When a statement of being or nonbeing is analyzed by Russell's theory of descriptions, it ceases to contain any expression which even purports to name the alleged entity whose being is in question, so that the meaningfulness of the statement no longer can be thought to presuppose that there be such an entity.

Now what of 'Pegasus'? This being a word rather than a descriptive phrase, Russell's argument does not immediately apply to it. However, it can easily be made to apply. We have only to rephrase 'Pegasus' as a description, in any way that seems adequately to single out our idea; say, 'the winged horse that was captured by Bellerophon'. Substituting such a phrase for 'Pegasus', we can then proceed to analyze the statement 'Pegasus is', or 'Pegasus is not', precisely on the analogy of Russell's analysis of 'The author of Waverley is' and 'The author of Waverley is not'.

In order thus to subsume a one-word name or alleged name such as 'Pegasus' under Russell's theory of description, we must, of course, be able first to translate the word into a description. But this is no real restriction. If the notion of Pegasus had been so obscure or so basic a one that no pat translation into a descriptive phrase had offered itself along familiar lines, we

---

Footnotes:
1 For more on the theory of descriptions see below, pp. 85f, 106f.
4 For more explicit treatment of the bound variable see below, pp. 82, 102f.
could still have availed ourselves of the following artificial and trivial-seeming device: we could have appealed to the _ex hypothesi_ unanalyzable, irreducible attribute of _being Pegasus_, adopting, for its expression, the verb 'is-Pegasus', or 'pegasizes'. The noun 'Pegasus' itself could then be treated as derivative, and identified after all with a description: 'the thing that is-Pegasus', 'the thing that pegasizes'.

If the importing of such a predicate as 'pegasizes' seems to commit us to recognizing that there is a corresponding attribute, pegasizing, in Plato's heaven or in the minds of men, well and good. Neither we nor Wyman nor McX have been contending, thus far, about the being or nonbeing of universals, but rather about that of Pegasus. If in terms of pegasizing we can interpret the noun 'Pegasus' as a description subject to Russell's theory of descriptions, then we have disposed of the old notion that Pegasus cannot be said not to be without presupposing that in some sense Pegasus is.

Our argument is now quite general. McX and Wyman supposed that we could not meaningfully affirm a statement of the form 'So-and-so is not', with a simple or descriptive singular noun in place of 'so-and-so', unless so-and-so is. This supposition is now seen to be quite generally groundless, since the singular noun in question can always be expanded into a singular description, trivially or otherwise, and then analyzed out _à la_ Russell.

We commit ourselves to an ontology containing numbers when we say there are prime numbers larger than a million; we commit ourselves to an ontology containing centaurs when we say there are centaurs; and we commit ourselves to an ontology containing Pegasus when we say Pegasus is. But we do not commit ourselves to an ontology containing Pegasus or the author of _Waverley_ or the round square cupola on Berkeley College when we say that Pegasus or the author of _Waverley_ or the cupola in question is not. We need no longer labor under the delusion that the meaningfulness of a statement containing

---

*For further remarks on such assimilation of all singular terms to descriptions see below, p. 167; also Quine [2], pp. 218-224.*

---

a singular term presupposes an entity named by the term. A singular term need not name to be significant.

An inkling of this might have dawned on Wyman and McX even without benefit of Russell if they had only noticed—as so few of us do—that there is a gulf between _meaning_ and _naming_ even in the case of a singular term which is genuinely a name of an object. The following example from Frege [3] will serve. The phrase 'Evening Star' names a certain large physical object of spherical form, which is hurtling through space some scores of millions of miles from here. The phrase 'Morning Star' names the same thing, as was probably first established by some observant Babylonian. But the two phrases cannot be regarded as having the same meaning; otherwise that Babylonian could have dispensed with his observations and contented himself with reflecting on the meanings of his words. The meanings, then, being different from one another, must be other than the named object, which is one and the same in both cases.

Confusion of meaning with naming not only made McX think he could not meaningfully repudiate Pegasus; a continuing confusion of meaning with naming no doubt helped engender his absurd notion that Pegasus is an idea, a mental entity. The structure of his confusion is as follows. He confused the alleged named object Pegasus with the meaning of the word 'Pegasus', therefore concluding that Pegasus must be in order that the word have meaning. But what sorts of things are meanings? This is a moot point; however, one might quite plausibly explain meanings as ideas in the mind, supposing we can make clear sense in turn of the idea of ideas in the mind. Therefore Pegasus, initially confused with a meaning, ends up as an idea in the mind. It is the more remarkable that Wyman, subject to the same initial motivation as McX, should have avoided this particular blunder and wound up with unactualized possibles instead.

