QUINE'S THEORY OF ONTOLOGICAL COMMITMENT
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COMMITEMENT

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by

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FOREWORD

The following rules of reference have been observed in this thesis:

1. All quotations from, and references to, works by Quine, and works which mention Quine, refer to the bibliography found at the end of this thesis. Thus, for instance, "Strawson (24) p. 196", means: "Strawson, Individuals, p. 196."

2. Journal articles which have been reprinted in anthologies are not present in the bibliography. The titles of such articles occur only in the text and/or foot-notes. Thus, for instance, "Warnock, "Metaphysics in Logic" in Flew (10) p. 78", means, "Flew (10) p. 78."
The invention of Functional calculus, and more generally the rigorous development of symbolic logic in the second half of the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth century have had a great impact on philosophy. However, nowadays there is a controversy concerning the relevance of techniques of symbolic logic for solving philosophic problems. Both sides agree that as a result of these techniques, philosophers have gained a better insight into their problems, thus only the range of application of these techniques is at issue.

The problem of ontology is probably the most appropriate testing ground for this controversy, not only because this philosophic problem has received great attention in twentieth century logical theory, but also because it is thought to have been most affected by the earlier mentioned developments in logic.

In my thesis I examine Quine's theory of ontological commitment in the light of the controversy which it has generated. I first give one of the earliest attempts at applying the techniques of symbolic logic to the problem of existence (Ch. I). Then I outline Quine's treatment of the problem (Ch. II Sect. I) which is generally thought to be the most rigorous contemporary attempt to bring symbolic logic to bear on problems of ontology.
I argue against Quine's position, the position that the only philosophical problem of existence is that which is connected with the existential quantifier. After having argued that Quine intends to solve the general philosophical problem of existence by his criterion of ontological commitment (Ch. II, Sect. II) I argue, following Strawson, that Quine's thesis concerning the elimination of singular terms involves a misconception. (Ch. III, Sect. I).

Next I outline the objections of Carnap and Warnock to Quine's notion of ontological commitment. (Ch. III, Sect. II).

In my fourth chapter, I discuss how Quine does reply to Carnap's objection and could reply to Warnock's, and I argue that Quine's views on reconstructing our natural language rely on untenable assumptions.

I conclude my thesis by arguing (Ch. IV) that Quine's theory of ontological commitment, involving a reconstruction of our natural language does not deal adequately with the philosophical problem of existence.
THE ORIGIN OF THE METHOD
As a preliminary to my main topic, Quine's theory of ontological commitment, I shall discuss Russell's theory of descriptions; although I shall introduce Strawson's opposition to Russell's programme, I will not offer any definitive conclusions about the controversy.

Russell's chapter in Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy entitled "Descriptions"¹ and Strawson's article "On Referring"² will receive most of my attention. Nevertheless, in my exposition I shall also make use of Russell's "On Denoting"³ and Strawson's Introduction to Logical Theory⁴.

Russell's theory of descriptions is intended to solve the problem of "unreality". He says: "It is argued, e.g. by Meinong, that we can speak about "the golden mountain", "the round square" and so on; we can assert two propositions of which these are grammatical subjects; hence they must have some kind of logical being, since otherwise the propositions in which they occur would be meaningless"⁵. For Russell Meinong's argument shows

¹. Russell (20) p. 167-180.
³. Feigl (9) p. 103-118.
⁴. Strawson (25)
⁵. Russell (20 p. 169.)
a lack of "that feeling for reality which ought to be preserved even in
the most abstract studies". He believes that logicians like Meinong
were led to such conclusions by their undue emphasis on the grammatical
forms of propositions as guides for analysis; they lacked the apparatus
of propositional functions. But, "in dealing with propositions, we are
dealing in the first instance with symbols, and if we attribute signifi-
cance to groups of symbols which have no significance we shall fall into
the error of admitting unrealities." Logic must no more admit a uni-
corn than zoology can; for logic is concerned with the real world just
as truly as zoology, though with its more abstract and general features.

The Russellian position is that it is significant but false to say
"I met a unicorn", since the proper analysis reveals that "a unicorn" is
not a constituent of the proposition, though the concept "unicorn" is.

To illustrate this point with another example; we might ask for the
meaning of: (1) "A student knows his algebra"
(2) "student"
but not of: (3) "a student"
The logical form of (1) is: "x knows his algebra" where x can be
substituted by a name or a description.

Now, a word is appropriate about names and descriptions. It is
Russell's view that in the world there are things which we sometimes name
and sometimes describe. The question whether a name names anything is
senseless because to be a name is to name something. That which it names
is its meaning. Consequently, "x is real" or "x is unreal" make no sense

1. ibid. p. 169.
2. ibid. p. 168.
4. ibid. p. 169.
5. ibid. p. 168.
when the values of $x$ are names; on the other hand when values are descriptions the propositions make sense, they can be true or false.

The distinction between names and descriptions is seen from an examination of identity contexts. For example, the function: "$x = x$" will become a true proposition whenever the $x$ is replaced by a description. What does this mean?

Russell divides descriptions into

A. Definite descriptions

B. Indefinite descriptions

Roughly, the difference between A and B is that in A there is an implication of uniqueness whereas in B there is not. Thus:

Members of A have the form "the so and so".

Members of B have the form "a so and so".

Russell wants to say that this difference is intuitively clear so that when I say "The man next door is noisy" I am taken to mean:

(a) "There is a man next door."

(b) "There is only one man next door."

(c) "There is nothing which is a man next door and is not noisy."

and when I say "A man next door is noisy." I am taken to mean:

(d) "There is a man next door."

(e) It is not the case that all men next door are not noisy."

One chooses between A and B mainly on epistemological grounds.¹ But, definite or indefinite description may or may not describe. A does not describe if one of (a), or (b) is false. B does not describe if (d) is

¹. In this example, one would choose between A and B according to one’s information about the source of the noise.
false. Hence, if in the identity context we replace \( x \) by a definite description which does not describe definitely the resulting statement of identity will be false. "The round square is round" will be false. From this, it follows that substituting a name for the \( x \) in a function will result in a proposition different from the one which results from substituting a description for the same \( x \). For example, consider "K wanted to know whether \( x \) was Scott".

"K wanted to know whether Scott was Scott" is different from "K wanted to know whether the author of Waverly was Scott", where "Scott" is a name and "the author of Waverly" a description.

As far as existence is concerned the thesis is as follows:

I. "\( x \) exists" is senseless when the value of \( x \) is a name.

II. "\( x \) exists" or "\( x \) is so and so" is a significant proposition if the value of \( x \) is a description and its truth or falsity depends on the truth or falsity of the a's, b's and c's corresponding to the description.

