

Existence□ Quine starts with ontological debate. Existence-denier in a tight spot. Denying that X exists I seem to cut off branch I'm sitting on. For my statement (A) requires that there is such a thing as X (otherwise what is its subject matter?) and (B) there is no such thing as X (otherwise how can it be true?). Quine follows Russell in rejecting (A). Works best when "X" is an overt or disguised definite description like "Vulcan." But what if it's a name with no corresponding description? No such thing for Quine. "Pegasus" means *the pegasizer*, "Pegasus does not exist" says that *nothing pegasizes*.

So, mere use of a singular term never commits you ontologically. It might be thought that predicates, included even *pegasizes*, commit you to properties. But no: it's perfectly possible to "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." In fact *no* part of speech is sufficient for commitment. Commitment is carried not by a part of speech but by one's statements – one's theory. A theory is committed to the entities that have to exist for the theory to be true. A person inherits their commitments from their theory.

Bigger question is, what *should* we commit ourselves to? Traditional ontologists confronted the question directly, scratching their heads about rainbows and redness and such. Quine recommends an indirect approach. Forget about ontology. Look for the best overall theory of the world, best by ordinary scientific standards. We should believe in whatever has to exist for that theory to be true. In Quine's flowery language: "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..." There is no special science of ontology with a special method (say, ontological insight). Ontology is just a by-product of ordinary scientific theory building.

But there are puzzles. Seems like we're saying that for all x, T is committed to x iff x has to exist for T to be true. But then "There are Greek gods" isn't committed to anything, for in the absence of Greek gods, there are no things of the type that would have to exist for it to be true. Even worse, "There are trees" isn't committal, for there are no particular trees that its truth requires. Mistake is to assume that commitment is a relation between theories and specific entities x, y, and z. Say instead that T is committed in a general way to entities of a given kind – to Fs if Fs have to exist for it to be true. But there is a cost; there is no single yardstick with which to compare commitments of alternative theories. T₁ is committed to sets, T₂ to numbers. Which has the bigger ontology? That depends on whether numbers are a kind of set, and the theorists may not agree about that.

A theory is committed to numbers iff it says, or implies, that *there are numbers*. You may say that this makes the criterion trivial, and in some moods Quine agrees: "Existence is what existential quantification expresses. There are things of kind F if and only if $(\exists x)Fx$. This is as unhelpful as it is undebatable, since it is how one explains the symbolic notation of quantification to begin with." The nontrivial part is where Quine moves from the commitments of theories to the commitments of the people who *hold* the theories. Couldn't I accept a theory which says "there are Fs" without necessarily believing in them? Spose for example that my theory says: there's a 50% chance that a radium particle will decay in so many years. That implies: there are chances. And am I now

committed to chances? No, I have the option of paraphrasing the unwanted commitment away, saying instead "it is 50% likely that..." OK, but then I'm not getting the promised ontological guidance; the theory isn't telling me what to believe, because I have to know independently what seeming commitments I want to paraphrase away. Quine might say: paraphrase away whatever you can. But (i), that you can paraphrase something away may not mean that you should, and (ii) there may be things you can't paraphrase away that you can't bring yourself to believe in.

Where Quine speaks of alternative "conceptual schemes", Carnap appeals rather of alternative "linguistic frameworks." What Quine means is not altogether clear, but Carnap's idea is this: a framework is essentially a way of *organizing our talk* about the world, something like a set of linguistic bookkeeping procedures. The framework itself has no descriptive content; it is just a list of permissible words and phrases together with rules for their use: "*syntactical* rules specifying which sequences of words count as sentences; *logical* rules telling us which sentences entail which; *correspondence* rules, rules for "testing, accepting, or rejecting" these sentences." Within a framework, a syntactically kosher sentence is counted true just in case it passes the indicated tests. *Outside* the framework, there are no rules to guide us, and questions of truth and falsity can't arise.

Existence-claims may be made in either of two spirits: *within* a framework (this he would call an internal claim), or from *without* the framework about the entire system of entities it postulates (this he would call an external claim). Take the claim that there are physical objects. Suppose we are making an internal claim, from within what he calls the "thing language." If so, then this claim is clearly true. For within that conceptual scheme, it's certainly true to say that there are tables and chairs, ie., this sentence passes all the tests. Since tables and chairs are physical objects, it's true that there are physical objects. But we philosophers want to make an *external* claim! Then we are not really saying anything at all; we have made a pseudo-statement lacking in cognitive content. For we're operating outside the system of rules which alone give talk of material objects content.

Analogy: Suppose we find ourselves on a long train trip and to pass the time we decide improvise a new board game. The pieces in the new game will be called flugs and glugs. Here's a salt shaker and a matchbox. Pointing to one, we say, "it's a flug" and pointing to the other, "it's a glug." Understand as uttered within the game, these statements are quite true. But conceived as attempts to describe the game-independent world, they make no sense. Apart from the game, nothing either is or is not a glug; the term has no meaning. At best what we are doing in making these noises is indicating our acceptance of a certain way of talking and acting. Is this way "true" or "correct"? The question has no answer; all we can say is this is what we do, this is the kind of thing we're now proposing to say. (Better analogy might be: who is "it" outside the game?)

External claims are best seen as expressing not beliefs but attitudes of acceptance. It goes with this that our reason for saying (in an external vein) that physical objects exist can't be that we have *evidence* for this view; there is no such view. Our reason is rather that we have *decided* for fundamentally practical reasons to accept the thing language or framework: "If someone decides to accept the thing language, there is no objection against saying that he has accepted the world of things. But this must not be interpreted as if meant his acceptance of a *belief* in the reality of the thing world; there is no such belief or assertion or assumption, because it is not a theoretical question. To accept the thing world means nothing more than to accept a certain form of language, in other words, to accept rules for forming statements and for testing, accepting, or rejecting them."