Now let us turn to the ontological problem of universals: the question whether there are such entities as attributes, relations, classes, numbers, functions. McX, characteristically enough, thinks there are. Speaking of attributes, he says: "There
are red houses, red roses, red sunsets; this much is prephilosophical common sense in which we must all agree. These houses, roses, and sunsets, then, have something in common; and this which they have in common is all I mean by the attribute of redness.” For McX, thus, there being attributes is even more obvious and trivial than the obvious and trivial fact of there being red houses, roses, and sunsets. This, I think, is characteristic of metaphysics, or at least of that part of metaphysics called ontology: one who regards a statement on this subject as true at all must regard it as trivially true. One’s ontology is basic to the conceptual scheme by which he interprets all experiences, even the most commonplace ones. Judged within some particular conceptual scheme—and how else is judgment possible?—an ontological statement goes without saying, standing in need of no separate justification at all. Ontological statements follow immediately from all manner of casual statements of commonplace fact, just as—from the point of view, anyway, of McX’s conceptual scheme—‘There is an attribute’ follows from ‘There are red houses, red roses, red sunsets’.

Judged in another conceptual scheme, an ontological statement which is axiomatic to McX’s mind may, with equal immediacy and triviality, be adjudged false. One may admit that there are red houses, roses, and sunsets, but deny, except as a popular and misleading manner of speaking, that they have anything in common. The words ‘houses’, ‘roses’, and ‘sunsets’ are true of sundry individual entities which are houses, roses, and sunsets; and the word ‘red’ or ‘red object’ is true of each of sundry individual entities which are red houses, red roses, red sunsets; but there is not, in addition, any entity whatever, individual or otherwise, which is named by the word ‘redness’, nor, for that matter, by the word ‘househood’, ‘rosehood’, ‘sunsethood’. That the houses and roses and sunsets are all of them red may be taken as ultimate and irreducible, and it may be held that McX is no better off, in point of real explanatory power, for all the occult entities which he posits under such names as ‘redness’.

One means by which McX might naturally have tried to impose his ontology of universals on us was already removed before we turned to the problem of universals. McX cannot argue that predicates such as ‘red’ or ‘is-red’, which we all concur in using, must be regarded as names each of a single universal entity in order that they be meaningful at all. For we have seen that being a name of something is a much more special feature than being meaningful. He cannot even charge us—at least not by that argument—with having posited an attribute of pegasusizing by our adoption of the predicate ‘pegasizes’.

However, McX hits upon a different strategem. “Let us grant,” he says, “this distinction between meaning and naming of which you make so much. Let us even grant that ‘is red’, ‘pegasizes’, etc., are not names of attributes. Still, you admit they have meanings. But these meanings, whether they are named or not, are still universals, and I venture to say that some of them might even be the very things that I call attributes, or something to much the same purpose in the end.”

For McX, this is an unusually penetrating speech; and the only way I know to counter it is by refusing to admit meanings. However, I feel no reluctance toward refusing to admit meanings, for I do not thereby deny that words and statements are meaningful. McX and I may agree to the letter in our classification of linguistic forms into the meaningful and the meaningless, even though McX construes meaningfulness as the having (in some sense of ‘having’) of some abstract entity which he calls a meaning, whereas I do not. I remain free to maintain that the fact that a given linguistic utterance is meaningful (or significant, as I prefer to say so as not to invite hypostasis of meanings as entities) is an ultimate and irreducible matter of fact; or, I may undertake to analyze it in terms directly of what people do in the presence of the linguistic utterance in question and other utterances similar to it.

The useful ways in which people ordinarily talk or seem to talk about meanings boil down to two: the having of meanings, which is significance, and sameness of meaning, or synonymy. What is called giving the meaning of an utterance is simply the uttering of a synonym, couched, ordinarily, in clearer language
than the original. If we are allergic to meanings as such, we can speak directly of utterances as significant or insignificant, and as synonymous or heteronymous one with another. The problem of explaining these adjectives ‘significant’ and ‘synonymous’ with some degree of clarity and rigor—preferably, as I see it, in terms of behavior—is as difficult as it is important. But the explanatory value of special and irreducible intermediary entities called meanings is surely illusory.