Accordingly, "the present King of France is wise" will be a significant but false proposition because in

\[
a_0 = \text{"There is a King of France at present"}
\]

\[
b_0 = \text{"There is at most one King of France at present"}
\]

\[
c_0 = \text{"There is nothing which is a King of France and is not wise"}
\]

\( a_0 \) is clearly false, therefore the conjunct \( a_0 \) and \( b_0 \) and \( c_0 \) is false. Thus, we have a decision procedure for determining the truth or falsity of existential propositions where a description is a component; we rephrase it as a conjunct of the a's, b's and c's, and determine the truth values of the conjuncts by empirical means. If they all turn out to be true, the existential proposition is true; if one or more of them turns out to be false, the proposition is false. A corollary to Russell's
solution of the problem of "unreality" is that whenever there is a genuine problem as to whether an existential proposition is true or false, its subject term is treated as a description. For example, since there is a genuine problem whether "Homer exists" is true or false, we treat "Homer" not as a name but as a shorthand for some description or other.

The following is a statement of Strawson's opposition to Russell:

"I think it is true to say that Russell's theory of Descriptions... is still widely accepted among logicians as giving a correct account of the use of such expressions" (as 'the so and so') "in ordinary language. I want to show in the first place that this theory, so regarded, embodies some fundamental mistakes", 1 It has been seen that Russell analysed "The present King of France is wise", say S, as $a_0$ and $b_0$ and $c_0$. He arrived, says Strawson, at this analysis by asking himself what would be the circumstances in which we would say that anyone who uttered the sentence S had made a true assertion. 2 $a_0$, $b_0$ and $c_0$ are only the necessary conditions of making a true assertion by uttering the sentence S, but they do not constitute a correct analysis of sentence S.

At the basis of this opposition lie the following statements:

a. "We cannot talk of the sentence being true or false, but only of its being used to make a true or false assertion." 3

b. "'Mentioning' or 'referring' is not something an expression does: it is something that someone can use an expression to do." 4

Russell's confusion about a and b gave rise to thinking that "referring or mentioning, if it occurred at all, must be meaning". Strawson's con-

2. Ibid. p. 169.
3. Ibid. p. 169.
4. Ibid. p. 170.
clusion about "The King of France is wise" is that the question of its being true or false does not arise. The speaker of the sentence does not mention anything or anybody. Thus, he is spuriously using a significant sentence rather than, as Russell would say, genuinely uttering a false one. The "The" of "The such and such" shows, but does not state, that we are, or intend to be, referring to one particular individual of the species "Such and such". "The" used in such a way implies that the existential conditions described by Russell are fulfilled. That there is a King of France is presupposed by "The King of France is wise" but does not entail it because the assertion of one and the denial of the other does not lead to a contradiction.

Thus, while Strawson agrees that the position Russell seeks to reject, i.e. that "round square", "the golden mountain" have some kind of logical being, should be rejected, he maintains that it could be done more satisfactorily by avoiding the confusion Russell and his earlier opponents (e.g. Meinong) share. It must be noted that Strawson's position is not without its critics. Nevertheless, a few points remain unassailed:

1. Using an expression to refer to something is not in and of itself to make any assertions about that thing but to lay down the grounds for assertions.

2. Emphasis should be placed on the different roles expressions

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1. Strawson gives the following definition of "presupposition": K is presupposed by L, if and only if the truth of K is a necessary condition for the truth or falsity of L. Strawson (25) p. 175.
2. Caton (6) p. 185.
3. ibid. p. 165.
4. Ayer (1), Russell (21), Black (4).
play in a language and not on an analysis of expression as such without respect to their varied uses in a variety of contexts.

This latter point is a crucial one; it is in fact discrediting the Russellian claim about the importance of the apparatus of propositional functions, for by such an apparatus we can examine only the context-invariant features of statements leaving an examination of their context-invariant use aside.

Thus this chapter has served a double rôle:

a) It has introduced the historical roots from which will spring Quine's attempt to apply formal logical considerations to the problem of existence, and at the same time

b) it has shown a germ of the opposition to such programme.
II

THE EXTENSION OF THE METHOD
Giving a full amount of Quine's theory of ontological commitment is a rather complicated task. The reason for this is twofold:

a) It is difficult to make out the extent of Quine's claims.

b) Quine discusses many important issues which the reader feels are somehow related, yet the connections are seldom made explicit.

For Quine the ontological problem can be put simply - What is there?

He begins his treatment of the problem by an investigation into the nature of ontological disputes. He suggests that at some point in a philosophic discussion one of the participants may assert that there are certain things which the other may, with equal vehemence, deny.

Quine further notes that the proponent of the negative side in the ontological dispute seems to be at a disadvantage since he cannot admit that his opponent disagrees with him. The situation is this. A asserts "Unicorns exist" and if B wants to deny this he is in the strange position of naming some things (unicorns) and saying that they do not exist. Thus, as soon as B tries to express his disagreement with A he seems to be contradicting himself. Quine calls this the "Platonic riddle of nonbeing". He finds "traditional" attempts to solve the riddle inadequate.
Saying either that unicorns exist in one sense and tables exist in a different sense; or distinguishing between "subisting" and "existing" lead to unnecessary theoretical complications. In any case, these traditional answers have "united in ruining the good old word 'exist'" because 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. To dissolve the riddle Quine offers a solution in the spirit of Russell's theory of descriptions. He wants to have a manageable way of handling ontological disputes, but more importantly he wants to refute, or at least to discredit Platonism, in the sense in which Platonism is associated with the already mentioned problem of nonbeing and the traditional answers to it. In Quine's attack on Platonism, however, the spirit of nominalism is more prominent than in Russell's attack on its Meinongian version. It will be remembered that Russell's main concern was to maintain a "sense of reality", whereas Quine is also concerned with minimising the number of entities presupposed by our discourse. This feature of Quine's attack is illustrated by his argument against talking of "unactualized" and "actualized" possibles. By positing there two additional realms of entities we open ourselves to a whole array of additional problems which were not there in the first place. In his view a bloated ontology besides generating unnecessary problems is, for aesthetic reasons, undesirable. Quine's programme is as follows:

He takes from Russell the notion that apparent names, complex

1. Quine (16) p. 4.
2. ibid. p. 3.
3. ibid. p. 4.
4. ibid. p. 4.
descriptive phrases like "the author of Waverly" or "the present King of France" can be analyzed as fragments of the whole sentences in which they occur. He goes further: "The virtue of this analysis," he says "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".\(^1\) Thus, to apply Russell's theory to "The round square cupola on Berkeley College is pink", we get "Something is round and square and is a cupola on Berkeley College and is pink". The second statement, says Quine, ceases to contain any component which even purports to name the alleged entity "round square cupola". The burden of the claim is placed on the pronoun "something".

He now extends Russell's analysis to all singular terms, terms which purport to refer uniquely to entities. All singular terms can in principle be eliminated.\(^2\) Any singular term \(K\) is equivalent to a description such as "the \(x\) that \(K\)'s" and can be analysed away "À la Russell". The extension of Russell's analysis consists in saying that all singular terms can be construed as descriptions; for Russell, the class of singular terms was greater than that of descriptions. Quine's thesis in contrast presupposes that in principle there is no difference between naming something and listing all the predicates and only those predicates which apply to that thing; that we can secure uniqueness of reference to, for example, Socrates by listing all the predicates which apply to Socrates and to him only. Nevertheless, Quine's conclusion

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1. ibid. p. 6. Note that by "context" he means what Russell meant by "context of the proposition" and not what Strawson did by "context of the assertion".
2. ibid. p. 146.
from the possibility of eliminating singular terms is that we can use singular terms significantly in sentences without presupposing that there are the entities which those terms purport to name. Thus, "the only way we can involve ourselves in ontological commitment (is) by our use of bound variables". This then is Quine's criterion of ontological commitment. For an example of how it might work, take "There are grey elephants". In first order functional calculus, the above statement would be symbolised as $\exists x (E x \land G x)$; the $x$ is bound by the existential quantifier $\exists x$. Thus, one would be committed to all and only those things which $x$ takes on as values such as to make the sentence true.

The importance of this criterion for Quine is illustrated by the following quotation. "We now have a more explicit standard whereby to decide what 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 must be capable of referring in order that the affirmation made in the theory be true".

Before going on to further elaborate the criterion, I shall add a few more words about the elimination of singular terms. Quine says: "Whatever we say with the help of names can be said in a language that 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." That we be able, in principle, to eliminate singular terms is crucial to his general programme, for if it were true that singular terms are theoretically superfluous,

1. ibid. p. 12.
2. ibid. p. 12.
3. ibid. p. 13. F.
it would follow that we could have a language consisting of quantified statements alone. Hence, the Quinian ontological criterion would be sufficient for all cases.

Also the problem of universals could be solved by Quinian methods; we would be committed only to classes because:

(a) All names could be construed as predicates (or as clusters of predicates);
(b) All predicates can be construed as relations;
(c) All relations can be construed as classes of classes.

As I have said, the thesis about singular terms is crucial to Quine's contentions concerning ontology. A more detailed examination of it will be offered in the next chapter.

However, for a fuller understanding of Quine's criterion of ontological commitment two qualifications of it must be taken into account. The two qualifications Quine offers are the following:

(a) "What there is does not in general depend on one's use of language, but what one says there is does". This tells us what Quine means by "ontological commitment of our discourse": we are not committed to entities—what exists, but only to saying that there are such and such entities—saying what there is. This leads to the point that, primarily, ontological commitment applies not to man but to discourse. The way I talk may commit me to saying what there is but I may disregard my commitment. I may take the attitude of frivolity.

Another important qualification connected with (a) is

(b) One can free oneself from ontological commitment by altering

1. ibid. p. 103.
one's discourse. It may be that I can rephrase what I want to say into an idiom avoiding quantification, avoiding the use of "There is." This point is important for Quine because whenever I use "There is" I automatically involve myself in an ontological commitment but with this qualification more flexibility is allowed.

Quine also says that: "Relative to a really alien language it may happen despite the most sympathetic effort, that we cannot make even the roughest and remotest sense of ontological commitment." Now, this suggests that there may be cases where we cannot decide in an ontological dispute along Quinian methods, but the question is: What would count as such an alien language for Quine? From the context it appears that he has among others, the natural language in mind.

"... the idiomatic use of "there is" in ordinary language knows no bounds comparable to those that might be reasonably adhered to in scientific discourse painstakingly formulated in quantificational terms." But, would he accept such an alienation between a quantified language and the natural language?

In sum, we see two things happening: an attempt at a more or less decisive way of handling ontological disputes, and second, an attempt at reducing the number of entities which we can, or must say there are. It has already been pointed out that Quine is attacking Platonism, and that his attack is in the spirit of nominalism.

1. ibid. p. 103.
2. ibid. p. 107.
3. ibid. p. 106.
4. A language expressible in quantificational form. (Quine often uses "schematised language" to mean "quantified language").
5. A more detailed discussion of this question is given in my Chapter IV.
II

At this point the difficulty concerning the extent of Quine’s philosophical claims has to be settled. It might be argued that Quine is not concerned with metaphysics, but is merely attempting to deal with some philosophical problems of the exact sciences. Therefore, to say that he fails to solve the general philosophical problem of existence is beside the point. This argument is supported by the fact that Quine repeatedly points out that he is not worried about what there is, but what one is committed to saying there is. But, this distinction itself needs to be clarified.

What Quine says in the following passages seems yet stronger support for this argument. Quantificational form is a good standard for appraising ontological commitment of one or other of our theories because “the quantificational form is a convenient standard form in which to couch a theory.” Or again:

“.... it is only in this spirit, in reference to one or another real or imagined logical schematisation of one or another part of or all of

1. Ibid. p. 105.
science, that we can with full propriety inquire into ontological presuppositions".  

In these passages he seems to suggest that he is not concerned with the general problem. However, I shall now show that this is by no means the whole story.

1) Even in the pages where the two previous quotations appear he says more. He is explicitly arguing against the "champions of ordinary language" who say that "there is" certainly belongs to ordinary language but "look askance at a criterion of ontological commitment which turns on a real or imagined translation of statements into quantificational form".  

2) In Word and Object Quine argues against saying that there can be different senses of "there are". The gist of both 1) and 2) is that Quine is not satisfied with saying that there is the problem of "there is" in ordinary language for which there cannot be a formal solution, and that there is the problem of "there is" of schematised language which is formally soluble. He is saying rather that we could and should have a general (formal) solution for both.

3) In Methods of Logic Quine says: "There are no ultimate philosophical problems concerning terms and their references, but only concerning variables and their values; and there are no ultimate philosophical problems concerning existence except insofar as existence is expressed by the quantifier (\(\exists x\))."  

4) His discussions and examples range over a wide section of ordinary language.  