Up to now I have argued that we can use singular terms significantly in sentences without presupposing that there are the entities which those terms purport to name. I have argued further that we can use general terms, for example, predicates, without conceding them to be names of abstract entities. I have argued further that we can view utterances as significant, and as synonymous or heteronymous with one another, without countenancing a realm of entities called meanings. At this point McX begins to wonder whether there is any limit at all to our ontological immunity. Does nothing we may say commit us to the assumption of universals or other entities which we may find unwelcome?

I have already suggested a negative answer to this question, in speaking of bound variables, or variables of quantification, in connection with Russell’s theory of descriptions. We can very easily involve ourselves in ontological commitments by saying, for example, that there is something (bound variable) which red houses and sunsets have in common; or that there is something which is a prime number larger than a million. But this is, essentially, the only way we can involve ourselves in ontological commitments: by our use of bound variables. The use of alleged names is no criterion, for we can repudiate their namehood at the drop of a hat unless the assumption of a corresponding entity can be spotted in the things we affirm in terms of bound variables. Names are, in fact, altogether immaterial to the ontological issue, for I have shown, in connection with ‘Pegasus’ and ‘pegasize’, that names can be converted to descriptions, and Russell has shown that descriptions can be eliminated.

\* See Essays II and III.

Whatever we say with the help of names can be said in a language which shuns names altogether. To be assumed as an entity is, purely and simply, to be reckoned as the value of a variable. In terms of the categories of traditional grammar, this amounts roughly to saying that to be is to be in the range of reference of a pronoun. Pronouns are the basic media of reference; nouns might better have been named propronomes. The variables of quantification, ‘something’, ‘nothing’, ‘everything’, range over our whole ontology, whatever it may be; and we are convicted of a particular ontological presupposition if, and only if, the alleged presuppositum has to be reckoned among the entities over which our variables range in order to render one of our affirmations true.

We may say, for example, that some dogs are white and not thereby commit ourselves to recognizing either doghood or whiteness as entities. ‘Some dogs are white’ says that some things that are dogs are white; and, in order that this statement be true, the things over which the bound variable ‘something’ ranges must include some white dogs, but need not include doghood or whiteness. On the other hand, when we say that some zoological species are cross-fertile we are committing ourselves to recognizing as entities the several species themselves, abstract though they are. We remain so committed at least until we devise some way of so paraphrasing the statement as to show that the seeming reference to species on the part of our bound variable was an avoidable manner of speaking.\*7

Classical mathematics, as the example of primes larger than a million clearly illustrates, is up to its neck in commitments to an ontology of abstract entities. Thus it is that the great mediaeval controversy over universals has flared up anew in the modern philosophy of mathematics. The issue is clearer now than of old, because we now have a more explicit standard whereby to decide what ontology a given theory or form of discourse is committed to: a theory is committed to those and only those entities to which the bound variables of the theory

\* For more on this topic see Essay VI.
must be capable of referring in order that the affirmations made in the theory be true.

Because this standard of ontological presupposition did not emerge clearly in the philosophical tradition, the modern philosophical mathematicians have not on the whole recognized that they were debating the same old problem of universals in a newly clarified form. But the fundamental cleavages among modern points of view on foundations of mathematics do come down pretty explicitly to disagreements as to the range of entities to which the bound variables should be permitted to refer.

The three main mediaeval points of view regarding universals are designated by historians as realism, conceptualism, and nominalism. Essentially these same three doctrines reappear in twentieth-century surveys of the philosophy of mathematics under the new names logicism, intuitionism, and formalism.

Realism, as the word is used in connection with the mediaeval controversy over universals, is the Platonic doctrine that universals or abstract entities have being independently of the mind; the mind may discover them but cannot create them. Logicism, represented by Frege, Russell, Whitehead, Church, and Carnap, condones the use of bound variables to refer to abstract entities known and unknown, specifiable and unspecifiable, indiscriminately.

Conceptualism holds that there are universals but they are mind-made. Intuitionism, espoused in modern times in one form or another by Poincaré, Brouwer, Weyl, and others, countenances the use of bound variables to refer to abstract entities only when those entities are capable of being cooked up individually from ingredients specified in advance. As Fraenkel has put it, logicism holds that classes are discovered while intuitionism holds that they are invented—a fair statement indeed of the old opposition between realism and conceptualism. This opposition is no mere quibble; it makes an essential difference in the amount of classical mathematics to which one is willing to subscribe. Logicians, or realists, are able on their assumptions to get Cantor's ascending orders of infinity; intuitionists are compelled to stop with the lowest order of infinity,

and, as an indirect consequence, to abandon even some of the classical laws of real numbers.\footnote{See below, pp. 1256.} The modern controversy between logicism and intuitionism arose, in fact, from disagreements over infinity.

Formalism, associated with the name of Hilbert, echoes intuitionism in deploping the logicist's unbridled recourse to universals. But formalism also finds intuitionism unsatisfactory. This could happen for either of two opposite reasons. The formalist might, like the logicist, object to the crippling of classical mathematics; or he might, like the nominalists of old, object to admitting abstract entities at all, even in the restrained sense of mind-made entities. The upshot is the same: the formalist keeps classical mathematics as a play of insignificant notations. This play of notations can still be of utility—whatever utility it has already shown itself to have as a crutch for physicists and technologists. But utility need not imply significance, in any literal linguistic sense. Nor need the marked success of mathematicians in spinning out theorems, and in finding objective bases for agreement with one another's results, imply significance. For an adequate basis for agreement among mathematicians can be found simply in the rules which govern the manipulation of the notations—these syntactical rules being, unlike the notations themselves, quite significant and intelligible.\footnote{See Goodman and Quine. For further discussion of the general matters touched on in the past two pages, see Bernays [1], Fraenkel, Black.}
and this much is quite properly a problem involving language. But what there is is another question.

In debating over what there is, there are still reasons for operating on a semantical plane. One reason is to escape from the predicament noted at the beginning of this essay: the predicament of my not being able to admit that there are things which McX countenances and I do not. So long as I adhere to my ontology, as opposed to McX's, I cannot allow my bound variables to refer to entities which belong to McX's ontology and not to mine. I can, however, consistently describe our disagreement by characterizing the statements which McX affirms. Provided merely that my ontology countenances linguistic forms, or at least concrete inscriptions and utterances, I can talk about McX's sentences.

Another reason for withdrawing to a semantical plane is to find common ground on which to argue. Disagreement in ontology involves basic disagreement in conceptual schemes; yet McX and I, despite these basic disagreements, find that our conceptual schemes converge sufficiently in their intermediate and upper ramifications to enable us to communicate successfully on such topics as politics, weather, and, in particular, language. In so far as our basic controversy over ontology can be translated upward into a semantical controversy about words and what to do with them, the collapse of the controversy into question-begging may be delayed.

It is no wonder, then, that ontological controversy should tend into controversy over language. But we must not jump to the conclusion that what there is depends on words. Translatability of a question into semantical terms is no indication that the question is linguistic. To see Naples is to bear a name which, when prefixed to the words 'sees Naples', yields a true sentence; still there is nothing linguistic about seeing Naples.

Our acceptance of an ontology is, I think, similar in principle to our acceptance of a scientific theory, say a system of physics: we adopt, at least insofar as we are reasonable, the simplest conceptual scheme into which the disordered fragments of raw experience can be fitted and arranged. Our ontology is determined once we have fixed upon the over-all conceptual scheme which is to accommodate science in the broadest sense; and the considerations which determine a reasonable construction of any part of that conceptual scheme, for example, the biological or the physical part, are not different in kind from the considerations which determine a reasonable construction of the whole. To whatever extent the adoption of any system of scientific theory may be said to be a matter of language, the same—but no more—may be said of the adoption of an ontology.

But simplicity, as a guiding principle in constructing conceptual schemes, is not a clear and unambiguous idea; and it is quite capable of presenting a double or multiple standard. Imagine, for example, that we have devised the most economical set of concepts adequate to the play-by-play reporting of immediate experience. The entities under this scheme—the values of bound variables—are, let us suppose, individual subjective events of sensation or reflection. We should still find, no doubt, that a physicalistic conceptual scheme, purporting to talk about external objects, offers great advantages in simplifying our over-all reports. By bringing together scattered sense data and treating them as perceptions of one object, we reduce the complexity of our stream of experience to manageable conceptual simplicity. The rule of simplicity is indeed our guiding maxim in assigning sense data to objects: we associate an earlier and a later round sensum with the same so-called penny, or with two different so-called pennies, in obedience to the demands of maximum simplicity in our total world-picture.