These four points are convincing enough but there are other grounds

1. ibid. p. 106.  
2. ibid. p. 106.  
3. Quine (19) p. 241. P.  
on which one might assert that Quine is making a fairly wide philosophical claim. He also says: "Ontological questions...are on a par with questions of natural science."¹ "As an empiricist I continue to think of the conceptual scheme of science as a tool, ultimately, for predicting future experience in the light of past experience. Physical objects are conceptually imported into the situation as convenient intermediaries...comparable, epistemologically, to the gods of Homer."²

"Positing does not stop with macroscopic physical objects. Objects at the atomic level are posited to make the laws of macroscopic objects, and ultimately the laws of experience, simpler and more manageable."³

"Total science, mathematical and natural and human, is similarly but more extremely underdetermined by experience. The edge of the system must be kept squared with experience; the rest, with all its elaborate myths or fictions, has as its objective the simplicity of laws."⁴

Consequently, when Quine says: "The important thing is to understand our instruments; to keep tab on the diverse presuppositions of diverse portions of our theory, and reduce them where we can",⁵ he is to be taken as making a general claim about ontology, one that has and should have importance over and above mathematics and logic.

This section was not meant to further elaborate Quine's criterion of ontological commitment but rather to decide its scope. It has been decided that Quine intends to solve the general philosophical problem of existence. Thus, in the remaining chapters I shall treat his claim concerning ontology as a general philosophical claim.

1. Quine (16) p. 45.
2. ibid. p. 44.
3. ibid. p. 44.
4. ibid. p. 45.
5. ibid. p. 117.
In the immediately following chapter I shall examine two types of objection to Quine's theory of ontological commitment, objections to his thesis about the elimination of singular terms, and objections to his very notion of ontological commitment.
III

SOME OBJECTIONS
In the previous Chapter I have suggested that the thesis about the elimination of singular terms is crucial to Quine's general programme and have given reasons why it is so. One finds a fuller discussion of this issue in Strawson's Individuals and "Singular Terms, Ontology and Identity". Existential quantification has "... a role, in language which is to be brought out or elucidated in contrast with the place, or role, in language which linguistic singular terms have. No sense can be attached to the idea that they can have the place they have even if there is no such place", says Strawson. This statement is a succinct summary of the elaborate polemic directed against Quine in "Singular Terms of Ontology and Identity". The outline of Strawson's argument there is as follows:

He begins with three quotations from Quine:

1) "The whole category of singular terms is theoretically superfluous...there are logical advantages in thinking of it as theoretically cleared away."4

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2. Strawson (26)  
3. In Strawson (24) p. 196.  
4. Quine (17) p. 211.
2) "Whatever we say with the help of names can be said in a language which shuns names altogether."¹

3) "All singular terms aside from the variables that serve as pronouns in connection with quantifiers, are dispensable and eliminable by paraphrase."²

Then he points out that while these three statements seem to say the same thing, yet there is a difference. 1) and 2) state the theoretical possibility of a situation where we use no singular terms at all. 3) states the possibility of using singular terms, but also paraphrasing them into different forms where they are not used.

Thus, there are two theses, one stronger and one weaker. The weaker (W) being 'that we can eliminate singular terms by paraphrase language', and the stronger (S) being 'that we can eliminate singular terms by a language which could stand by itself'. W is weaker because to understand the paraphrase would involve understanding it "as forms of words from which singular terms have been eliminated by paraphrase."³ S on the other hand will not do because there is no guarantee that the description of the logical character of the "new language" will remain as it was within the "old language" without the context of the "old language".

Strawson's strategy is to show that:

a) Quine produces evidence to support W only.

b) The advantages Quine claims follow from S only.

Since W follows from S but S does not follow from W the truth of a) and b) will seriously damage Quine's position. Hence, what Strawson seeks to establish is "that it is impossible in principle that the language of the paraphrase (my 'new language') should be interpreted

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2. ibid. p. 146
as Quine and the rest of us interpret it, unless it is seen as a paraphrase language, i.e. unless language also contains singular terms."

Strawson is correct in maintaining that Quine needs S because Quine wants to say more than just that "in the language of the paraphrase all reference to objects is so narrowed down".

Briefly, the argument is as follows:

Quine's predicates or what Strawson calls universal terms "must be connected with our experience if any are to be understood." Further-

more, these universal terms must be connected with particular bits or

slices of our experience. Hence, if they are to be learnt as predicates

of particulars, they must be learnt as predicates of demonstratively

identified particulars. But, no meaning can be attached to the idea of

their being learnt as predicates of demonstratively identified particu-
lars unless the language contains expressions used for making demonstra-
tively identifying references to particulars, i.e. unless it contains

singular terms for particulars. To put this more generally: It is

maintained that a schema could not have the sense it has for us, the

grammar it has for us, except in the context of that simpler grammar

against the background of which we can learn it.

Strawson considers the possible objection that 'no ways of reading

or interpreting the schema are mandatory, that these are the natural

ways only for those whose ordinary language does in fact contain singu-

lar terms.' A similar objection is envisaged in Individuals: "Analysis

must rather be seen as an attempt, hampered by the difficulty of getting

away from the forms of ordinary speech, ...We must be liberal and ima-

ginative in our interpretation of it." However, his answer is that

1. ibid. p. 446.
2. Against the background of natural language containing singular terms.
3. ibid. p. 448.
in such a case we must forfeit our claim to refer to particulars at all; we are then not entitled to say, because it does not make sense, that all reference is narrowed down to the values of our bound variables.

That Strawson has given an adequate representation of Quine's point can be seen from the following two quotations from Quine: "The creative aspect is involved in the progressive refinement of scientific language."¹

"The philosopher's task was well compared by Neurath to that of a mariner who must rebuild his ship on the open sea."²

I could find nothing beyond these and other similarly vague comments of Quine which could be taken as counter-objections to Strawson's thesis concerning singular terms.

Thus, it may be concluded that Quine cannot (logically) invite us to consider the possibility of eliminating singular terms, for our understanding of existentially quantified statements depends on our ability to refer identifyingly with singular terms. In my fourth chapter I shall further reinforce Strawson's criticism of Quine on this point, by pointing out inadequacies in Quine's views on reconstructing (regenerating) our natural (ordinary) language.

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1. Quine (16) p. 106.
2. ibid. p. 79.
II

In this section, I am going to consider two objections to Quine's proposal of a criterion of ontological commitment; namely those of Carnap and Warnock. Although these objections originate from two widely different philosophical backgrounds, logical positivism, and ordinary language analysis, they are similar in that both question the very notion of an ontological commitment.