Here we have two competing conceptual schemes, a phenomenalistic one and a physicalistic one. Which should prevail? Each has its advantages; each has its special simplicity in its own way. Each, I suggest, deserves to be developed. Each may be said, indeed, to be the more fundamental, though in different senses: the one is epistemologically, the other physically, fundamental.

The physical conceptual scheme simplifies our account of experience because of the way myriad scattered sense events come to be associated with single so-called objects; still there
is no likelihood that each sentence about physical objects can actually be translated, however deviously and complexly, into the phenomenalistic language. Physical objects are postulated entities which round out and simplify our account of the flux of experience, just as the introduction of irrational numbers simplifies laws of arithmetic. From the point of view of the conceptual scheme of the elementary arithmetic of rational numbers alone, the broader arithmetic of rational and irrational numbers would have the status of a convenient myth, simpler than the literal truth (namely, the arithmetic of rationals) and yet containing that literal truth as a scattered part. Similarly, from a phenomenalistic point of view, the conceptual scheme of physical objects is a convenient myth, simpler than the literal truth and yet containing that literal truth as a scattered part.\[16\]

Now what of classes or attributes of physical objects, in turn? A platonistic ontology of this sort is, from the point of view of a strictly physicalistic conceptual scheme, as much a myth as that physicalistic conceptual scheme itself is for phenomenalism. This higher myth is a good and useful one, in turn, in so far as it simplifies our account of physics. Since mathematics is an integral part of this higher myth, the utility of this myth for physical science is evident enough. In speaking of it nevertheless as a myth, I echo that philosophy of mathematics to which I alluded earlier under the name of formalism. But an attitude of formalism may with equal justice be adopted toward the physical conceptual scheme, in turn, by the pure aesthete or phenomenalist.

The analogy between the myth of mathematics and the myth of physics is, in some additional and perhaps fortuitous ways, strikingly close. Consider, for example, the crisis which was precipitated in the foundations of mathematics, at the turn of the century, by the discovery of Russell’s paradox and other antinomies of set theory. These contradictions had to be obviated by unintuitive, ad hoc devices;\[11\] our mathematical myth-making became deliberate and evident to all. But what

\[16\] The arithmetical analogy is due to Frank, pp. 108f.

\[11\] See below, pp. 90ff, 96ff, 122ff.

of physics? An antimony arose between the undular and the corpuscular accounts of light; and if this was not as out-and-out a contradiction as Russell’s paradox, I suspect that the reason is that physics is not as out-and-out as mathematics. Again, the second great modern crisis in the foundations of mathematics—precipitated in 1931 by Gödel’s proof [2] that there are bound to be undecidable statements in arithmetic—has its companion piece in physics in Heisenberg’s indeterminacy principle.

In earlier pages I undertook to show that some common arguments in favor of certain ontologies are fallacious. Further, I advanced an explicit standard whereby to decide what the ontological commitments of a theory are. But the question what ontology actually to adopt still stands open, and the obvious counsel is tolerance and an experimental spirit. Let us by all means see how much of the physicalistic conceptual scheme can be reduced to a phenomenalistic one; still, physics also naturally demands pursuing, irreducible in toto though it be. Let us see how, or to what degree, natural science may be rendered independent of platonistic mathematics; but let us also pursue mathematics and delve into its platonistic foundations.

From among the various conceptual schemes best suited to these various pursuits, one—the phenomenalistic—claims epistemological priority. Viewed from within the phenomenalistic conceptual scheme, the ontologies of physical objects and mathematical objects are myths. The quality of myth, however, is relative; relative, in this case, to the epistemological point of view. This point of view is one among various, corresponding to one among our various interests and purposes.
ORIGINS OF THE ESSAYS

"On what there is" appeared in the Review of Metaphysics in 1948, earlier versions having been presented as lectures at Princeton and Yale in March and May of that year. It lent its title to a symposium at the joint session of the Aristotelian Society and the Mind Association at Edinburgh, July 1951, and was reprinted, along with the animadversions of the symposiasts, in the Aristotelian Society's supplementary volume Freedom, Language, and Reality (London: Harrison, 1951). It is reprinted also in Linsky's anthology. The changes occurring in the present version are mostly confined to footnotes.

"Two dogmas of empiricism" appeared in the Philosophical Review in January 1951, having been read, with omissions, to the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association in December 1950 at Toronto. In May 1951 it became the subject of a symposium of the Institute for the Unity of Science in Boston and also of a meeting at Stanford University, for which occasion it was reissued by mimeograph. The version printed here diverges from the original in footnotes and in other minor respects: §§1 and 6 have been abridged where they encroach on the preceding essay, and §§3–4 have been expanded at points.

"The problem of meaning in linguistics" is the text, abridged in some portions and expanded in others, of a lecture given in the Linguistics Forum at Ann Arbor in August 1951.

"Identity, ostension, and hypostasis" appeared in the Journal of Philosophy in 1950. It was drawn in large part from the Theodore and Grace de Laguna Lecture, "Identity," which I gave at Bryn Mawr in December 1949, and in smaller part from a lecture "On ontologies" which I gave at the University of Southern California in July 1949. The essay is reprinted here almost unchanged except in the references.

"New foundations for mathematical logic" appeared in the American Mathematical Monthly in February 1937, having been
read to the Mathematical Association of America in December 1936 at Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The paper as reprinted here departs from the original only in annotation, correction of several errors, and small changes of notation and terminology. But the material headed "Supplementary remarks" is wholly foreign to the original. The first part of this material is the gist of the first part of my "Logic based on inclusion and abstraction," Journal of Symbolic Logic, 1937. The rest is newly written.

"Logic and the reification of universals" derives mainly from a paper "On the problem of universals" which I read to the Association for Symbolic Logic, February 1947, in New York. Part of that paper came into print as part of an article "On universals," Journal of Symbolic Logic, 1947, but the present essay draws also on the unpublished part. It draws also on two other papers: "Semantics and abstract objects" (Proceedings of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1951), which was read in Boston at the April 1950 meeting of the Institute for the Unity of Science, and "Designation and existence" (Journal of Philosophy, 1939; reprinted in Feigl and Sellars), which was an abridgment of a paper read in Cambridge, Massachusetts, at the September 1939 Congress for the Unity of Science.


"Reference and modality" has grown out of a fusion of "Notes on existence and necessity," Journal of Philosophy, 1943, with "The problem of interpreting modal logic," Journal of Symbolic Logic, 1947. Sundry omissions, revisions, and insertions have been made. The parent article "Notes on existence and necessity" is reprinted in Linsky. It was in the main a translation in turn of portions of my book O Sentido da nova lógica (São Paulo, Brazil: Livraria Martins, 1944), which embodied a course of lectures delivered at São Paulo in 1942.

"Meaning and existential inference" is newly written, but the points in it derive mostly from my review of E. J. Nelson in the Journal of Symbolic Logic, 1947.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Ackermann and Hilbert, see Hilbert.
—— and Hilbert, see Hilbert.
Carnap, Rudolf [1], Der logische Aufbau der Welt (Berlin, 1928).
FROM A LOGICAL POINT OF VIEW


[2], “A note on the Entscheidungsproblem,” Journal of Symbolic Logic 1 (1936), 40f., 101f. (For a possibly more convenient presentation of the argument, see Hilbert and Bernays, vol. 2, pp. 416-421.)

[3], Review of Quine, ibid. 7 (1942), 100f.

[4], Review of Quine, ibid. 8 (1943), 45ff.

[5], “On Carnap’s analysis of statements of assertion and belief,” Analysis 10 (1950), 97ff.


Curry, H. B. “A simplification of the theory of combinators,” Synthèse 7 (1948-49), 391-399. (Contains further references.)


BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES


[2], “The consistency of the ramified Principia,” Journal of Symbolic Logic 3 (1938), 140-149.

[3], “The problem of the Morning Star and the Evening Star,” Philosophy of Science 16 (1949), 137-141.


[2], Grundgesetze der Arithmetik, 2 vols. (Jena, 1893, 1903).


Gödel, Kurt [1], “Die Vollständigkeit der Axiome des logischen Funktionenkalküls, Monatshefte für Mathematik und Physik 37 (1930), 349-360. (For a simpler proof of this result, see Henkin.)