For Carnap the problem of ontological commitment is not a theoretical, but merely a practical one. His argument is as follows:

There are two types of existential statements:

a) internal existential statements
b) external existential statements

Statements of type a) are formulated within a given language. They assert "that there are entities of a specified kind, (and) can be formulated as simple existential statements in a language containing variables for these entities."\(^1\) Examples of these are "there are tables", "there are numbers greater than 10". Given the language, these are "usually

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1. Schilpp (22) p. 871.
analytic and trivial."\(^1\)

Statements of type b), on the other hand "... purport to assert the existence of entities of the kind in question not merely within a given language, but, so to speak before a language has been constructed."\(^2\) These Carnap would call pseudo-theoretical statements, they should properly be thought of as proposals for the acceptance of language forms. Examples of these are: "There are objects", "There are numbers". Now, for Carnap, since he does not think a)-type statements are problematic, the purported problem of ontological commitment is no more than a dispute about the acceptance of language forms. He suggests an example to illustrate the point.

'Suppose', he says, 'there are two philosophers \(x_1\) and \(x_2\) discussing in the natural language about two constructed object languages \(L_1\) and \(L_2\). These two languages are the same except the universe of discourse \(D_1\) of \(L_1\) (the range of values of the variables) is more comprehensive than \(D_2\) of \(L_2\). Suppose also that \(D_1\) contains individuals, classes of individuals and classes of classes of individuals, but \(D_2\) does not contain classes of classes of individuals. Consequently, the syntactical rules of transformation and the semantical rules for \(L\)-concepts are such that:

1) "For some \(x\) and some \(y\), \(x\) is an element of \(y\)" is provable \(L\)-true in \(L_1\).

2) "For every \(x\) and every \(y\), \(x\) is not an element of \(y\)" is provable \(L\)-true in \(L_2\).

Now, both \(x_1\) and \(x_2\) agree that \(L_2\) is simpler than \(L_1\), they both understand the syntactical rules for \(L_1\) and \(L_2\) only \(x_2\) does not understand

\(^1\) ibid. p. 871.

\(^2\) ibid. p. 871.
the semantical rules of $L_1$, but this is not crucial. So far there is no problem. The problem arises when $x_2$ objects to $L_1$ on the grounds that he has arrived at the following two ontological results:

3) There are classes of objects.

4) There are no classes of classes of objects, and he says that he arrived at this result because the semantical rules of $L_1$ allow the phrase "classes of classes", which has no reference.

For Carnap 3) and 4) would be pseudo-statements because they are misconstrued by $x_2$ as existential statements of the natural language "absolutely and objectively"¹ rather than (correctly) as statements "relative to this or that language".²

Therefore, when Quine says that your language $L_x$ commits you to $\mathcal{B}$ and $\mathcal{J}$ because your semantical rules allow $\mathcal{B}$ and $\mathcal{J}$, according to Carnap, he is uttering a pseudo-statement. Thus, Carnap's point is that ontological disputes as Quine conceives them are spurious. They are idle disputes. Once we get clear on the semantical and syntactical rules of the language, such disputes need not arise.

Warnock's treatment of the problem is different. He takes Quine's assumption to be that "if an expression has a designative use, there is something which in that use it designates"³ and asks for the test whereby one could decide what expressions are to be taken to have designative uses.⁴

One of these tests is existential generalization. From:

1) "Leeds is a city" one can generalize to

1a) "Something is a city" or

¹ ibid. p. 873.
² ibid. p. 873.
³ Warnock, "Metaphysics in Logic", in Flew (10) p. 78.
⁴ ibid. p. 78.
1b) "There is something which is a city" or
1c) "There is an x such that x is a city"

But, from:

2) "Valhalla is mythological" one cannot generalize to
2a) "There is an x such that x is mythological"

Thus it is argued that the above shows that "Leeds" does, and "Valhalla" does not have designative use.

'But, this test', says Warnock, 'breaks down in cases of;

3) "Appendicitis is painful"

4) "17 is a prime number", because it is not clear whether one would rule out statements of the form:

3a) "There is something which is painful"

3b) "Something is a prime number"

Even if we are liberal and say that clearly we can admit 3a and 3b does it follow (as it would for Quine) that we are committed to Platonic entities? In both statements (3a and 3b) "something" is a component, and treating it as logicians do both statements are of the form:

"∃x(⋅⋯⋅)". The point, however, is that "something" does not function in ordinary language in the same way as it does in logic. Thus, at least in the case of ordinary language the first test fails to tell whether an expression is used designatively or not. Consequently, as far as ordinary language is concerned, we can say with Warnock that the question of ontological commitment is not yet answered.

The second test Warnock examines is that of Quinian "application".1 (Quine "Notes on Existence and Necessity" Journal of Philosophy 40, 1943) This is the converse of existential generalization in that here one is to

1. Cf. Quine (18), and Quine (17)
find a formula which is true for all x's and see whether it "applies" to the term in question. If it does, the term is said to have designated use. For example, if there is a formula, say \((\ldots x \ldots)\) which is true of all x and applies to a term 'a' then 'a' has a designative use. Let the formula be \((\exists y) (x>y)\). If it is true that \((x) (\exists y) (x>y)\), and that \(\exists y (x>y)\) is "applicable" to the term 'a'; i.e. if substituting 'a' for 'x' in \(\exists y (x>y)\) yields a true statement; then 'a' is said to have a designative use.

The weakness of this latter test according to Warnock, is that we could find certain formulas which are both true of all x's and "apply" to every possible term, e.g. \'(x = x)'.

To sum up Warnock's position so far: Quine is interested in the ontological commitment of languages. His procedure for deciding about commitment is to find which terms can be instances of the bound variables of quantification. (Those which are, are said to have designative use). But existential quantification is but a device of quantificational logic which as such has "little or no clear application to the ordinary words and idioms in which the problems are initially expressed".1

Finally, Warnock considers the possible counter-objection that his own objection might after all be irrelevant. Could Quine agree with all that Warnock has said, and reply that the question of ontological commitment is concerned not with ordinary language but with "one or another real or imagined logical schematisation of one or another part or all of science"?2

If what I say in the previous chapter is right, such a charge of irrelevance has already been answered. Nevertheless, the fact remains that Quine's criterion of ontological commitment has no prima facie application to ordinary language.

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1. Flew (10) p. 90.
2. Quine (16) p. 106.
The purpose of this chapter has been to outline the objections of Carnap, and the objections of two ordinary language philosophers: Strawson and Warnock. In the next chapter I shall reexamine, briefly, Carnap's objections, and, in detail, the ordinary language philosophers' objections.
THE CONCEPTUAL PRIORITY OF NATURAL LANGUAGE
The aim of this chapter is to elucidate further some of the difficulties one encounters in attempting to relate the various aspects of Quine's philosophy. Thus, I propose to consider how he does or could reply to Carnap's and Warnock's objections.