[2], “Über formal unentscheidbare Sätze der Principia Mathematica und verwandter Systeme,” ibid. 38 (1931), 173-198. (For an introductory account and further references see Quine [2], pp. 245ff.)


and W. V. Quine, “Steps toward a constructive nominalism,” Journal of Symbolic Logic 12 (1947), 105-122. (Lest the reader be led to misconstrue passages in the present...
book by trying to reconcile them with the appealingly forthright opening sentence of the cited paper, let me say that I should now prefer to treat that sentence as a hypothetical statement of conditions for the construction in hand.)


Hume, David, *A Treatise of Human Nature*. (Especially Book 1, Part 4, Section 2.)


FROM A LOGICAL POINT OF VIEW


[3], “On the axiom of reducibility,” Mind 45 (1936), 488ff.


[5], “Logic based on inclusion and abstraction,” ibid., 145-152.

[6], “On the theory of types,” ibid. 3 (1938), 125-139.

[7], “On α-inconsistency and a so-called axiom of infinity,” ibid. 18 (1953).


and Church, see Church; and Goodman, see Goodman.


and Kleene, see Kleene.


BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES


—— [3], “Mathematical logic as based on the theory of types,” American Journal of Mathematics 30 (1908), 222-262.


—— and Whitehead, see Whitehead.

Schönhofen, Moses, “Über die Bausteine der mathematischen Logik,” Mathematische Annalen 92 (1924), 305-316.


—— [3], “Einige methodologische Untersuchungen über die Definierbarkeit der Begriffe,” Erkenntnis 5 (1935-36), 80-100.


Trager and Bloch, see Bloch.
FROM A LOGICAL POINT OF VIEW


Weyl, Hermann, Das Kontinuum (Leipzig, 1918, 1932).


Wright, G. H. von, "On the idea of logical truth (I)," Societas Scientiarum Fennica, Commentationes Physico-Mathematicae 14 (1948), no. 4.


INDEX

Abstract: algebra 81; entities 8n, 45, 73; terms 21, 30, 76, 78. See also Attribute, Class, Name

Abstraction: of attributes 76, 156; of classes 30, 76ff, 87, 94ff, 104, 150; of functions 104; of relations 88; of universals 117f; principle of 90, 96ff; vacuous 95, 150

Accident 22, 158

Accent, Wilhelm 90n, 120n

Actuality 3f

Aggregates 114f. See also Class

Algebra: abstractions 81; of classes 87, 92, 128; of numbers 18, 45; of relations 128

Alternation 84

Alternative denial 81f, 84, 94

Ambiguity 32, 55, 67

Analytical: geometry 81; philosophy 157

Analyticity 20, 22f; and existence 161, 163; and modality 143, 150-153, 156f; and postulation 85; and reductionism 41; and synonymy 27f, 31f, 161; contrasted with truth 120, 138; in artificial languages 32-37

Ancestor 115

Antimony, see Contradiction, Paradox

Arithmology 22, 81, 155f

Arithmetic 1ff, 45, 81, 92ff, 127f

Artificial language 32-37

Atomic sentence 23, 30, 166

Attribute 8-11, 15, 78, 108, 156f; versus class 107f, 119, 123, 153

Ausserordnung 96

Axiom 83, 88f, 96f, 100f; of infinity 89, 93; of reducibility 125n, 127

Barcan, Ruth 158

Behaviorism 48

Being and nonbeing 1ff, 7. See also Existence

Belief 142, 144, 148

Benthem, Jeremy 39, 42

Bernays, Paul 15n, 90n, 97n

Berry, G. G. 134

Biconditional 32, 84

Bind, see Bound

Black, Max 15n

Bloomfield, Leonard 90n, 120n

Boole, George 87, 92

Bound, least upper 127

Bound variable 86f, 102f; in ontological commitment 6, 12ff, 103, 106ff, 113, 128; in stratification 91n; erstwhile schematic 113f, 118f, 121-124; restricted to elements 97, 100; Greek 111. See also Quantification Variable

Brouwer, L. E. J. 14, 125n

Brouwer, Karl 81

Cantor, Georg 14, 90n, 121f, 128f, 129

Carne, Rudolf 14, 22ff, 45f, 158f;

Aufbau 30f; on modality 144n, 152-156; on semantic rules 33, 36; on synonymy 26n, 32