Very briefly, the objections are as follows:

(1) Carnap:

Ontological questions arise in certain frameworks; answers to them may be found by logical methods or by empirical investigations. However, questions about the existence of the framework (numbers, large size objects) are at best questions concerning convenience of linguistic expression. Thus, Quine's problem about ontology is a pseudo-theoretical one.

(2) Warnock:

The efforts of symbolic logicians to clarify problems of ontology fail. If, however, Quine agrees that symbolic logic can make no important contribution to philosophic problems of ontology, only to "one or another real or imagined schematisation of one or another part or all of science", the issue comes to an uncontroversial end.

Quine's general defense against (1) is that Carnap's distinction between external and internal existential statements is a misconception. It
relies on the "analytic-synthetic" distinction, a distinction which is unacceptable.

What needs to be done now is to examine Quine's reasons for the rejection of the "analytic-synthetic" distinction, and Carnap's justification of the "internal-external" distinction.

The "analytic-synthetic" distinction is usually stated in the following way: There are two types of statements, those which are true by virtue of certain facts about the world, and those which are true by virtue of their meaning. These two types of statements are said to be "synthetic" and "analytic" respectively. Quine rejects the "analytic-synthetic" distinction because, in his opinion, there are no adequate criteria for analyticity. He considers the following attempts at giving a criterion:

A) The explanation of analyticity in terms of synonymy. When I say "all bachelors are unmarried men" is analytic', I mean that "bachelors" and "unmarried men" are synonymous. More generally, a statement is called analytic if it can be transformed into a truth of logic by substituting synonyms for synonyms. In our example, this substitution would result in the logical truth "all bachelors are bachelors" (x) (Bx = Bx). But, Quine's objection is that this will not do because our notion of synonymy is in as much need of clarification as that of analyticity. In fact, most attempts at defining synonymy rely on the notion of analyticity.

B) Explanation of analyticity in terms of artificial languages. Here it is held that since ordinary language is vague we must look at artificial languages which have explicit "semantical rules",

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1. Quine would distinguish between artificial languages and a reconstructed language. Cf. in my next chapter: Quine's use of "ordinary language".
in order to make the distinction clear. Carnap (also) holds this view. For him, a statement $S$ is said to be analytic for a language $L$ if it is true according to the semantical rules of $L$. But what, asks Quine, are "semantical rules"? How are we to explain them? Quine in the end says, "Semantical rules determining the analytic statements of an artificial language are of interest only in so far as we already understand the notion of analyticity; they are of no help in gaining this understanding."¹

Now it follows from B that Carnap's distinction between external and internal existential statement relies on the "analytic-synthetic" distinction because the very notion of semantical rule relies on that distinction.

In sum, the force of Quine's counter-objection is that if Carnap makes the "internal-external" distinction, the onus is upon him to explain what an artificial language is, what a semantical rule is. Since such an explanation would have to rely on the "analytic-synthetic" distinction, and since this distinction is untenable, Carnap's objection is without weight.

It must be noted here that the issue about analytic and synthetic statements is by no means a closed one. Nevertheless, Quine is justified in his counter-objection. Carnap does have a rather strict requirement for what he considers a language and he does not meet any of Quine's objections to the "analytic-synthetic" distinction, i.e., in the way he makes the distinction it is vulnerable to Quine's attack.

In spite of all this, the difference between Carnap's and Quine's position is not as great as one might think. This is what Quine says about their difference concerning ontology: "Now Carnap has maintained that this is a question not of matters of fact but of choosing a

1. Quine (16) p. 36.
convenient language form, a convenient conceptual scheme or framework for science. With this I agree, but only on the proviso that the same be conceded regarding scientific hypotheses generally. Carnap has recognized that he is able to preserve a double standard for ontological questions and scientific hypotheses only by assuming an absolute distinction between the analytic and the synthetic; and I need not say again that this is a distinction which I reject."¹ Or again: "Carnap, Lewis, and others take a pragmatic stand on the question of choosing between language forms, scientific frameworks; but their pragmatism leaves off at the imagined boundary between the analytic and the synthetic. In repudiating such a boundary I espouse a more thoroughgoing pragmatism."² Thus, the main difference between them is that Quine is more sensitive to the subtle difficulties connected with the "analytic-synthetic" distinction, and as he says he is a more "thoroughgoing pragmatist". Whether such a "thorough going pragmatism" is called for, whether it is needed, has still to be decided.

As far as Warnock's objection is concerned, I have already dismissed the counter-charge of irrelevance as having no adequate basis. Thus, I propose to re-examine the controversy in light of what Quine says in his chapter "Logic and the Reification of Universals": "Ordinary language remains indeed fundamental, not only genetically, but also as a medium for the ultimate clarification, by however elaborate paraphrase, of such more artificial usages." But, preoccupation with ordinary language passes over the creative aspect of philosophy.³

While Warnock would readily agree with the first statement he would have suspicions about the creative aspect of philosophy. For,

¹. ibid. p. 46.
². ibid. p. 46.
³. ibid. p. 105.
he could argue, if it is true that ordinary language is fundamental, then any innovations introduced in a regenerate language have to be clarified in ordinary language. But since the problem of ontology, he could say, arose from ordinary language, and paradoxes seem to arise in it, the problem should be solved there. A regenerate, schematised, language which ex hypothesi does not have those problems can at best be a sketchy summary of what has been achieved in the natural language.

But, now what is this creative aspect of philosophy? In "Aims and Claims of Regimentation"¹, Quine speaks of departures from ordinary language.² Some departures, he says, might later become ordinary language, because the language which is psychologically most fundamental is ordinary language; consequently, any departure could later become a part of ordinary language.

Herein lies the basic divergence between Quine and ordinary language philosophers like Strawson or Warnock. Ordinary language philosophers would insist that there is no precise definition (no necessary and sufficient conditions) for what constitutes an ordinary language, but they would maintain that there are certain conceptual criteria enabling us to decide which language is ordinary and which is regenerate. Quine on the other hand taking advantage of this vagueness fills the gap: the language which is most fundamental psychologically is ordinary language. Ordinary language philosophers, in contradistinction, maintain that ordinary language is conceptually, not just psychologically, prior.

Quine's thesis about translation has to do with the issue here. He denies emphatically that radical translation is possible, that it is possible ever to give an exact translation of something in a different

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1. "Regimentation" means reconstruction in quantificational form.
2. Quine (19) Section 33.
language. This he calls a "lexicographers' myth". The reason he offers for rejecting the possibility of radical translation is that it presupposes an inadequate theory of meaning; that it presupposes the view of meanings as some kind of ideal entities. On that view sentences could be radical translations of one another because they would "share" the same meaning.

Without going into any great detail, we could grant Quine the impossibility of radical translations which follow from the inadequacy of that (Platonist) theory of meaning. However, we need not agree with his conclusions. First, we need not agree that none but the psychological account of meaning is possible. Second, we need not agree that because under certain theories radical translation is misconceived, we must, and need rest content with a loose contact with our natural language when we depart from it. When we are faced with a departure from ordinary usage, the questions we must ask are:

Is the departure called for?

What are the "conceptual wheels" turned by the departure?

Could we turn these same "wheels" in the old, non-regenerate language?

But, most importantly:

Will this departure be consistent with other things we want to say, and can perhaps say only in the natural language?

These questions are important, and though they seem too vague in the abstract, in particular contexts answers to them are not only possible but are essential. These questions and answers to them will, in particular contexts, constitute an analysis of the meaning of the departures in question. Quine offers two justifications for his departures from ordinary language in his theory of ontological commitment:

1. ibid. p. 158.
1) they are aids to clarification

2) they simplify theory

I shall start with a discussion of 2).

The notion of simplicity is probably one of the most problematic. So many different senses of it are invoked by different people in various contexts that any reference to it must be treated with great caution. That there is uneasiness about "simplicity" can be seen from what Bunge says: "The unqualified demand for economy in every respect, or even in some one respect, is definitely incompatible with a number of important desiderata of theory constructions—such as, e.g., accuracy, depth, and external consistency—whence simplicity tout court should neither be regarded as mandatory nor be counted as an independent criterion on a par with others—let alone above others. The rules of simplicity fall under the general norm 'Do not hold arbitrary (un-grounded) beliefs'\(^1\).

That there is further uneasiness about Quine's use of "simplicity" is evident from what Katz says. Katz argues that Quine's discussion, in *Word and Object*\(^2\), of simplicity does not "offer an independent methodological justification for preferring the simplest hypotheses",\(^3\) or rather the purported justifications he does offer are wrong. Quine's passage in question is to my knowledge his most detailed and serious account of simplicity.

To deal adequately with the problem of simplicity in science is beyond the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, we can say that in some

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2. Quine (19) p. 20.
sense of "simplicity" a request to simplify specific theories $T_1$, $T_2$... etc. is legitimate, because usually we can get clear on what is asked for in the specific cases. But, talk of simplicity of our conceptual scheme as if it were some kind of a theory, like the ones we are familiar with in science, is surely not to be taken at face value. Thus, Quine's offering simplification of theory as a justification for departures from ordinary language as such is highly questionable. He should not invite us to accept that even one of the aims of philosophy is simplification of theory unless he can show us:

(1) How it is legitimate to speak of our conceptual scheme as some sort of a theory.

(2) How the notion of simplicity is operative in this purported theory.

In as much as Quine does not deal adequately with these two points, his unnecessary extension of the notion a theory and his reliance on the notion of simplicity is not justified.

Let me now turn to Quine's claim that his programme of ontological commitment can aid us "to understanding the referential work of language". He remarks that in ordinary language we paraphrase certain expressions to reach the assent of our interlocutor, i.e. my interlocutor may not assent to, or understand something I say, but if I paraphrase my statement he may assent to and/or understand the paraphrase.—This is true.—He then goes on to say that paraphrasing a certain existential statement into logical symbols can also have the same results.—This is also true.—However, this does not mean that all paraphrasing into quantificational form will have that result. That sometimes we can achieve

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1. Quine (19) p. 158.
clarity by our use of existentially quantified statements in no way justifies saying that always, and only through existential quantification can we clarify the notion of existence, clarify the referential work of our language. It is unsound to make a clear-cut distinction between how we communicate, and what the referential work of language is, as Quine has done.¹ For how are we to understand the referential work of language unless we know how to communicate with referring expressions? In the first chapter it has been seen how important it is not to be "taken in" by plausible sounding paraphrases, and how important it is to keep the contexts of assertions in mind.

Another claim Quine makes, which is meant to lend further support to the theory of ontological commitment, is that "...to paraphrase a sentence of ordinary language into logical symbols is virtually to paraphrase it into a special part, still of ordinary or semi-ordinary language; for the shapes of the individual characters are unimportant. So we see that paraphrasing into logical symbols is after all not unlike what we all do every day in paraphrasing sentences to avoid ambiguity."² First, "semi-ordinary language" is nothing but a "long-hand" for symbolic notation, as for example: "There is an x such that it X's" (semi-ordinary) is by definition synonymous with $\exists x (Xx)$ (symbolic). The problem for us is not to get from semi-ordinary language to symbolic expression, but to get to semi-ordinary language itself. About this Quine says:

"But in the pattest of paraphrasing one courts confusion and obscurity imagining some absolute synonymy as goal."³

¹. ibid. p. 158.
². ibid. p. 159.
This counter-objection has already been dealt with. Lack of absolute synonymy does not justify Quine's refusal to accept anything short of a psychological criterion for synonymy for meaning.

A corollary to Quine's thesis on synonymy is that the only notion of commitment which makes any sense is to be found in elementary logic, in first order functional calculus. This explains his insistence on his criterion of ontological commitment. Since he found a need to solve ontological disputes and would not reconcile himself to a method less rigorous and precise than quantificational logic, his offer for a solution was to be in terms of quantificational logic. In this respect, Quine was " ruthlessly" consistent. However, while one could agree that quantificational schemata, serving as limited models for some types of discourse are useful provided the possible or actual uses of that model are known, one would maintain that the task of explaining, and/or understanding is not through paraphrase into quantification, but rather it is through descriptions, redescriptions, examinations of various uses, and contexts, and other similar methods.

Quine's worries over ambiguity are, in any case, needless. There is nothing wrong with ambiguity and impreciseness as such. Most of our concepts are and some need to be ambiguous and imprecise. But, then what is ambiguous outside a specific context of discourse need not be so within it. 'That a term is ambiguous', means that there are several ways one can understand it, therefore, one need only ask which way it was meant to be understood. The problem of ambiguity arises when one looks at terms or statements as context invariant "entities", things which must do the same job in all contexts. Thus in my next chapter I shall investigate, in the spirit of the previous paragraph, what regimentation contributes to our understanding of the problems of ontology.
V

THE "E-PROBLEM"
Up to now, I have dealt with the presuppositions underlying Quine's thesis about ontological commitment. In the following chapter I shall address myself to the specific problem of what Quinian regimentation can contribute to our understanding of E-problems. I use 'E-problems' to avoid biasing the issue with a loaded expression. It refers to the cluster of problems falling under these different headings:

a) The various uses of "there is", "exists".
b) The referring work of language.
c) Deciding about ontological disputes.
d) Genuine or pseudo-ontological disputes.
e) The status of universals.