Carriker, Ernst 61

Chadwick, J. A. 106

Change 65

Choice, axiom of 89

Church, Alonso 14, 104, 116; on modality 152f, 160; on semantics 108, 132n, 135n, 142, 145n; his theorem 5, 96n

Classes: abstraction of 30, 76ff, 87, 94ff, 104, 159; abstractness of 114; algebra of 87, 92, 128; commitment to 45f, 113, 115, 122; determination of 89; existence of, in general 14, 18, 114ff, 125f; existence of, in special theories 39, 81, 90, 93-100, 113, 128; names of 30, 108, 118ff; pointing of 71-77, 117-127; versus attributes 107, 122f, 157

Collection 114

Combinator 104f

Commitment, ontological 1ff, 8-11, 44f, 130f; to abstract entities 10f, 45, 73, 78; in logic and semantics 96, 112f, 116; in mathematics 13, 19, 103, 122, 127ff. See also Criterion, Hypostasis, Ontology

Common sense 45

Completeness 19, 89, 96, 116, 131, 137

179
INDEX

Sum of classes 87, 97
Synonymy 11f, 22-25, 48, 60, 130f;
cognitive 28f, 37, 57; as interchange-
ability 27-32, 56f; in linguistics 25,
49, 56-64; and definition 24-27, 132;
and intensional objects 151-155; of
predicates 31, 132; of singular terms
9, 21, 32, 62, 151, 154f; of statements
32, 37ff, 42, 57-60
Syntax 61, 117, 129. See also Grammar
Synthetic 20, 41f. See also Analyticity

Tarski, Alfred 118f, 130ff, 136ff
Term, see Abstract term, Description,
General term, Name, Predicate
Theorem 88f, 100; in quantification
theory 90, 96, 107f, 119, 161f
Thomson, J. F. 137a
Time 40, 65-70
Tooke, J. H. 38f
Traditional logic 81
Trager, G. L. 50m, 52n
Translation: in epistemology 39f; in
lexicography 50ff, 62; in logic and
mathematics 27, 80; and ideology
131; and ontology 104f; and semantical
rules 36. See also Definition,
Synonymy

Transparency 142n
Truth 130, 134-138, 141; logical 223f,
28, 38, 42f, 106f; of 21, 130, 134-
138; and analyticity 20, 34f; and
ontology 13, 103, 131
Truth functions 30, 84, 159; laws of
90, 96, 108f, 115f; quantified 118f
Truth values: preservation of 27-32,
56f, 150f, 155f, 159; as values of vari-
ables 71, 109, 115f, 118f; assigned
and reassigned 23, 42; wanting 64ff
Types 90-93, 124f, 127

Unawareness 141f, 144, 147f
Unit class 82n, 87, 95
Universal: class 87, 91, 94f, 97; instan-
tiation 146, 167; quantification, see
Quantification
Universals 9f, 69f, 72f, 117f, 121,
128f. See also Attribute, Class, Com-
mitment
Used and mention 83, 111f

Vagueness 27, 32
Validity 89, 115f, 119f, 161f. See also
Analyticity, Truth
Value of variable 103, 110, 130; in
modal contexts 145, 153f, 158. See
also Commitment, Quantification,
Variable
Variable 80-83, 103f, 109-113; with
exponents 123f. See also Bound,
Criterion, Free, Quantification, Schem-
matic letter, Value
Verification 37-42
Vocabulary 30, 55, 137, 151, 154;
logical 22, 26, 80ff, 94

Wang, Hao 98-101
Weierstrass, Karl 106
Weyl, Hermann 14, 125
White, Morton 66n, 137n, 164
Whitehead, A. N. 14. See also Prin-
ciples
Whorf, B. L. 61
Wiener, Norbert 88
Word 28, 32, 37f, 52, 57, 59
Wright, G. H. von 160n

Zermelo, Ernst 96ff, 100
FROM A LOGICAL POINT OF VIEW

9 Logico-Philosophical Essays

Willard Van Orman Quine
Edgar Pierce Professor of Philosophy
Harvard University

"On What There Is"

Second Edition, revised

HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, Massachusetts
and London, England
© COPYRIGHT 1953, 1961, 1980
BY THE PRESIDENT AND FELLOWS OF HARVARD COLLEGE
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED
FOURTH PRINTING, 1980
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To my
Mother and Father
H. V. Q. — C. R. Q.