The temptation is to say, as Quine does, that ordinary use of "there is", "exists" knows no bounds, thus we have to restrict it, to make it more manageable. But, we must go cautiously here. We must first distinguish between saying that we do not understand what is meant by the expressions "there is", "exists", and saying that their use sometimes generates paradoxes. Quine would say that disagreements and paradoxes are generated because we have a vague and imprecise notion
of existence. Hence, for him the solution of E-problems cannot be piecemeal, varying from contexts to contexts; he requires a general decision-procedure.

"...we now have a more explicit standard whereby to decide what ontology a given theory or form of discourse is committed to."

But, as I have indicated in my previous chapter, freedom from vagueness, and freedom from paradoxes are neither sufficient nor necessary conditions for freedom from confusion.

That Quine should come to such a strict requirement for solving E-problems can also be seen from the first question he asks about the problem: "What is there?" This is indeed a simple sounding question, but one which upon scrutiny becomes increasingly abstruse. It sounds like "What is on tables?" "What is on one's mind?" "What is the sum of 2 and 2?". Yet it demands an answer that could satisfy any one of these. This way of approaching the E-problem prejudices the case from the outset. It presupposes that there is a general, formal problem which needs solving.

Quine's anti-Platonism, in the end, comes to this: Plato has asked "What is real?" or "What really exists?", and his answer was that it is the one in the many; he was led to this conclusion by concentrating on the individual terms of discourse, not realizing that whatever we say faces the tribunal of experience together with our whole conceptual scheme. But depending on our conceptual scheme what is real may vary.

Quine might be right in his diagnosis that the source of Plato's fallacy was over-emphasis of the similarities in grammatical form.

However, he does not, in that case, go far enough. He is still looking for a general solution to THE problem of existence. Hence, the question: "What is there?" Now, an answer to any of the three earlier question is S, P or R whatever S, P, or R might be. Yet the answer to "What is there?" is drastically different. It can have only one possible answer.

One can understand the question "What is there, for theory T?" or "What is the ontological commitment of theory T?". And, the answer that "theory T is committed to those and only those entities which are the values of bound variables of theory T." makes sense. It makes sense, but it presupposes that theory T is expressible in quantificational form. In reality, there are very few, if any such theories. Thus even the ontological problem of theories is much more thorny than Quine seems to suggest. But, when we come to E-problems, things become much more difficult.

In the first place, it is difficult to see how Quine can speak of the ontology of general discourse, how he can say that when we come to THE problem of existence we should look upon our conceptual scheme as some sort of a theory, and on our language as some sort of unifiable, if not unified, discourse. The truth is that E-problems are not in any important sense like the purported ontological problems of the sciences. Our particular scientific theories have certain more or less specific jobs to do. The deployment of models for certain scientific theories, which is an essential scientific-ontological task is guided by many specific considerations, arising in specific contexts of inquiry. These tasks are not shared with our discourse at large.

"There is" and "exists" give rise to disagreements and paradoxes in ordinary discourse because they are put to many and varied uses.
Of course, schematisation will help in some cases, but it is only one (by no means the most important) of many considerations. It is not true that whenever E-problems arise they are resolvable by the Quinian criterion; Warnock's "Are there Appendicites?" and "Are there mythical mountains?" are two examples of that.

Thus Quine's dictum that:

"To decline to explain oneself in terms of quantification, or in terms of those special idioms of ordinary language by which quantification is directly explained, is simply to decline to disclose one's referential intent"\(^1\) is too strong. E-problems, I wish to maintain, are generated by various contexts of inquiry, especially when two categories of discourse, such as the mythical and factual, the formal and material, are at play in those contexts. But, even then the E-problems are only secondary. The primary problems are adequate understanding and adequacy of descriptions.

Suppose A describes a certain state of affairs and B finds the description inadequate. Then B may invite A to take another look or to try to redescribe the given state of affairs. In the end, A and B may still come up with two alternate descriptions. Suppose also that the two descriptions differ, as Quine would say, in their referential intent. How could A and B understand and decide about this difference in intent? They would not ask one another for schematisation but rather ask what further moves they would be allowed to make, or prevented from making with their respective descriptions. In other words, they would have to explore in piecemeal fashion the consequences and ramifications of the alternate descriptions. Their exploration might have one of two results:

1) the referential problem has been dissolved with the mutual

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acceptance of one description

2) the difference in referential intent has been understood and neither of them would, for some understandable, particular reason change his description.

The second alternative is a possibility, but even then schematisation would not help because the divergence would be due to their different treatment of the particular situation.

Now, Quine would say that they could have gone on and on, until eventually they would have agreed on a certain schematisation. But, this is what I find unacceptable, for it

a) places too much emphasis on the referential problem
b) puts too much faith in schematisation.

But more seriously,

c) it assumes the possibility of fully resolving all ontological (referential) disagreements.

We could say more or less clearly what outside considerations are relevant to our particular problem, in the particular universe of discourse. But, to suggest that there is ultimately only one universe of discourse, a quantifiable one, where ontological problems can be resolved, seems at best gratuitous.

I have earlier suggested that Quine's treatment of the E-problem is motivated by his dissatisfaction with the Platonic view of universals; in accordance with the law of parsimony he attempts to reduce the number of universals. In this sense, he is attacking the Platonic theory from within. However, in recent philosophical discussions, the concern over universals has diminished, not through complacency, but because

1. Strawson, "On Referring" in Caton (6); Scriven, "Definitions, Explanations, and Theories" in Feigl (8); Wittgenstein (27)
the new ways of looking at our concepts, our language, is thought to have undercut the Platonic view of universals. Quine, if my arguments in these last two chapters are valid, failed to show us how what he takes to be the ontological problem is a problem, and furthermore, if he meant to contribute to the solution of E-problems how his theory of ontological commitment contributes to such a solution.
The conclusion reached in this study is that Quine's attempt to apply techniques of symbolic logic has, at best, only a limited application to the problems of existence. His criterion of ontological commitment, relying on the notion of the existential quantifier of symbolic logic, is much too restrictive to be of use in solving the philosophic problem. Furthermore, his reliance on symbolic logic is misconceived, for an adequate discussion of existence must include a critical examination of the logicians' notion of existential qualification. It ought not start with the assumption that their notion is the correct one.
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